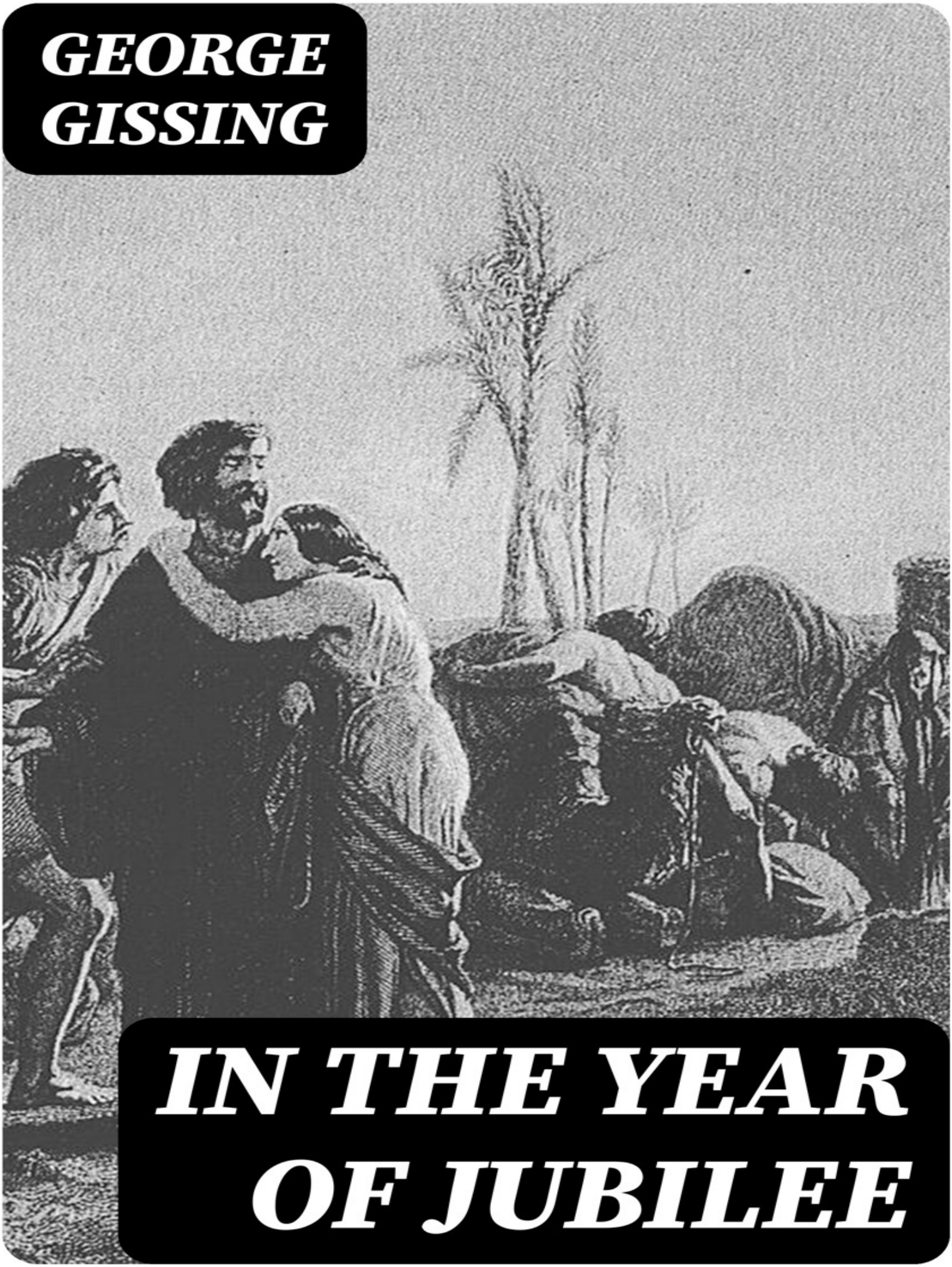
GEORGE GISSING



IN THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

George Gissing

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Part I: Miss. Lord

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CHAPTER 1

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At eight o’clock on Sunday morning, Arthur Peachey unlocked his front door, and quietly went forth. He had not ventured to ask that early breakfast should be prepared for him. Enough that he was leaving home for a summer holiday—the first he had allowed himself since his marriage three years ago.

It was a house in De Crespigny Park; unattached, double-fronted, with half-sunk basement, and a flight of steps to the stucco pillars at the entrance. De Crespigny Park, a thoroughfare connecting Grove Lane, Camberwell, with Denmark Hill, presents a double row of similar dwellings; its clean breadth, with foliage of trees and shrubs in front gardens, makes it pleasant to the eye that finds pleasure in suburban London. In point of respectability, it has claims only to be appreciated by the ambitious middle-class of Camberwell. Each house seems to remind its neighbour, with all the complacence expressible in buff brick, that in this locality lodgings are *not* to let.

For an hour after Peachey’s departure, the silence of the house was unbroken. Then a bedroom door opened, and a lady in a morning gown of the fashionable heliotrope came downstairs. She had acute features; eyes which seemed to indicate the concentration of her thoughts upon a difficult problem, and cheeks of singular bloom. Her name was Beatrice French; her years numbered six and twenty.

She entered the dining-room and drew up the blind. Though the furniture was less than a year old, and by no means of the cheapest description, slovenly housekeeping had dulled the brightness of every surface. On a chair lay a

broken toy, one of those elaborate and costly playthings which serve no purpose but to stunt a child's imagination. Though the time was midsummer, not a flower appeared among the pretentious ornaments. The pictures were a strange medley—autotypes of some artistic value hanging side by side with hideous oleographs framed in ponderous gilding. Miss. ——— then violently rang the bell. When the summons had been twice French looked about her with an expression of strong disgust, repeated, there appeared a young woman whose features told of long and placid slumbers.

'Well? what does this mean?'

'The cook doesn't feel well, miss; she can't get up.'

'Then get breakfast yourself, and look sharp about it.'

Beatrice spoke with vehemence; her cheeks showed a circle of richer hue around the unchanging rose. The domestic made insolent reply, and there began a war of words. At this moment another step sounded on the stairs, and as it drew near, a female voice was raised in song.

'*And a penny in his pocket, la-de-da, la-de-da—and a penny in his pocket, la-de-da*!'

A younger girl, this, of much slighter build; with a frisky gait, a jaunty pose of the head; pretty, but thin-featured, and shallow-eyed; a long neck, no chin to speak of, a low forehead with the hair of washed-out flaxen fluffed all over it. Her dress was showy, and in a taste that set the teeth on edge. Fanny French, her name.

'What's up? Another row?' she asked, entering the room as the servant went out.

'I've known a good many fools,' said Beatrice, 'but Ada's the biggest I've come across yet.'

'Is she? Well, I shouldn't wonder,' Fanny admitted impartially. And with a skip she took up her song again. '*A penny paper collar round his neck, la-de-da—*'

‘Are you going to church this morning?’ asked her sister.

‘Yes. Are you?’

‘Come for a walk instead. There’s something I want to talk to you about.’

‘Won’t it do afterwards? I’ve got an appointment.’

‘With Lord?’

Fanny laughed and nodded.

Interrupted by the reappearance of the servant, who brought a tray and began to lay the table, they crossed the hall to the drawing-room. In half-an-hour’s time a sluttish meal was prepared for them, and whilst they were satisfying their hunger, the door opened to admit Mrs. Peachey. Ada presented herself in a costume which, at any season but high summer, would have been inconveniently cool. Beneath a loose thin dressing-gown her feet, in felt slippers, showed stockingless, her neck was bare almost to the bosom, and the tresses of pale yellow, upon which she especially prided herself, lay raggedly pinned together on the top of her flat head. She was about twenty-eight years old, but at present looked more than thirty. Her features resembled Fanny’s, but had a much less amiable expression, and betokened, if the thing were possible, an inferior intellect. Fresh from the morning basin, her cheeks displayed that peculiar colourlessness which results from the habitual use of paints and powders; her pale pink lips, thin and sullen, were curiously wrinkled; she had eyes of slate colour, with lids so elevated that she always seemed to be staring in silly wonder.

‘So you’ve got breakfast, have you?’ were her first words, in a thin and rather nasal voice. ‘You may think yourselves lucky.’

‘You have a cheek of your own,’ replied Beatrice. ‘Whose place is it to see that we get meals?’

‘And what can any one do with servants like I’ve got?’ retorted the married sister.

‘It’s your own fault. You should get better; and when you’ve got them, you should manage them. But that’s just what you can’t do.’

‘Oh, *you*’d be a wonderful housekeeper, we know all about that. If you’re not satisfied, you’d better find board and lodging somewhere else, as I’ve told you often enough. You’re not likely to get it as cheap.’

They squabbled for some minutes, Fanny looking on with ingenuous amusement, and putting in a word, now for this side, now for that.

‘And what am I going to have for breakfast?’ demanded Mrs. Peachey at length, surveying the table. ‘You’ve taken jolly good care of yourselves, it seems to me.’

She jumped up, and rang the bell. When a minute’s interval brought no reply, she rang again. Beatrice thought it probable that the bell might be rung without effect, ‘till all was blue.’

‘We’ll see about that,’ answered her sister, and forthwith invaded the lower parts of the house. Thence, presently, her voice became audible, rising gradually to shrillness; with it there blended the rougher accents of the housemaid, now in reckless revolt. Beatrice listened for a minute or two in the hall, then passed on into the drawing-room with a contemptuous laugh. Fanny, to whom the uproar seemed to bring a renewal of appetite, cut herself a slice of bread and butter, and ate it as she stood at the window.

‘Dirty cat! beast! swine!’

The mistress of the house, fairly beaten away by superior force of vocabulary, reappeared with these and other exclamations, her face livid, her foolish eyes starting from their sockets. Fanny, a sort of Mother Cary’s chicken, revelled in the row, and screamed her merriment.

It was long before the domestic uproar wholly subsided, but towards eleven o’clock the sisters found themselves together in the drawing-room. Ada sprawled limply on a sofa; Beatrice sat with legs crossed in the most comfortable chair; and Fanny twirled about on a music stool.

The only books in the room were a few show-volumes, which belonged to Arthur Peachey, and half-a-dozen novels of the meaner kind, wherewith Ada sometimes beguiled her infinite leisure. But on tables and chairs lay scattered a multitude of papers: illustrated weeklies, journals of society, cheap miscellanies, penny novelettes, and the like. At the end of the week, when new numbers came in, Ada Peachey passed many hours upon her sofa, reading instalments of a dozen serial stories, paragraphs relating to fashion, sport, the theatre, answers to correspondents (wherein she especially delighted), columns of facetiae, and gossip about notorious people. Through a great deal of this matter Beatrice followed her, and read much besides in which Ada took no interest; she studied a daily newspaper, with special note of law suits, police intelligence, wills, bankruptcies, and any concern, great or small, wherein money played a part. She understood the nature of investments, and liked to talk about stocks and shares with her male acquaintances.

They were the daughters of a Camberwell builder, lately deceased; to each of them had fallen a patrimony just sufficient for their support in elegant leisure. Ada’s money, united with a small capital in her husband’s possession, went to purchase a share in the business of Messrs. Ducker, Blunt & Co., manufacturers of disinfectants; Arthur Peachey, previously a clerk to the firm, became a junior partner, with the result that most of the hard work was thrown upon his shoulders. At their marriage, the happy pair first of all established themselves in a modest house near Camberwell Road; two years later, growing prosperity brought about their removal to De Crespigny Park, where they had now

resided for some twelve months. Unlike their elder sister, Beatrice and Fanny had learnt to support themselves, Beatrice in the postal service, and Fanny, sweet blossom! by mingling her fragrance with that of a florist’s shop in Brixton; but on their father’s death both forsook their employment, and came to live with Mrs. Peachey. Between them, these two were the owners of house-property, which produced £140 a year. They disbursed, together, a weekly sum of twenty-four shillings for board and lodging, and spent or saved the rest as their impulses dictated.

CHAPTER 2

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Ada brooded over her wrongs; Beatrice glanced over *The Referee*. Fanny, after twirling awhile in maiden meditation, turned to the piano and jingled a melody from ‘The Mikado.’ She broke off suddenly, and, without looking round, addressed her companions.

‘You can give the third seat at the Jubilee to somebody else. I’m provided for.’

‘Who are you going with?’ asked Ada.

‘My masher,’ the girl replied with a giggle.

‘Where?’

‘Shop-windows in the Strand, I think.’

She resumed her jingling; it was now ‘Queen of my Heart.’ Beatrice, dropping her paper, looked fixedly at the girl’s profile, with an eyelid droop which signified calculation.

‘How much is he really getting?’ she inquired all at once.

‘Seventy-five pounds a year. “*Oh where, oh where, is my leetle dog gone?*”’

‘Does he say,’ asked Mrs. Peachey, ‘that his governor will stump up?’

They spoke a peculiar tongue, the product of sham education and mock refinement grafted upon a stock of robust vulgarity. One and all would have been moved to indignant surprise if accused of ignorance or defective breeding. Ada had frequented an ‘establishment for young ladies’ up to the close of her seventeenth year; the other two had pursued culture at a still more pretentious institute until they were eighteen. All could ‘play the piano;’ all declared—and believed—that they ‘knew French.’ Beatrice

had ‘done’ Political Economy; Fanny had ‘been through’ Inorganic Chemistry and Botany. The truth was, of course, that their minds, characters, propensities had remained absolutely proof against such educational influence as had been brought to bear upon them. That they used a finer accent than their servants, signified only that they had grown up amid falsities, and were enabled, by the help of money, to dwell above-stairs, instead of with their spiritual kindred below.

Anticipating Fanny’s reply, Beatrice observed, with her air of sagacity:

‘If you think you’re going to get anything out of an old screw like Lord, you’ll jolly soon find your mistake.’

‘Don’t you go and make a fool of yourself, Fanny,’ said Mrs. Peachey. ‘Why, he can’t be more than twenty-one, is he?’

‘He’s turned twenty-two.’

The others laughed scornfully.

‘Can’t I have who I like for a masher?’ cried Fanny, reddening a little. ‘Who said I was going to marry him? I’m in no particular hurry to get married. You think everybody’s like yourselves.’

‘If there was any chance of old Lord turning up his toes,’ said Beatrice thoughtfully. ‘I dare say he’ll leave a tidy handful behind him, but then he may live another ten years or more.’

‘And there’s Nancy,’ exclaimed Ada. ‘Won’t she get half the plunder?’

‘May be plenty, even then,’ said Beatrice, her head aside. ‘The piano business isn’t a bad line. I shouldn’t wonder if he leaves ten or fifteen thousand.’

‘Haven’t you got anything out of Horace?’ asked Ada of Fanny. ‘What has he told you?’

‘He doesn’t know much, that’s the fact.’

‘Silly! There you are. His father treats him like a boy; if he talked about marrying, he’d get a cuff on the ear. Oh, I know all about old Lord,’ Ada proceeded. ‘He’s a regular old tyrant. Why, you’ve only to look at him. And he thinks no small beer of himself, either, for all he lives in that grubby little house; I shouldn’t wonder if he thinks us beneath him.’

She stared at her sisters, inviting their comment on this *ludicrous* state of things.

‘I quite believe Nancy does,’ said Fanny, with a point of malice.

‘She’s a stuck-up thing,’ declared Mrs. Peachey. ‘And she gets worse as she gets older. I shall never invite her again; it’s three times she has made an excuse—all lies, of course.

‘Who will *she* marry?’ asked Beatrice, in a tone of disinterested speculation.

Mrs. Peachey answered with a sneer:

‘She’s going to the Jubilee to pick up a fancy Prince.’

‘As it happens,’ objected Fanny, ‘she isn’t going to the Jubilee at all. At least she says she isn’t. She’s above it—so her brother told me.’

‘I know who *wants* to marry her,’ Ada remarked, with a sour smile.

‘Who is that?’ came from the others.

‘Mr. Crewe.’

With a significant giggle, Fanny glanced at the more sober of her sisters; she, the while, touched her upper lip with the point of her tongue, and looked towards the window.

‘Does he?’ Fanny asked of the ceiling.

‘He wants money to float his teetotal drink,’ said Beatrice. ‘Hasn’t he been at Arthur about it?’

‘Not that I know,’ answered the wife.

‘He tried to get round me, but I—’

A scream of incredulity from Fanny, and a chuckle from Mrs. Peachey, covered the rest of the sentence. Beatrice gazed at them defiantly.

‘Well, idiots! What’s up now?’

‘Oh, nothing.’

‘There’s nobody knows Luckworth Crewe better than I do,’ Beatrice pursued disdainfully, ‘and I think he knows *me* pretty well. He’ll make a fool of himself when he marries; I’ve told him so, and he as good as said I was right. If it wasn’t for that, I should feel a respect for him. He’ll have money one of these days.’

‘And he’ll marry Nancy Lord,’ said Ada tauntingly.

‘Not just yet.’

Ada rolled herself from the sofa, and stood yawning.

‘Well, I shall go and dress. What are you people going to do? You needn’t expect any dinner. I shall have mine at a restaurant.’

‘Who have you to meet?’ asked Fanny, with a grimace.

Her sister disregarded the question, yawned again, and turned to Beatrice.

‘Who shall we ask to take Fan’s place on Tuesday? Whoever it 15, they’ll have to pay. Those seats are selling for three guineas, somebody told me.’

Conversation lingered about this point for a few minutes, till Mrs. Peachey went upstairs. When the door was open, a child’s crying could be heard, but it excited no remark. Presently the other two retired, to make themselves ready for going out. Fanny was the first to reappear, and, whilst waiting for her sister, she tapped out a new music-hall melody on the piano.

As they left the house, Beatrice remarked that Ada really meant to have her dinner at Gatti’s or some such place;

perhaps they had better indulge themselves in the same way.

‘Suppose you give Horace Lord a hint that we’ve no dinner at home? He might take us, and stand treat.’

Fanny shook her head.

‘I don’t think he could get away. The guv’nor expects him home to dinner on Sundays.’

The other laughed her contempt.

‘You see! What good is he? Look here, Fan, you just wait a bit, and you’ll do much better than that. Old Lord would cut up rough as soon as ever such a thing was mentioned; I know he would. There’s something I have had in my mind for a long time. Suppose I could show you a way of making a heap of money—no end of money—? Shouldn’t you like it better—to live as you pleased, and be independent?’

The listener’s face confessed curiosity, yet was dubious.

‘What do you say to going into business with me?’ pursued Miss French. ‘We’ve only to raise a little money on the houses, and in a year or two we might be making thousands.’

‘Business? What sort of business?’

‘Suppose somebody came to you and said: Pay me a sovereign, and I’ll make you a member of an association that supplies fashionable clothing at about half the ordinary price—wouldn’t you jump at it?’

‘If I thought it wasn’t a swindle,’ Fanny replied ingenuously.

‘Of course. But you’d be made to see it wasn’t. And suppose they went on to say: Take a ten-pound share, and you shall have a big interest on it, as well as your dresses for next to nothing. How would you like that?’

‘Can it be done?’

‘I’ve got a notion it can, and I think I know two or three people who would help to set the thing going. But we must have some capital to show. Have you the pluck to join in?’

‘And suppose I lose my money?’

‘I’ll guarantee you the same income you’re getting now—if that will satisfy you. I’ve been looking round, and making inquiries, and I’ve got to know a bit about the profits of big dressmakers. We should start in Camberwell, or somewhere about there, and fish in all the women who want to do the heavy on very little. There are thousands and thousands of them, and most of them’—she lowered her voice—‘know as much about cut and material as they do about stockbroking. Do you twig? People like Mrs. Middlemist and Mrs. Murch. They spend, most likely, thirty or forty pounds a year on their things, and we could dress them a good deal more smartly for half the money. Of course we should make out that a dress we sold them for five guineas was worth ten in the shops, and the real cost would be two. See? The thing is to persuade them that they’re getting an article cheap, and at the same time making money out of other people.’

Thus, and at much greater length, did Miss. French discourse to her attentive sister. Forgetful of the time, Fanny found at length that it would be impossible to meet Horace Lord as he came out of church; but it did not distress her.

CHAPTER 3

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Nancy Lord stood at the front-room window, a hand grasping each side of her waist, her look vaguely directed upon the limetree opposite and the house which it in part concealed. She was a well-grown girl of three and twenty, with the complexion and the mould of form which indicate, whatever else, habitual nourishment on good and plenteous food. In her ripe lips and softly-rounded cheeks the current of life ran warm. She had hair of a fine auburn, and her mode of wearing it, in a plaited diadem, answered the purpose of completing a figure which, without being tall, had some stateliness and promised more. Her gown, trimmed with a collar of lace, left the neck free; the maiden cincture at her waist did no violence to natural proportion.

This afternoon—it was Monday—she could not occupy or amuse herself in any of the familiar ways. Perhaps the atmosphere of national Jubilee had a disturbing effect upon her—in spite of her professed disregard for the gathering tumult of popular enthusiasm. She had not left home to-day, and the brilliant weather did not tempt her forth. On the table lay a new volume from the circulating library—something about Evolution—but she had no mind to read it; it would have made her too conscious of the insincerity with which she approached such profound subjects. For a quarter of an hour and more she had stood at the window, regarding a prospect, now as always, utterly wearisome and depressing to her.

Grove Lane is a long acclivity, which starts from Camberwell suburban dwellings. The houses vary considerably in size and Green, and, after passing a few mean shops, becomes a road of aspect, also in date—with

the result of a certain picturesqueness, enhanced by the growth of fine trees on either side. Architectural grace can nowhere be discovered, but the contract-builder of today has not yet been permitted to work his will; age and irregularity, even though the edifices be but so many illustrations of the ungainly, the insipid, and the frankly hideous, have a pleasanter effect than that of new streets built to one pattern by the mile. There are small cottages overgrown with creepers, relics of Camberwell's rusticity; rows of tall and of squat dwellings that lie behind grassy plots, railed from the road; larger houses that stand in their own gardens, hidden by walls. Narrow passages connect the Lane with its more formal neighbour Camberwell Grove; on the other side are ways leading towards Denmark Hill, quiet, leafy. From the top of the Lane, where Champion Hill enjoys an aristocratic seclusion, is obtainable a glimpse of open fields and of a wooded horizon southward.

It is a neighbourhood in decay, a bit of London which does not keep pace with the times. And Nancy hated it. She would have preferred to live even in a poor and grimy street which neighboured the main track of business and pleasure.

Here she had spent as much of her life as she remembered, from the end of her third year. Mr. Lord never willingly talked of days gone by, but by questioning him she had learnt that her birthplace was a vaguely indicated part of northern London; there, it seemed, her mother had died, a year or so after the birth of her brother Horace. The relatives of whom she knew were all on her father's side, and lived scattered about England. When she sought information concerning her mother, Mr. Lord became evasive and presently silent; she had seen no portrait of the dead parent. Of late years this obscure point of the family history had often occupied her thoughts.

Nancy deemed herself a highly educated young woman —'cultured' was the word she would have used. Her studies

at a day-school which was reputed ‘modern’ terminated only when she herself chose to withdraw in her eighteenth year; and since then she had pursued ‘courses’ of independent reading, had attended lectures, had thought of preparing for examinations—only thought of it. Her father never suggested that she should use these acquirements for the earning of money; little as she knew of his affairs, it was obviously to be taken for granted that he could ensure her life-long independence. Satisfactory, this; but latterly it had become a question with her how the independence was to be used, and no intelligible aim as yet presented itself to her roving mind. All she knew was, that she wished to live, and not merely to vegetate. Now there are so many ways of living, and Nancy felt no distinct vocation for any one of them.

She was haunted by an uneasy sense of doubtfulness as to her social position. Mr. Lord followed the calling of a dealer in pianos; a respectable business, to be sure, but, it appeared, not lucrative enough to put her above caring how his money was made. She knew that one’s father may be anything whatever, yet suffer no social disability, provided he reap profit enough from the pursuit. But Stephen Lord, whilst resorting daily to his warehouse in Camberwell Road —not a locality that one would care to talk about in ‘cultured’ circles—continued, after twenty years, to occupy this small and ugly dwelling in Grove Lane. Possibly, owing to an imperfect education, he failed to appreciate his daughter’s needs, and saw no reason why she should not be happy in the old surroundings.

On the other hand, perhaps he cared very little about her. Undoubtedly his favourite was Horace, and in Horace he had suffered a disappointment. The boy, in spite of good schooling, had proved unequal to his father’s hope that he would choose some professional career, by preference the law; he idled away his schooldays, failed at examinations,

and ultimately had to be sent into ‘business.’ Mr. Lord obtained a place for him in a large shipping agency; but it still seemed doubtful whether he would make any progress there, notwithstanding the advantage of his start; at two-and-twenty he was remunerated with a mere thirty shillings a week, a nominal salary,’ his employers called it. Nancy often felt angry with her brother for his lack of energy and ambition; he might so easily, she thought, have helped to establish, by his professional dignity, her own social status at the level she desired.

There came into view a familiar figure, crossing from the other side of the way. Nancy started, waved her hand, and went to open the door. Her look had wholly altered; she was bright, mirthful, overflowing with affectionate welcome.

This friend of hers, Jessica Morgan by name, had few personal attractions. She looked overwrought and low-spirited; a very plain and slightly-made summer gown exhibited her meagre frame with undue frankness; her face might have been pretty if health had filled and coloured the flesh, but as it was she looked a ghost of girlhood, a dolorous image of frustrate sex. In her cotton-gloved hand she carried several volumes and notebooks.

‘I’m so glad you’re in,’ was her first utterance, between pants after hasty walking and the jerks of a nervous little laugh. ‘I want to ask you something about Geometrical Progression. You remember that formula—’

‘How can I remember what I never knew?’ exclaimed Nancy. ‘I always hated those formulas; I couldn’t learn them to save my life.’

‘Oh, that’s nonsense! You were much better at mathematics than I was. Do just look at what I mean.’

She threw her books down upon a chair, and opened some pages of scrawled manuscript, talking hurriedly in a thin falsetto.

Her family, a large one, had fallen of late years from a position of moderate comfort into sheer struggle for subsistence. Jessica, armed with certificates of examinational prowess, got work as a visiting governess. At the same time, she nourished ambitions, discernible perhaps in the singular light of her deep-set eyes and a something of hysteric determination about her lips. Her aim, at present, was to become a graduate of London University; she was toiling in her leisure hours—the hours of exhaustion, that is to say—to prepare herself for matriculation, which she hoped to achieve in the coming winter. Of her intimate acquaintances only one could lay claim to intellectual superiority, and even she, Nancy Lord to wit, shrank from the ordeals of Burlington House. To become B.A., to have her name in the newspapers, to be regarded as one of the clever, the uncommon women—for this Jessica was willing to labour early and late, regardless of failing health, regardless even of ruined complexion and hair that grew thin beneath the comb.

She talked only of the ‘exam,’ of her chances in this or that ‘paper,’ of the likelihood that this or the other question would be ‘set.’ Her brain was becoming a mere receptacle for dates and definitions, vocabularies and rules syntactic, for thrice-boiled essence of history, ragged scraps of science, quotations at fifth hand, and all the heterogeneous rubbish of a ‘crammer’s’ shop. When away from her books, she carried scraps of paper, with jottings to be committed to memory. Beside her plate at meals lay formulae and tabulations. She went to bed with a manual and got up with a compendium.

Nancy, whose pursuit of ‘culture’ followed a less exhausting track, regarded the girl with a little envy and some compassion. Esteeming herself in every respect Jessica’s superior, she could not help a slight condescension in the tone she used to her; yet their friendship had much

sincerity on both sides, and each was the other's only confidante. As soon as the mathematical difficulty could be set aside, Nancy began to speak of her private troubles.

'The Prophet was here last night,' she said, with a girlish grimace. 'He's beginning again. I can see it coming. I shall have to snub him awfully next time.'

'Oh, what a worry he is!'

'Yes, but there's something worse. I suspected that the Pasha knew of it; now I feel sure he's encouraging him.'

By this oriental style Nancy signified her father. The Prophet was her father's partner in business, Mr. Samuel Bennett Barmby.

'I feel sure now that they talked it over when the Prophet was taken into partnership. I was thrown in as a "consideration."'

'But how could your father possibly think—?'

'It's hard to say what he *does* think about me. I'm afraid I shall have to have a talk with him. If so, it will be a long talk, and a very serious talk. But he isn't well just now, and I must put it off.'

'He isn't well?'

'A touch of gout, he says. Two days last week he didn't go to business, and his temper was *that 'orrible*!' Nancy had a habit of facetiously quoting vulgarities; this from an acquaintance of theirs who often supplied them with mirth. 'I suppose the gout does make one bad-tempered.'

'Has he been coming often?—Mr. Barmby, I mean.'

'Pretty well. I think I must turn matchmaker, and get him married to some one. It oughtn't to be difficult. The Prophet "has points."'

'I dare say some people would think him handsome,' assented Miss Morgan, nibbling a finger which showed an ink-stain, and laughing shyly.

‘And his powers of conversation!—Don’t you know any one that would do for him?’

They jested on this theme until Nancy chose to become serious again.

‘Have you any lessons to-morrow?’

‘No. Thank goodness every one is going to see the procession, or the decorations, or the illuminations, and all the rest of the nonsense,’ Jessica replied. ‘I shall have a good long day of work; except that I’ve promised to go in the afternoon, and have tea with the little girls at Champion Hill. I wish you’d come too; they’d be delighted to see you, and there’ll be nobody except the governess.’

Nancy looked up in doubt.

‘Are you sure? Won’t the dowager be at home?’

‘She hasn’t left her room for three weeks.’

They exchanged a look of some special significance.

‘Then I suppose,’ said Nancy, with a peculiar smile, ‘that’s why Mr. Tarrant has been calling?’

‘Has he? How do you know?’

Again they looked at each other, and Nancy laughed.

‘I have happened to meet him twice, the last few days.’ She spoke in an off-hand way. ‘The first time, it was just at the top of the lane; he was coming away. The second time, I was walking along Champion Hill, and he came up behind me, going to the house.’

‘Did he talk?’

Nancy gave a nod.

‘Yes, both times. But he didn’t tell me that the dowager was worse.’

‘High and mighty?’ asked Jessica.

‘Not quite so majestic as usual, I thought. I didn’t feel quite so much of a shrimp before him. And decidedly he was

in better spirits. Perhaps the dowager's death would be important to him?'

'Very likely. Will you come to-morrow?'

Miss. Lord hesitated—then, with a sudden frankness:

'To tell you the truth, I'm afraid he might be there.'

'Oh, I don't think so, not on Jubilee Day.'

'But that's the very reason. He may come to be out of the uproar.'

'I meant he was more likely to be out of town altogether.'

Nancy, still leaning over the table, propped her chin on her hands, and reflected.

'Where does he go, I wonder?'

'Oh, all sorts of places, no doubt. Men of that kind are always travelling. I suppose he goes shooting and fishing—'

Nancy's laugh made an interruption.

'No, no, he doesn't! He told me once that he didn't care for that sort of thing.'

'Oh, well, you know much more about him than I do,' said Miss Morgan, with a smile.

'I've often meant to ask you—have they anything to do with Tarrant's black-lead?'

Jessica declared that she had never heard of it.

'Never heard of it? nonsense! A few years ago it used to be posted up everywhere, and I see it sometimes even now, but other kinds seem to have driven it out of the market. Now that's just like you! Pray, did you ever hear of Pears' Soap?'

'Of course.'

'Really? Oh, there's hope of you. You'll be a woman of the world some day.'

'Don't tease, Nancy. And what would it matter if he *was* there to-morrow?'

‘Oh! I don’t know. But I shouldn’t particularly like his lordship to imagine that I went in the hope of paying my respects to him, and having the reward of a gracious smile.’

‘One can’t always be thinking about what other people think,’ said Jessica impatiently. ‘You’re too sensitive. Any one else in your position would have lots of such friends.’

‘In my position! What *is* my position?’

‘Culture is everything now-a-days,’ observed Miss. Morgan, with the air of one who feels herself abundantly possessed of that qualification.

But Nancy laughed.

‘You may depend upon it, Mr. Tarrant doesn’t think so.’

‘He calls himself a democrat.’

‘And talks like one: doesn’t he?’

‘Oh! that’s only his way, I think. He doesn’t really mean to be haughty, and—and so on.’

‘I wish I knew if he had any connection with Tarrant’s blacklead,’ said Miss. Lord mischievously.

‘Why not ask him?’

They laughed merrily, Jessica’s thin note contrasting with the mellow timbre of her friend’s voice.

‘I will some day.’

‘You would never dare to!’

‘I daren’t? Then I will!’

‘It would be dreadfully rude.’

‘I don’t mind being thought rude,’ replied Nancy, with a movement of the head, ‘if it teaches people that I consider myself as good as they are.’

‘Well, will you come to-morrow?’

‘Ye-es; if you’ll go somewhere else with me in the evening.’

‘Where to?’

‘To walk about the streets after dark, and see the crowds and the illuminations.’

Nancy uttered this with a sly mirthfulness. Her friend was astonished.

‘Nonsense! you don’t mean it.’

‘I do. I want to go for the fun of the thing. I should feel ashamed of myself if I ran to stare at Royalties, but it’s a different thing at night. It’ll be wonderful, all the traffic stopped, and the streets crammed with people, and blazing with lights. Won’t you go?’

‘But the time, the time! I can’t afford it. I’m getting on so wretchedly with my Greek and my chemistry.’

‘You’ve time enough,’ said Nancy. ‘And, you know, after all it’s a historical event. In the year 3000 it will be ‘set’ in an examination paper, and poor wretches will get plucked because they don’t know the date.’

This was quite a new aspect of the matter to Jessica Morgan. She pondered it, and smiled.

‘Yes, I suppose it will. But we should have to be out so late.’

‘Why not, for once? It needn’t be later than half-past eleven.’ Nancy broke off and gesticulated. ‘That’s just why I want to go! I should like to walk about all night, as lots of people will. The public-houses are going to be kept open till two o’clock.’

‘Do you want to go into public-houses?’ asked Jessica, laughing.

‘Why not? I should like to. It’s horrible to be tied up as we are; we’re not children. Why can’t we go about as men do?’

‘Won’t your father make any objection?’ asked Jessica.

‘We shall take Horace with us. Your people wouldn’t interfere, would they?’

‘I think not. Father is away in Yorkshire, and will be till the end of the week. Poor mother has her rheumatism. The house is so dreadfully damp. We ought never to have taken it. The difference of rent will all go in doctors’ bills.—I don’t think mother would mind; but I must be back before twelve, of course.’

‘I don’t see the “of course,”’ Nancy returned impatiently, ‘but we could manage that. I’ll speak to the Pasha to-night, and either come, or let you have a note, to-morrow morning. If there’s any objection, I’m not sure that I shan’t make it the opportunity for setting up my standard of revolt. But I don’t like to do that whilst the Pasha is out of sorts—it might make him worse.’

‘You could reason with him quietly.’

‘Reason with the Pasha—How innocent you are, Jess! How unworldly! It always refreshes me to hear you talk.’