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THE MEEK FAMILY.

I don't know what I had done to merit the spite of fortune which led me to No. 132 Peckover street in search of a lodging.

There were one or two striking portraits (family ones, probably) on the walls, and a yet more striking fire-stove in the grate. I forgot further details.

The landlady was elderly and limp, with a sort of washed-out and plaintive aspect and a tendency to sigh and frown.

"The curtains will wash," said I, looking around.

"Dear, yes, sir, surely! We was lettin' 'em hang to save the others, which the sun fades 'em so, being the worst of stuffs and such like. Like all these things, as fade mostly, don't they, sir?"

"I hope," I said, in my polite way, "you don't mind my naming it—but, of course, you'll allow me to be free, you know—from any little annoyances?"

I had my experience—preceding those three years of paradise and Mrs. Maule's, and I was nervous, partly from dread of the indignation I had provoked by the headlong manner in which I had asked the question, and partly from the recollection of results that had followed on the assurance of landladies of another class that their knowledge of natural history did not extend to the species alluded to, and that they were at fault to comprehend me.

Mrs. Maule (that was her name) adopted neither of these extremes; she only shook her head pensively and said:

"To my knowledge there ain't a living flea in the house." (I didn't mean to say that, but you know, sir, we live in a vale of tears, and in course there will be such trials for all at times. If I am so tired, I hope to bear it meekly.)

And I think Mrs. Maule shed a tear.

"I am very glad to hear it, said I cheerfully; "now about terms, if I arrange to come."

"Oh, don't speak of terms, sir; I'm sure what you've been in the habit of paying will suit us, or, less, maybe, as it's more for the keepin' of the rooms and the protection of havin' a gent like yourself under our roof, Maule bein' low in the nerves of late years and myself haven't that sprout as some have, which I'm sure, sir, anything we can do to make you comfortable I feel at home, as there's no placin' it on the house."

"Ah! thank you—thank you." The light—when the windows were cleaned—would suit my work, the exchequer was somewhat low, time was an object, and, taking all in all, I closed with my obliging landlady's terms, which gave her much penitence.

"And if you'll be pleased to name your wishes, sir, in all respects," said Mrs. Maule with a faint sigh in conclusion, "we hope to do our humble best to meet 'em."

"I'm sure, if you're good," said I, "I don't think you'll find me exacting; I confess to a few weaknesses. I dislike damp salt and smoky potatoes. I object to a hot dinner on a cold plate, and I'm partial to clean linen. That's about all, I think."

Mrs. Maule readily acquiesced in the most moderate requests, observing that "a hangel couldn't want less," and thereupon we parted.

In due time myself and my few belongings were conveyed in a cab to 129 Peckover street. I had dined, and beyond a cup of coffee, wanted nothing more, and I had brought me the coffee herself.

"I'm sure, sir, I hope it's as you like," said she, meekly; "but, if not, you'll kindly name it, and Sophonisba Ann will bring you your water at any hour you'll mention in the mornin', sir. Sophonisba Ann mostly waits on lodgers, sir (that's my daughter), and I'm sure always will, though that timid and soft-hearted—but there, don't mind me, as a sayin', as a mother, perhaps more than I had ought respectin' my own."

I said I was much obliged to her and her daughter for their kind intentions and wished her good night. She sighed audibly and held the door handle for another minute, then, with an air of resignation, retired.

Morning brought breakfast and Sophonisba Ann. This young person was, if possible, meeker and more depressed than her parent. She carried her head a little on one side, and sniffed with every breath as if from chronic influenza. Her complexion was pale, not to say pasty, and her hair and eyebrows whitish-brown. Sophonisba Ann's figure was remarkable for depression where fullness might be expected and a curious blighting tendency toward the opposite effect was usual. Her attire was chiefly notable for an hocks and eyes—with a difference of opinion that materially hindered friendship, and refractory hair pins, which I found had a way of dropping out into all sorts of odd places. I found one, one day, at the bottom of my jug of porter.

This young man had a large nose of the solid Roman type, very red eyelids, and a sonorous voice with a twang in it. He told me he was in an attorney's office, but that the work was very distasteful to him, and he had thoughts of giving it up and turning author.

He had begun several works of importance, one of which (his 'chef d'oeuvre' he called it) he had brought up with him.

"Blank verse, mostly, sir," he explained; "in ten books, revealing the mysteries of a human soul to the moon, which is supposed to be listening—poetical license, of course—you understand. The first three books—"

"Isn't it a risk," interrupted I, shrugging from the prospect of being pressed into the same service as the moon, and resolved to be as practical as possible, "isn't it a risk to give up steady work for an uncertainty like literature?"

"Well, sir, mother talks like that, and she's right, and my father's right, in

A little later in the day, my landlady knocked in to my door.

"Come in," said I.

She came in, folding her hands and looking up at the ceiling.

"I'm sure, sir, you'll excuse it, though a liberty, but as I'm a mother, which it's nothing after all, and I've no call to scold, I'm certain, but it's my daughter, a takin' on, and as you spoke to her this mornin' and as you'd be so very kind, meek, as Sophonisba Ann is so tender-hearted—"

"What is it about?" I said, as the tearful lady paused to take breath, "I don't understand."

"Oh, ain't you am sure you didn't mean for to hurt her feelin's, sir, and she owns it; she's said as much in that kitchen down below me. 'His way seemed harsh,' she says, 'but his heart's in the right place,' she says; 'I'm certain sure of it,' she says, and she's been cryin' her eyes out, and as you spoke to her this mornin' and as you'd be so very kind, meek, as Sophonisba Ann is so tender-hearted—"

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"Well, sir, mother talks like that, and she's right, and my father's right, in

He waved his hand descriptively, as it were, in an aerial flight; his nails were inked, and very long.

"Well, I don't know," said I, "but hadn't you better—?"

But he had risen, and hurriedly commenced undoing the brown paper, withdrawing from it about fifty sheets of manuscript, well written over.

"Listen!" he cried suddenly, and slowly recited as follows:

Hail! cold, unfeeling orb, tho' thy bright ray

Mocks the absorbing madness of my soul!

Soon, soon thy last quarter will draw nigh!

But sooner still for me the funeral bell shall toll!

"That's the opening lines," said he, "the next—"

"My friend," I said, "I am afraid you will find the public hard to satisfy; you must look for disappointment."

"That's all I look for, sir," he interrupted, "and an early grave," he added, with a certain air of satisfaction. "And as mother and father aren't as well off as we were, I dare say there won't even be a record in the 'Times' of my death. Maule lies below—but that's of no consequence."

He sighed.

"Aren't you a little out of health?" I asked at this point.

"Oh, yes, sir," he smiled. "I'm journeyin' to the tomb. I've no sort of doubt about it myself, but the cold world will pass heedless by and think nothing of it. The world's so very sublimity! Don't you find it so, sir?"

"Well, yes; I suppose it is that," I said, never having had cause to doubt it as a fact. "Yes, I suppose it is. But now let me advise you as a friend."

"He looked up softly.

"I knew you would," he cried; "that's just it, you will assist me, and I'll just step up to evenings and we'll go through it together gradual like. Yes, I felt sure you'd be the friend to do it; when mother said, 'Glad that our first floor going out, I felt as if I could open my heart to you like a brother; I did indeed, sir.'"

"Look here," I said, when he paused and shook back the excited wisp of which-brown hair with joyful vehemence; "look here, sir, don't you see when to bring it out? The fact is, I'm awfully busy just now; I haven't a minute to spare for study or the delights of the muse."

I smiled grimly as I almost pushed him out of the door, bearing his precious brown paper apron, and evidently awaiting my sympathy.

"I'm sure Mr. Maule's choice does him credit," I said desperately, "he couldn't have done better than take a good wife to sooth the path of life for him; wasn't that your door bell?"

"Sophonisba Ann will answer the door, sir, which I think you was mistaken, and it didn't ring," said Mrs. Maule. "I'm sure I never did meet with a gentleman so thoughtful and feelin'; a real friend, as one may say, already, and I'm only thankful."

"I'm sure I must trouble you to shut that door," Mrs. Maule said, I gaped. "I'm subject to ear-ache, and the draught—I hope I shall be forgiven for the fibs that woman caused me to invent. She slowly withdrew a, murmuring motherly compassion, and faintly suggested pepper plaster, and family medicine, and for our aches, which I took up my pen and tried to collect my scattered ideas.

I had not yet seen Mr. Maule, the state of whose nerves kept him mostly confined to an armchair in the kitchen, but from occasional sounds of melody, something like feeble renditions of choruses of a jovial nature, in which a slight confusion of consonants was perceptible, I concluded that even Mr. M. had intervals of comparative cheerfulness. Moreover, I discovered that there was a son of the house—a tall youth with whitish-brown hair and skin, and a scow in his shoulders—whose avocation seemed to be near at hand, by his punctual return to meals at stated hours in the day. With this young man I was fated, alas! too soon to become acquainted.

One evening, a little before my dinner, Mrs. Maule waited on me with an air of mystery to ask, if her son might "step up by-and-by" and speak to me, if so be that I had no objection.

His name, his mother told me, was Cincinnati; he was rather low spirited, and had, in fact, something on his mind.

"Dear me!" I said, "poor fellow! you trouble! No serious, I hope."

"Oh, dear, no, sir—leastwise, nothing wrong. Cin's as innocent as the babe unborn, as to evil ways, sir; no, it's the mind, that's where it is," (tensely) "he's got a soarin' mind, sir, and the world's too little for him."

"Indeed?" I said, mentally regretting that the young gentleman had selected me as the confidant of his mental trials; but, alas! I little guessed what was to come. Scarcely was the cloth removed when a modest rap announced my new acquaintance, and Cincinnati entered, bearing a huge brown paper parcel, which he deposited with a jerk on the table, violently shaking back a long wisp of hair which kept falling rebelliously to his eyes, and sinking immediately into the first chair near, with an air of profound dejection.

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Transit or Local notices, ten cents a line, regular advertisements half rate.

Cards in the Business Directory column, or a dollar a year for each line.

Another minute and rapid and, it must be added, stumbling footsteps ascending the stairs, accompanied by the cries of Sophonisba Ann and the fainter sobs of her mother in the rear, and Mr. Maule entered, supported by his son and closely followed by a rough-and-ready looking person with a paper in his hand.

I started.

Mr. Maule waved his hand. "I—I—My dear friend—Sir—Sense—abrupt voice," he cried, in a hazy sort of voice, "F—friends may—waive sheremony."

Here Mr. Maule averted suddenly, but Cincinnati propped him up again.

"And I—I believe I'm correct in saying a friend in need is a friend indeed." (This very rapidly spoken.) "Under these circumstances, I—I'm bound to forego a parent's feelings!"

"Yes, Maule, that's it," cried Mrs. M., from behind the apron she held to her eyes; "we know what you'd say to what we'd both say, and feel likewise—and that's a fact, as you see, sir, to our aid, which I'm sure we can never repay, as it's £14 15s. 6d."

"£14 15s. 6d." interrupted the rough-and-ready-looking person, with a hoarse cough.

"Yes, take her, take my child, and bless you!" cried Mr. Maule, extending his arms like the "heavy father" in a play, and telling the man, who seemed to be a lawyer, that his claim satisfied and a helpless, aged parent saved from ruin and—distress!

Here Mr. Maule broke off weeping.

"Happy day!" said Cincinnati, "I said you were like a brother when first I saw you, and I'll put it all in my own way, and that an 'old-hearted world may read and be ashamed of being untrue to his swaying parent, whose emotions were too much for him."

"May you both—be—happy!" murmured Mr. Maule.

"O, la, father!" cried Sophonisba Ann, hysterically