**Frances Hodgson Burnett, *That Lass O’Lowrie’s* (1877)**

CHAPTER I - A Difficult Case

They did not look like women, or at least a stranger new to the district might easily have been misled by their appearance, as they stood together in a group, by the pit's mouth. There were about a dozen of them there—all “pit-girls,” as they were called; women who wore a dress more than half masculine, and who talked loudly and laughed discordantly, and some of whom, God knows, had faces as hard and brutal as the hardest of their collier brothers and husbands and sweethearts. They had lived among the coal-pits, and had worked early and late at the “mouth,” ever since they had been old enough to take part in the heavy labor. It was not to be wondered at that they had lost all bloom of womanly modesty and gentleness. Their mothers had been “pit-girls” in their time, their grandmothers in theirs; they had been born in coarse homes; they had fared hardly, and worked hard; they had breathed in the dust and grime of coal, and, somehow or other, it seemed to stick to them and reveal itself in their natures as it did in their bold unwashed faces. At first one shrank from them, but one's shrinking could not fail to change to pity. There was no element of softness to rule or even influence them in their half savage existence.

On the particular evening of which I speak, the group at the pit's mouth were even more than usually noisy. They were laughing, gossiping and joking,—coarse enough jokes,—and now and then a listener might have heard an oath flung out as if all were well used to the sound. Most of them were young women, though there were a few older ones among them, and the principal figure in the group—the center figure, about whom the rest clustered—was a young woman. But she differed from the rest in two or three respects. The others seemed somewhat stunted in growth; she was tall enough to be imposing. She was as roughly clad as the poorest of them, but she wore her uncouth garb differently. The man's jacket of fustian, open at the neck, bared a handsome sunbrowned throat. The man's hat shaded a face with dark eyes that had a sort of animal beauty, and a well-molded chin. It was at this girl that all the rough jokes seemed to be directed.

“I'll tell thee, Joan,” said one woman, “we'st ha' thee sweetheartin' wi' him afore th' month's out.”

“Aye,” laughed her fellows, “so we shall. Tha'st ha' to turn soft after aw. Tha conna stond out again' th' Lunnon chap. We'st ha' thee sweetheartin', Joan, i' th' face o' aw tha'st said.”

Joan Lowrie faced them defiantly:

“Tha'st noan ha' me sweetheartin' wi' siccan a foo',” she said, “I amna ower fond o' men folk at no time. I've had my fill on 'em; and I'm noan loike to tak' up wi' such loike as this un. An' he's no an a Lunnoner neither. He's on'y fro' th' South. An th' South is na Lunnon.”

“He's getten' Lunnon ways tho',” put in another. “Choppin' his words up an' mincin' 'em sma'. He's noan Lancashire, ony gowk could tell.”

“I dunnot see as he minces so,” said Joan roughly. “He dunnot speak our loike, but he's well enow i' his way.”

A boisterous peal of laughter interrupted her.

“I thowt tha' ca'ed him a foo' a minute sin',” cried two or three voices at once. “Eh, Joan, lass, tha'st goin' t' change thy moind, I see.”

The girl's eyes flashed.

“Theer's others I could ca' foo's,” she said; “I need na go far to foind foo's. Foo' huntin's th' best sport out, an' th' safest. Leave th' engineer alone an' leave me alone too. It 'll be th' best fur yo'.”

She turned round and strode out of the group.

Another burst of derisive laughter followed her, but she took no notice of it She took no notice of anything—not even of the two men who at that very moment passed and turned to look at her as she went by.

“A fine creature!” said one of them.

“A fine creature!” echoed the other. “Yes, and you see that is precisely it, Derrick. 'A fine creature'—and nothing else.”

They were the young engineer and his friend the Reverend Paul Grace, curate of the parish. There were never two men more unlike, physically and mentally, and yet it would have been a hard task to find two natures more harmonious and sympathetic. Still most people wondered at and failed to comprehend their friendship. The mild, nervous little Oxonian barely reached Derrick's shoulder; his finely cut face was singularly feminine and innocent; the mild eyes beaming from behind his small spectacles had an absent, dreamy look. One could not fail to see at the first glance, that this refined, restless, conscientious little gentleman was hardly the person to cope successfully with Riggan. Derrick strode by his side like a young son of Anak—brains and muscle evenly balanced and fully developed.

He turned his head over his shoulder to look at Joan Lowrie once again.

“That girl,” said Grace, “has worked at the pit's mouth from her childhood; her mother was a pit girl until she died—of hard work, privation and ill treatment. Her father is a collier and lives as most of them do—drinking, rioting, fighting. Their home is such a home as you have seen dozens of since you came here; the girl could not better it if she tried, and would not know how to begin if she felt inclined. She has borne, they tell me, such treatment as would have killed most women. She has been beaten, bruised, felled to the earth by this father of hers, who is said to be a perfect fiend in his cups. And yet she holds to her place in their wretched hovel, and makes herself a slave to the fellow with a dogged, stubborn determination. What can I do with such a case as that, Derrick?”

“You have tried to make friends with the girl?” said Derrick.

Grace colored sensitively.

“There is not a man, woman or child in the parish,” he answered, “with whom I have not conscientiously tried to make friends, and there is scarcely one, I think, with whom I have succeeded. Why can I not succeed? Why do I always fail? The fault must be with myself——”

“A mistake that at the outset,” interposed Derrick. “There is no 'fault' in the matter; there is simply misfortune. Your parishioners are so unfortunate as not to be able to understand you, and on your part you are so unfortunate as to fail at first to place yourself on the right footing with them. I say 'at first' you observe. Give yourself time, Grace, and give them time too.”

“Thank you,” said the Reverend Paul. “But speaking of this girl—'That lass o' Lowrie's,' as she is always called—Joan I believe her name is. Joan Lowrie is, I can assure you, a weight upon me. I cannot help her and I cannot rid my mind of her. She stands apart from her fellows. She has most of the faults of her class, but none of their follies; and she has the reputation of being half feared, half revered. The man who dared to approach her with the coarse love-making which is the fashion among them, would rue it to the last day of his life. She seems to defy all the world.”

CHAPTER V - Outside the Hedge

Deeply as Anice was interested in Joan, she left her to herself. She did not go to see her, and still more wisely, she managed to hush in her father any awakening tendency toward parochial visits. But from Grace and Fergus Derrick she heard much of her, and through Grace she contrived to convey work and help to Liz, and encouragement to her protectress. From what source the assistance came, Joan did not know, and she was not prone to ask questions.

“If she asks, tell her it is from a girl like herself,” Anice had said, and Joan had accepted the explanation.

In a very short time from the date of their first acquaintance, Fergus Derrick's position in the Barholm household had become established. He was the man to make friends and keep them. Mrs. Barholm grew fond of him; the Rector regarded him as an acquisition to their circle, and Anice was his firm friend. So, being free to come and go, he came and went, and found his unceremonious visits pleasant enough. On his arrival at Riggan, he had not anticipated meeting with any such opportunities of enjoyment. He had come to do hard work, and had expected a hard life, softened by few social graces. The work of opening the new mines was a heavy one, and was rendered additionally heavy and dangerous by unforeseen circumstances. A load of responsibility rested upon his shoulders, to which at times he felt himself barely equal, and which men of less tough fibre would have been glad to shift upon others. Naturally, his daily cares made his hours of relaxation all the more pleasant. Mrs. Barholm's influence upon him was a gentle and soothing one, and in Anice he found a subtle inspiration. She seemed to understand his trials by instinct, and even the minutiae of his work made themselves curiously clear to her. As to the people who were under his control, she was never tired of hearing of them, and of studying their quaint, rough ways. To please her he stored up many a characteristic incident, and it was through him that she heard most frequently of Joan. She did not even see Joan for fully two months after her arrival in Riggan, and then it was Joan who came to her.

As the weather became more spring-like she was oftener out in the garden. She found a great deal to do among the flower-beds and shrubbery, and as this had always been considered her department, she took the management of affairs wholly into her own hands. The old place, which had been rather neglected in the time of the previous inhabitant, began to bloom out into fragrant luxuriance, and passing Rigganites regarded it with admiring eyes. The colliers who had noticed her at the window in the colder weather, seeing her so frequently from a nearer point of view, felt themselves on more familiar terms. Some of them even took a sort of liking to her, and gave her an uncouth greeting as they went by; and, more than once, one or another of them had paused to ask for a flower or two, and had received them with a curious bashful awe, when they had been passed over the holly hedge.

Having gone out one evening after dinner to gather flowers for the house, Anice, standing before a high lilac bush, and pulling its pale purple tassels, became suddenly conscious that some one was watching her—some one standing upon the roadside behind the holly hedge. She did not know that as she stopped here and there to fill her basket, she had been singing to herself in a low tone. Her voice had attracted the passer-by.

This passer-by—a tall pit girl with a handsome, resolute face—stood behind the dark green hedge, and watched her. Perhaps to this girl, weary with her day's labor, grimed with coal-dust, it was not unlike standing outside paradise. Early in the year as it was, there were flowers enough in the beds, and among the shrubs, to make the spring air fresh with a faint, sweet odor. But here too was Anice in her soft white merino dress, with her basket of flowers, with the blue bells at her belt, and her half audible song. She struck Joan Lowrie with a new sense of beauty and purity. As she watched her she grew discontented—restless—sore at heart. She could not have told why, but she felt a certain anger against herself. She had had a hard day. Things had gone wrong at the pit's mouth; things had gone wrong at home. It was hard for her strong nature to bear with Liz's weakness. Her path was never smooth, but to-day it had been at its roughest. The little song fell upon her ear with strong pathos.

“She's inside o' th' hedge,” she said to herself in a dull voice. “I'm outside, theer's th' difference. It a'most looks loike the hedge went aw' around an' she'd been born among th' flowers, and theer's no way out for her—no more than theer's a way in fur me.”

Then it was that Anice turned round and saw her. Their eyes met, and, singularly enough, Anice's first thought was that this was Joan. Derrick's description made her sure. There were not two such women in Riggan. She made her decision in a moment. She stepped across the grass to the hedge with a ready smile.

“You were looking at my flowers,” she said. “Will you have some?”

Joan hesitated.

“I often give them to people,” said Anice, taking a handful from the basket and offering them to her across the holly. “When the men come home from the mines they often ask me for two or three, and I think they like them even better than I do—though that is saying a great deal.”

Joan held out her hand, and took the flowers, holding them awkwardly, but with tenderness.

“Oh, thank yo',” she said. “It's kind o' yo' to gi' 'em away.”

“It's a pleasure to me,” said Anice, picking out a delicate pink hyacinth. “Here's a hyacinth.” Then as Joan took it their eyes met. “Are you Joan Lowrie?” asked the girl.

Joan lifted her head.

“Aye,” she answered, “I'm Joan Lowrie.”

“Ah,” said Anice, “then I am very glad.”

They stood on the same level from that moment. Something as indescribable as all else in her manner, had done for Anice just what she had simply and seriously desired to do. Proud and stubborn as her nature was, Joan was subdued. The girl's air and speech were like her song. She stood inside the hedge still, in her white dress, among the flowers, looking just as much as if she had been born there as ever, but some fine part of her had crossed the boundary.

**John Monk Foster, *A Pit-Brow Lassie* (1889)**

CHAPTER I—The New Wench.

A scene more unromantic it would be almost impossible to imagine, and one less lovely equally difficult to discover in all the length and breadth of smoke-polluted, pit-pierced, factory and foundry dotted Lancashire. It was the brow of a coal mine, situated in the very midst of a town of coal pits, and although it was summer time one might have stood on that pit's bank and glanced vainly toward every point of the compass for a sight of green fields, yellowing corn, and cool umbrageous woods. Yet there were fields and timber to be seen here and there; but the former were brown and arid, the latter leafless and ugly, affording neither pleasure to the eye, resting-place for the body, nor shelter from the sun's fierce rays.

The only things that appeared to flourish in that neighborhood were cotton factories, iron foundries, and coal mines, and the abundance of these fully justified one in phrasing Ashford—so was the town named—'a perfect hive of industry.' The monuments of Commerce are more numerous if less impressive and beautiful than those which Art and Science have created. Standing on the brow of the King Pit, Ashford, one could count, on a clear day, over a score of huge chimneys, each with its banner of smoke, and some of them towering heavenward higher than any column ever raised to warrior or king. And the great coal heaps visible here and there appeared to be the foundations of new pyramids which, when completed, would dwarf those the Egyptians raised.

It was between three and four o'clock in the afternoon, and working operations at the King Pit were at their greatest activity just then. The mine was one of the deepest in England, it had been sunk over thirty years, its underground workings were said to be more extensive than any in the same shire, and it still found employment for over five hundred hands—men, lads, women, and girls—above ground and below. The great pulleys suspended on the top of the 'head-gear,' high over the pit mouth, flew round with great rapidity, and the singular humming sound they made, like the droning of countless multitudes of bees, could be heard in the town a good quarter of a mile away. Quickly one huge cage descended and the other was borne upward loaded with full 'tubs'—as the small waggons used in the mines are called in Lancashire—and when the full cage arrived at the surface it was emptied in a few seconds by the banksman and his co-worker—a woman—half-a-dozen empty tubs took the place of the full ones, there was a clear ringing stroke of a bell, the signal from below, and again the great pulleys were whirling, the huge iron cages speeding in opposite directions.

The King Pit, Ashford, was noted amongst mining people for the great number of women employed about the mines there, and a visit to the place would have disclosed ample evidence of this. No work that woman or girl could do would be found in the hands of boy or man. There was a woman helping the banksman at the cages; women and girls were running full and empty tubs in all directions across the pit brow, which, like the sides of a modern warship, was covered with smooth thick plates of iron, over which the small waggons slid easily; women and girls were busy in the shoots and screens freeing the coal from dirt and slack.

At the end of the great coal-stack, where coals were stored when trade was bad, a group of women with only a here and there a man among them, were busy with spades and riddles filling railway waggons, and each woman handled her implement of labor as easily and as deftly as a man. On the other side of the pit brow, where the Leeds and Liverpool Canal ran, another group of women were filling a boat with coal in the colliery basin under the guidance of a man. The ages of these miner women varied greatly. Some of them were over 50 years old, whilst the youngest were just entering their teens. Some of them were large-limbed and muscular, like their relatives who worked underground, and a few seemed too slenderly built for such rough work as they must necessarily undergo. But all of them seemed active and healthful, with weather-tanned faces; they were frank-eyed and sure-footed, even graceful.

The work was rough and arduous, but most of the women preferred it to being cooped up in the stifling cotton factories; and whilst it was rare to find a woman leaving the pit bank to work in the mills, it was common enough to witness the contrary. The pay was poor—the girls received from one shilling to half-a-crown per day, according to their age and ability—but even in that respect it was not inferior to the wages to be obtained by them elsewhere. The miner women were all dressed after the same fashion. Each of them wore clogs and breeches, and over the latter garment was a petticoat looped up in front so as not to offer any barrier to rapid movement. The body garment was usually a short jacket of some printed stuff, or perhaps the discarded short coat of some male relative. The headdress was invariably a kerchief of some bright pattern, wound gracefully round the head and tied so as to fall in a neat fold behind. Very picturesque and spruce those pit-brow lassies appeared each Monday morning in summer, for then they came to work in polished clogs and snowy stockings, which peeped daintily out beneath their short trousers, showing not infrequently a pair of well-formed ankles. Here and there might have been seen a form so splendidly developed by exercise that it would have served as a model for a sculptor, and, much rarer still, a face that deserved to be called handsome.

The cry against female labor about mines had at this time not grown strong enough to deserve notice. It was then only talked of in secret at Miners' Union meetings, and the whole movement against the pit-brow women had its origin in the worst of motives. No feelings of charity actuated the men who took up the cry; they had no chivalrous regard for the weaker sex; it was not because they deemed the labor too arduous or that it had a tendency to demoralise the worker; it was because they regarded pit-brow women as rivals in the labor market and wished to have the whole field to themselves.

It was now 4 o'clock, and batches of miners, who had finished work for the day, were beginning to come up the King pit. Presently there ascended with a cageful of others a miner who is to play a prominent part in this story. This was Luke Standish, who labored at the mine as a day wage man or "dataller." He was about six-and-twenty years old, of Titanic mould, deep-chested, broad-shouldered, and strong-limbed, like some Greek demi-god of classic story. His head and face were cast in exact proportion to his form, and their massive build, though striking, did not impress a beholder so much as did the singular aspect his face habitually wore. His features were handsome, in a rugged, rough-hewn fashion, but what struck one most was the great honest heart, the frank mind, and clear soul so plainly revealed in the open countenance and straightforward-looking eyes.

Luke Standish was a prominent figure in the limited circle in which he moved. Common repute said of him that he was a good son, a splendid workman, a true friend, and an honest Christian, although he seldom attended church. His father had been years in the grave, having been burnt to a black human cinder by an explosion when Luke was only fifteen, leaving a delicate wife to his only child's care. And well had Luke Standish discharged the filial obligations his father's sudden and lamentable fate had entailed upon him. From his youth up he had worked steadily and lived temperately, never idling when there was work at the pit, and wasting none of the money he earned. Luckily for himself Luke became possessed early in his teens of a passion for reading, and this proved to him a two-fold gain; for not only did it save him joining in the questionable pastimes of his fellow-miners—pigeon-flying, dog-racing, wrestling, and so forth—but it deepened and widened his mind; stirred into activity faculties that otherwise might have forever remained dormant; roused within him ambitions, hopes, more noble ideas of life, and gave him purpose and intellect to effect them; making of him a better workman, truer citizen, nobler Christian.

This was the man who, coming up the King Pit, Ashford, one June afternoon, walked out of the cage with his fellow pitmen, heart whole, his thoughts and dreams up to that moment untouched by thoughts of love. Five minutes afterwards new prospects had opened out before him, a fair land of promise was suddenly revealed unto him; and all this wonderful change was wrought in Luke by a girl's graceful figure and sweet winsome face. Walking leisurely across the pit brow, chatting with a workmate, Luke's attention was suddenly arrested by the sight of a new face—the face of a young woman who was just then passing with an empty tub. He could not refrain from coming to a standstill, and glancing after the strange pit-girl he said—

"Who's that, Dick? Dost know her?"

"Ah dunnot, Luke. Ah ony know us hoo sterted this morning. A bonnie un, isn't hoo?"

But Luke made no reply to his companion's question. He turned on his heel without speaking, went with the others to the lamp office, where they left their lamps, and then returned to the pit brow wondering much anent the girl whose face had impressed him so greatly.

Lounging about the pit bank, as if he were waiting for somebody or something, Luke watched the new girl with an intentness that surprised him afterwards, when he came to think of it and to analyse the motive that prompted him to scrutinise her so closely. The feeling uppermost in his mind was one of deep reverent admiration; and next to that came the conviction that although he felt certain that he had not seen her before, her face was familiar to him. Unable to account for the notion, he seated himself on a heap of pit timber and watched her as she went about her work totally unconscious of the deep feeling she had stirred in the young pitman's heart. There was much to be said in excuse of Luke Standish's involuntary admiration of the new pit-brow girl. Her face and figure would have attracted attention anywhere. Taller than the ordinary run of women, and splendidly built, her shapely limbs displayed themselves in every movement as she went about her work in a quick gliding way pleasant to witness.

She was dressed no better than the rest of her companions, but the gulf between her and the others was very plainly marked. Perhaps this was owing to her face more than anything else. She was dark-haired, brown-eyed, and her face was oval as a wild bird's egg. Her nose, with its clearly cut tremulous nostrils, had the slightest possible tendency towards the aquiline form, but this was insufficient to mar the sweet grace and tender womanliness of the whole countenance. In age the girl seemed to be about nineteen or twenty. The work she was doing was light and cleanly, and in consequence her hands and face were scarcely soiled. Noting these things, Luke found himself expressing mentally a wish that the new girl's work might never be harder or dirtier than that of "number shouting." Here a word of explanation may be offered as to the vocation in which the new girl was engaged. Each miner employed in getting coal has a set of tallies, each set being numbered differently, and he affixes one of these tallies to every tub of coal he fills, and when the full tubs are sent up the shaft they are weighed and the number attached to each tub is cried out by the "number shouter" and set down by the weighman.

Luke watched the new girl for some little time longer. It was a positive pleasure to him to sit there noticing every movement of the shapely form, to hear her clear voice intoning the different numbers, each number falling from her lips clearly articulated and singularly musical. Then Luke arose half regretfully from the "props" on which he was seated and walked slowly across the brow homeward. On his way across he met a woman he knew intimately, and addressing her he asked—

"Who's that new wench yo'n getten number sheawtin'?"

"They ca' her Kate Leigh, so ah yeard at brekfust-tahme, an' o pratty wench too hoo is, eh, Luke?"

"Prattiest that ever ah seed in breeches, Meg. Wheer does hoo come fro'?"

"Ah cawnt tell tha that, lad, bur ah fancy they're strangers ta this peyrt."

Luke said no more, but went thoughtfully home. Whilst eating his dinner his thoughts still encircled Kate Leigh, and he continued to wonder how it was that her face struck him as familiar. Times innumerable he asked himself during the evening where and when he had seen a face that resembled hers, but in vain he strove to find answers to his questions.

Whilst Luke lay awake in bed that night a flash of memory revealed to him the cause of his thinking that Kate Leigh's face was familiar to him. In a moment he jumped out of bed, lit his candle, and made his way downstairs softly so as not to disturb his mother. Placing his candle on the table he went to the small bookshelf fixed in one corner near the fireplace, and taking therefrom a bundle of old magazines in yellow paper backs he returned to the light. These old journals were odd unbound copies of Cassell's Family Magazine, which Luke had picked up at a second-hand bookstall in the town. Placing the magazines on the table he selected one from the heap, and turning to the frontispiece he looked upon a face that might have been Kate Leigh's very self in portraiture. The engraving was entitled "The Carol Singers," by Haynes Williams, and it represented two young girls singing a Christmas carol. The younger of the two was a school girl just entering her teens; the elder a perfect type of budding woman-hood. In her dark hair were intertwined bright holly berries; her eyes and eyebrows were dark also; the nose was slightly aquiline; every feature the exact counterpart of the girl's he had seen that afternoon. Impulsively Luke Standish bent his head and pressed his lips to those of the elder maiden of the engraving. He kissed the paper as reverently as if it had been Kate Leigh's own lips he was caressing. Then he replaced the magazines, returned to bed, and dreamt that he had become a mine manager and won for a wife sweet-faced Kate Leigh.

CHAPTER IV --- Retrospective

…Ten years slipped away, and the wife and child Jonathan Leigh had deserted still resided at Orrelham. Mrs. Leigh had ceased to work in the cotton mill. A year ago the only company of cotton spinners in the place failed and the mills were closed. When this happened Margaret cast about for other work. She did not wish to quit the place, and having an excellent character and some friends she obtained odd jobs, such as charing, at the houses of the gentry round Orrelham. Her daughter Kate was now thirteen, a tall slip of a girl whose face showed then no trace of the great beauty it attained half a dozen years later. The lass was working on the brow of an adjacent colliery, and she had taken up that kind of work because none other was to be obtained since the cotton mill closed.

It was with considerable misgivings that Mrs. Leigh allowed Kate to commence working about the mines, but as her own earnings were not sufficient to maintain them she submitted to the inevitable. Besides, the girl began to work as a pit-brow hand on the understanding that if she did not like the work they would both leave Orrelham and go to some town where employment in the cotton mills could be obtained. The first morning that Kate Leigh donned the garb of a miner lassie was of course a time of trial to the young girl. Of a quiet retiring nature it required not a little courage on her part to make her appearance in trousers before a number of strangers composed of both sexes. But Kate was both a good girl and a brave one. She understood to some extent the trials her mother had faced and overcome, and being earnestly desirous of decreasing her parent's burden as far possible, stuck to the work on the pit bank. After the first day or two the feeling of strangeness passed away, and being acquainted with many of the other girls she soon grew to like the work. It was summer time then, and the uglier aspects of pit-brow-life did not present themselves. Working under a genial sun and soft blue skies is an altogether different matter from toiling amidst storms of wind and snow, torrents of rain and sleet, to all of which the pit-brow hands are often subjected through the callousness or indifference of their employers.

At an old dame's school In Orrelham village Kate managed to pick up a smattering of the three "R's" and this knowledge her mother had done much to increase by sedulously fostering in her daughter a love for reading. Mrs. Leigh was herself a great reader of cheap romances, and from her mother Kate probably inherited her literary taste. She had been accustomed to perusing the old penny journals Mrs. Leigh had bought, read, and afterwards put by, and when she began to work on the pit-brow, with the first week's "spending money" she bought the first two numbers of a periodical she had seen in the village stationer's window. Thus at thirteen Kate Leigh became one of that great "Unknown Public" whose existence once puzzled Wilkie Collins so much; and regularly for years did she continue to purchase her favorite "Penny Novel Journal."

This taste for cheap literature in no way militated against any virtues Kate possessed; it rather fostered their growth and ennobled the girl's ideas of life. Living as she did in a dull country village, she would have grown up thick-witted as a clod had not the romances she devoured shown her glimpses—often caricatures it is true—of the great world that struggled, surged, seethed, and breathed around her. What if the heroes of her cheap stories were invariably models of manly beauty—the heroines paragons of virtue and loveliness—the one performing impossible feats of valor and intellect, the other enduring intolerable wrongs and suffering for Right's sake? What if the characters of the stories were too often the clumsiest of lay figures, woefully overdrawn, and inevitably surcharged with every passion, human and divine? In the end the virtuous reigned triumphant and the wicked were consigned to a righteous perdition. To her uncritical eye the blemishes of the stories were not discernible; she was only able to see in them that which was good and inspiriting.

So the years rolled by and Kate Leigh grew up to womanhood, living, as it seemed to her, two lives—one the hard practical life of the pit-brow girl, the other a dream of romance passed in the companionship of her heroes and her heroines. As she approached the end of her teens Kate developed into a strikingly beautiful woman, though hers was not the beauty met with commonly in women of her class—a bold sort of masculine handsomeness—but a sweet, unostentatious kind rarely found in village maidens. Lovers she had in dozens in Orrelham, but none of them had in her a lover. Her reading of romance had steeled her heart against all wooers such as the village could furnish, and poor pit-girl though she was she was dreaming her dreams and building her air-castles. As yet she had to meet the young fellow who could compare favorably with her ideal. That Kate was conscious of her loveliness need not be recorded, nor need it be written that she was proud of it. As yet it had proved a source of pure satisfaction to her; presently she was to learn that its possession had its own dangers.

At the colliery where she worked the agent was a man named Robert Gregson. He was a middle-aged man, married, with a large family, but these things did not prevent him from forming designs upon Kate Leigh. Her loveliness had excited his lascivious nature, and her modesty only inflamed his desire. He set about his designs in a snake-like fashion. Kate was removed from the pit-brow and instituted "office-cleaner." The change was at first agreeable to her in every way. The work was cleanly, easy, and the pay better than she had formerly received. In the suite of offices attached to the colliery Kate, of course, often encountered Mr. Gregson, and he soon informed her that the change in her work and wages was due to the kindly feeling he entertained for one who was so much above ordinary pit-brow girls. Suspecting nothing she thanked him warmly for what he had done.

Some time after this the agent unmasked himself and his attentions. He waited one evening—it was winter time—in the lane along which Kate journeyed homeward, and made such proposals to the girl as to send her flying home almost heartbroken. Neither to her mother nor to anyone else did Kate breathe a syllable of what had happened; she was too utterly ashamed of the position in which the insult had placed her. She went to work next day as usual, and for some time the agent ceased to persecute her. But the man's evil intention had not been given up; it was only laid aside for a time. One day when Kate was cleaning Mr. Gregson's private room he entered hurriedly and closing the door behind him confronted the astonished girl, who, after gazing on him a moment continued her occupation of sweeping the floor.

Kate's silence regarding the fellow's previous insult perhaps incited him to offer her another, thinking it would pass unpunished also. Anyhow, without a word he strode across the uncarpeted floor, caught her in his arms before she could spring away, and in a moment he had kissed her twice on the lips. Then he loosed his hold on her, stepped backward a pace, and stood there smiling. Almost choking with indignation and shame, Kate stood there clasping the long-handled brush as if she were petrified, though her face was the color of fire, whilst her great brown eyes shot forth lightning flashes at the craven who had dared again to insult her. Then a wave of passionate craving for revenge surged through the girl's breast; she swung round the implement in her hands with fierce purpose and sure aim, and the next moment Robert Gregson went crashing to the floor, a loud cry welling from his lips. The heavy head of the brush had caught the agent full upon the temple, and as he went down before the sweeping stroke his head came in contact with a table edge, inflicting a nasty scalp wound from which the blood gashed out.

There was a rush of feet and half a dozen clerks ran into the room, brought thither by the agent's shout and the noise of his fall. Each of them assailed Kate with questions on seeing her standing there, white-faced now and vengeful-eyed, with the stunned man at her feet.

"He Insulted me!—kissed me!—and I knocked him down!" she burst forth. Then she walked from the place, got her basket and can from another room, and went home. She told her mother all that had taken place, telling her also of the agent's previous insult.

The affair created quite a stir in Orrelham, setting every gossip's tongue awag in the place. The agent denied Kate's version of the matter, but despite the advice of his friends he did not take out against her a summons for assault and battery. A week afterwards Mrs. Leigh and her daughter said adieu to Orrelham for various reasons, and the spot they ultimately settled upon was the town wherein they lived when the husband of one and the father of the other disappeared.