

you, I love you!" my heart sang from morning until night; and if I woke in the darkness, there was my heart still singing: "I love you, I love you!"

One day my heart sang too happily, and some one heard. In the first scene of the second act, the regiment embarks on a troop-ship for foreign service. The troopers, dismounted and carrying their kits, come swinging along to the pier-head, the band in front playing "The Girl I Left Behind Me," and nearly every person in the play crowding the stage to see them off. You remember the scene, of course? It is wonderfully effective, and full of noise and bustle; and while the soldiers pass, I stand in the porch of the inn and wave my handkerchief and pretend to weep.

One night as I was doing this, and Mr. Travis the Sergeant was striding by with the marching troops, he stopped short, looked back at me, and then went on. That was all. But in that instant of time, in the midst of that confusion and hubbub, and in some way that puzzles me to this moment, he had heard the singing of my heart. I blushed crimson and covered my face with my handkerchief. It was too late; he had seen. I knew it, and my secret was out. To think that the man whom I loved with a poor little tremulous love should not even guess, while the one whom I almost loathed should read me like a book!

But the song that my heart sang would not be stilled. Every night, when the troops marched past, I waved my handkerchief—it was for him, though I looked another way. Every night, when in the great third act he staggered into camp bearing the wounded Sergeant on his back—the man who had been to him a cruel and persistent enemy—and sank to the ground spent with weariness, every night when he stood modest but brave before a court-martial of his brother officers and made the great sacrifice, telling a lie, dragging his own honor in the dust that the honor of the regiment might be unstained, I watched him and loved him dearly.

To be near him, to look upon him, young and glorious in his brilliant Lieutenant's uniform, to listen to his voice, set my heart to singing joyously. He was so gracious, so manly, his expression and manner were so natural and full of charm, that the heroic words he uttered, his deeds of daring and self-sacrifice, were just what might have been expected of him—part and parcel of the man himself.

As we came to know each other better, it made me proud it gave me the greatest happiness, to feel that he was doing nightly on the stage precisely what he would have done under similar conditions in the actual living world outside the theater. His whole treatment of me confirmed me in this opinion. He was kindness itself, helped me with my part, sent me flowers, gave me little suppers—did everything to please me; and sometimes, it seemed to me, he must hear my timid little heart singing those wonderful, wonderful words: "I love you, I love you!" Oh, how anxiously, how timorously, I waited for him to hear, and for his own dear heart to sing in its turn! For I knew—I knew so well that I should follow wherever that song led me, and that I should be blissfully, unutterably happy!

After that one backward glance that had surprised my secret, the Sergeant never looked me in the eye; but I was always conscious that he watched me covertly. He seemed to dog my steps. I was never alone with Mr. Crompton for a moment; I could not even speak to him or look at him without feeling that the Sergeant was near and was observing me. This angered me. Then it dawned upon me that he was jealous. I was only a foolish, light-headed girl, remember, and that thought added the last drop to my cup of happiness. In my wildest dreams I had never imagined anything so delightfully romantic, so tremendously dramatic. Indeed, the whole situation was ridiculously like the very thing we were playing every night: the young Lieutenant, at first unconscious that he is loved; the heroine loving him in secret; the Sergeant loving her, jealous of him, and trying by every crafty device to prevent the union that is inevitable and that ends the play with his own undoing and the Lieutenant's happiness. I almost laughed aloud when I thought of it. Here, surely, was a drama within a drama, with Rosa Leigh as the heroine of one, and I as the heroine of the other.

For week in and week out we played our several parts in each drama, the false and real; and as time went on I could observe a marvelous change in Mr. Travis's acting. Now, he must have felt in a certain measure what before he had only pretended to feel. There were no more hisses from the galleries, no more catcalls, no more stamping. The house sat silent,

spellbound. It was not the actor whom they saw, but the cavalry Sergeant; a man of flesh and blood, barked in the dearest wish of his heart, swayed by an overmastering passion, daring, resourceful, patient, who, when his hopes collapse and ruin overwhelms him, is led out to meet the firing squad, with no fear in his face, nothing but a desperate, yearning, eternal love. It was masterly; and when the shots rang out that meant his death, a great shudder went through the house, and women turned pale and wept.

It was not possible that my untutored heart should forever hold its secret. Its song grew loud, and then my tongue spoke also.

We were sitting one night, Mr. Crompton and I, far to one side of the stage near a passageway leading to some dressing-rooms. I was in street dress, for I did not appear in the last act. The stage was set for the deck of the troop-ship, the deck itself being a platform raised some few feet above the level of the stage proper. It was night, and a moon shone upon the ship and the gently heaving ocean. But on the ship itself there were no lights save the red and green near the bows, and a faint glow about the door of a companionway. The deck was deserted except for a sailor on watch, and a sentry, far forward, leaning on his musket and looking over the side. It is in this scene that the two men meet, not as soldiers, nor as commissioned and non-commissioned officers, but as men, and a fierce but brief scuffle ensues that ceases upon the approach of the sentry.

It was quite dark where we were sitting; and somehow—somehow, without a word from him I

and this was my absolution. I was a girl no longer, but a woman.

Before I could recover myself, I heard near me a quiet voice in the darkness. It was the Sergeant's. "I say, Crompton! Drop that, will you!"

"What blanked business—" began Mr. Crompton violently.

But Mr. Travis interrupted him: "Come on, Crompton! We are late."

They turned and ran up the companion, and appeared together on the silent moonlit deck. I stood transfixed, watching them. They were talking to each other in the words of the play, following their lines exactly; but every word they said had a hidden meaning that only I could read, and their voices were tense and hard. Presently, at the proper cue, the first blow was struck. Almost instantly there were two more, quick and sharp. The stage-manager saw there was something wrong and ran up, calling to them; but they paid no heed. In a moment more they clinched, broke away, clinched again, and swayed back and forth, back and forth, struggling desperately.

It was impossible, from where I stood, to tell them apart in the pale moonlight which filtered downward from the flies. They made only one huge blot of shadow that quivered and swayed and danced grotesquely, and out of which, loud against the death-like stillness of the house, issued the sounds of labored breathing and grunts and curses, and the scraping of feet as they fought furiously together. Then something happened—I don't know what; there was an oath, a vicious blow, and one of them was hurled headlong over the canvas

bulwarks and fell with an awful crash on the stage. Which one? I dared not look. I hid my eyes; my heart stopped beating. I heard the curtain come down with a run, and a muffled roar from the unsuspecting audience, and much hurrying about, and hushed, anxious voices. Finally some one asked: "Crompton, are you hurt?" And with that my heart leaped in my breast, beating, beating, so loud, so riotously, that it almost stifled me, and I turned and ran as if for life.

I entered the room through the opened door, and stopped short, my finger at my lips. Mrs. Gilpin was following me—that sweet old woman who played the landlady of the Pump and Dipper Inn—and she stopped short also, and put her finger to her lips. We both stood on tiptoe, motionless, so like conspirators about to commit some dark deed that we could scarcely keep from laughing.

The room was empty; but from behind a curtain at the opposite end issued a voice, shouting:

"You hound!" so spake the voice; "you hound! You saw that I loved the dream-lady—you must have seen it—and you came between us! Dastard! Do you hear me?"

"Pitch into him, buddy! Give it to him, give it to him!" came now in shrill, excited tones from the same direction.

I pushed the curtain aside a little mite, and peeped into a bare, shabby room, in the center of

which stood the Sergeant, clad in a ragged dressing-gown that reached his heels, and with his left arm in a sling. On his head he wore a moth-eaten grenadier's bear-skin, and about his waist was knotted an old red table-cloth with ends hanging like a sash, while in his right hand he brandished a poker in lieu of a sword.

In front of him, almost lost in a big arm-chair, sat a little girl with great blue eyes and long golden curls. She was prinked out as children love to dress in all manner of finery and strange garments, the tail of her long gown, suspiciously like another table-cloth, spread out with much elegance upon the floor. In her lap she held a bit of newspaper and a dilapidated pair of opera-glasses. Here, then, were the actor and his audience: the one in costume; the other gowned for the play. My heart melted; and when I saw that propped against the chair which held the audience was a little crutch, tears came to my eyes, and I drew back and let the curtain fall.

Presently the Sergeant began again; but such mouthing, such ranting, such sibilant S's, such grating R's, such guttural G's, such big round O's, such gloomy frowns, such fiendish laughs, I am sure no audience ever saw or heard before or since. No wonder the little girl clapped her small hands wildly, and cried: "Pitch into him, buddy! Give it to him!"

"I loved the beautiful lady with my whole heart and soul," continued the Sergeant; "and you—what did you do? Answer me! Ha, ha! You can't! I know well enough that you come of a great and ancient family; that you are a real lord's son and heir; that you are a Lieutenant and my superior officer. I know it as well as I know that I am a nobody, a Sergeant, a man in the ranks. But if you have a spark of manhood in you, strip off that

Continued on page 19



In the Center of the Room
Stood the Sergeant.

came to tell him everything. That sweet old song which has welled up from so many hearts rose to my lips. Its spell was upon me, and low in his ear I whispered the secret that I had so long guarded. I poured out my whole soul to him, hiding nothing, caring nothing, swept away on a tide that could no longer be controlled. Finally, I told him about Mr. Travis's jealousy.

At that moment the call was made and the curtain ran up. He laid his hand on mine, then rose and stood looking down at me. For a long time he said nothing; but I could feel that his eyes were searching me through and through. Then he opened his lips and murmured: "At last, you beauty!" and catching me up in his arms, almost crushed me in his embrace, and kissed me fiercely three times on the lips.

I tore myself away from him and covered my burning face. I snatched my handkerchief and frantically rubbed my lips, that I might wipe away forever the sting of that corroding kiss—that kiss that had in it not one trace of love, but everything in the world that was horrible, and defiling, and degrading. I can feel it now scorching me: I have never since felt clean. My confession was made,