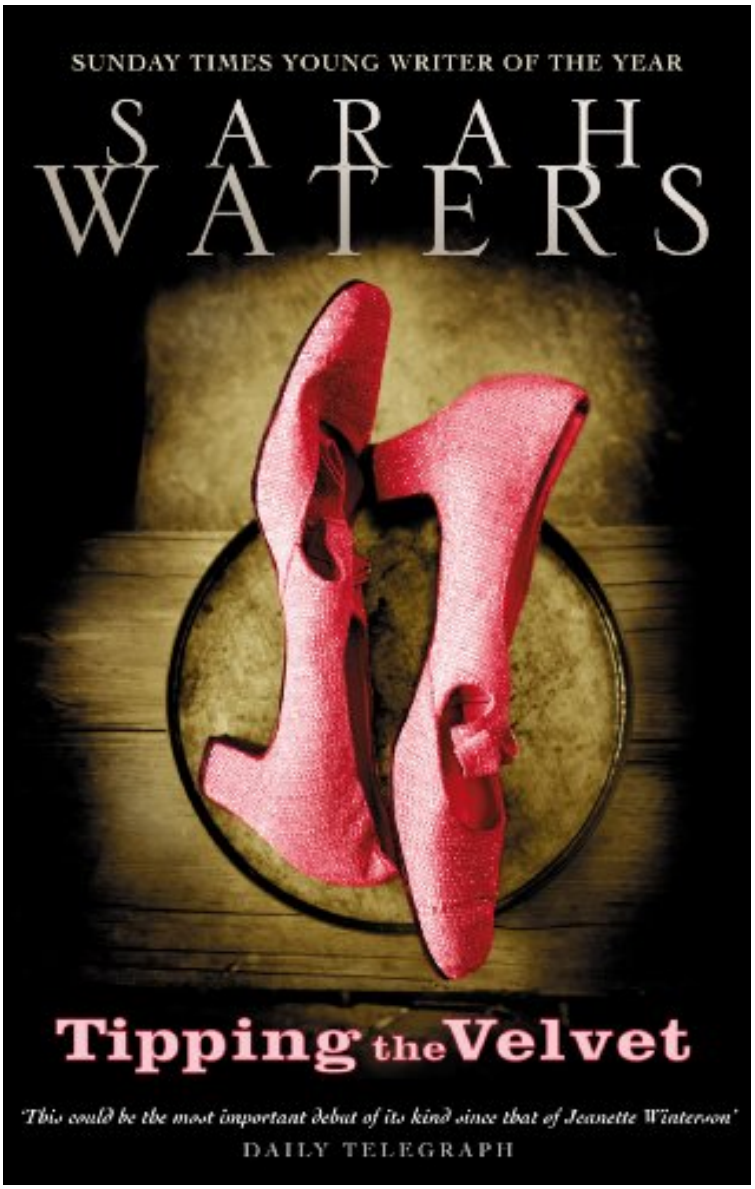
Tipping The Velvet (Virago Modern Classics) (English Edition)



Par Sarah Waters
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(Library ebook) Tipping The Velvet (Virago Modern Classics) (English Edition)

Par Sarah Waters : Tipping The Velvet (Virago Modern Classics) (English Edition) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Tipping The Velvet (Virago Modern Classics) (English Edition):

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurPiercing the shadows of the naked stage was a single shaft of rosy limelight, and in the centre of this was a girl: the most marvellous girl - I knew it at once! - that I had ever seen. A saucy, sensuous and multi-layered historical romance, Tipping the Velvet follows the glittering career of Nan King - oyster girl turned music-hall star turned rent boy turned East End 'tom'..comThe heroine of Sarah Waters's audacious first novel knows her destiny, and seems content with it. Her place is in her father's

seaside restaurant, shucking shellfish and stirring soup, singing all the while. "Although I didn't long believe the story told to me by Mother--that they had found me as a baby in an oyster-shell, and a greedy customer had almost eaten me for lunch--for eighteen years I never doubted my own oysterish sympathies, never looked far beyond my father's kitchen for occupation, or for love." At night Nancy Astley often ventures to the nearby music hall, not that she has illusions of being more than an audience member. But the moment she spies a new male impersonator--still something of a curiosity in England circa 1888--her years of innocence come to an end and a life of transformations begins. Tipping the Velvet, all 472 pages of it, is as saucy, as tantalizing, and as touching as the narrator's first encounter with the seductive but shame-ridden Miss Kitty Butler. And at first even Nancy's family is thrilled with her gender-bending pal, all but her sister, best friend, and bedmate, Alice, "her eyes shining cold and dull, with starlight and suspicion." Not to worry. Soon Nancy and Kitty are off to London, their relationship close though (alas for our heroine) sisterly. We know that bliss will come, and it does, in an exceptionally charged moment. A lesser author would have been content to stop her story there, but Waters has much more in mind for her buttonholing heroine, and for us. In brief, her Everywoman with a sexual difference goes from success onstage to heartbreak to a stint as a male prostitute (necessity truly is the mother of invention) to keeping house for a brother and sister in the Labour movement. And did I mention her long stint as a plaything in the pleasure palace of a rich Sapphist extraordinaire? Diana Lethaby is as cruel as she is carnal, and even the well-concealed Cavendish Ladies' Club isn't outr enough for her. Kitting Nancy out in full, elegant drag, she dares the front desk to turn them away. "We are here," she mocks, "for the sake of the irregular." Only after some seven years of hard twists and sensual turns does Nancy conclude that a life of sensation is not enough. Still, Tipping the Velvet is so entertaining that readers will wish her sentimental--and hedonistic--education had taken twice as long. --Kerry FriedExtraitPART ONEChapter 1Have you ever tasted a Whitstable oyster? If you have, you will remember it. Some quirk of the Kentish coastline makes Whitstable natives - as they are properly called - the largest and the juiciest, the savouriest yet the subtlest, oysters in the whole of England. Whitstable oysters are, quite rightly, famous. The French, who are known for their sensitive palates, regularly cross the Channel for them; they are shipped, in barrels of ice, to the dining-tables of Hamburg and Berlin. Why, the King himself, I heard, makes special trips to Whitstable with Mrs Keppel, to eat oyster suppers in a private hotel; and as for the old Queen - she dined on a native a day (or so they say) till the day she died.Did you ever go to Whitstable, and see the oyster-parlours there? My father kept one; I was born in it - do you recall a narrow, weather-boarded house, painted a flaking blue, half-way between the High Street and the harbour? Do you remember the bulging sign that hung above the door, that said that Astleys Oysters, the Best in Kent were to be had within? Did you, perhaps, push at that door, and step into the dim, low-ceilinged, fragrant room beyond it? Can you recall the tables with their chequered cloths - the bill of fare chalked on a board - the spirit-lamps, the sweating slabs of butter?Were you served by a girl with a rosy cheek, and a saucy manner, and curls? That was my sister, Alice. Or was it a man, rather tall and stooping, with a snowy apron falling from the knot in his neck-tie to the bow in his boots? That was my father. Did you see, as the kitchen door swung to and fro, a lady stand frowning into the clouds of steam that rose from a pan of bubbling oyster soup, or a sizzling gridiron? That was my mother.And was there at her side a slender, white-faced, unremarkable-looking girl, with the sleeves of her dress rolled up to her elbows, and a lock of lank and colourless hair forever falling into her eye, and her lips continually moving to the words of some street-singers or music-hall song?That was me.Like Molly Malone in the old ballad, I was a fishmonger, because my parents were. They kept the restaurant, and the rooms above it: I was raised an oyster-girl, and steeped in all the flavours of the trade. My first few childish steps I took around vats of sleeping natives and barrels of ice; before I was ever given a piece of chalk and a slate, I was handed an oyster-knife and instructed in its use; while I was still lisping out my alphabet at the schoolmasters knee, I could name you the contents of an oyster-cooks kitchen - could sample fish with a blindfold on, and tell you their variety. Whitstable was all the world to me, Astleys Parlour my own particular country, oyster-juice my medium. Although I didnt long believe the story told to me by Mother - that they had found me as a baby in an oyster-shell, and a greedy customer had almost eaten me for lunch - for eighteen years I never doubted my own oysterish sympathies, never looked far beyond my fathers kitchen for occupation, or for love.It was a curious kind of life, mine, even by Whitstable standards ; but it was not a disagreeable or even a terribly hard one. Our working day began at seven, and ended twelve hours later; and through all those hours my duties were the same. While Mother cooked, and Alice and my father served, I sat upon a high stool at the side of a vat of natives, and scrubbed, and rinsed, and plied the oyster-knife. Some people like their oysters raw; and for them your job is

easiest, for you have merely to pick out a dozen natives from the barrel, swill the brine from them, and place them, with a piece of parsley or cress, upon a plate. But for those who took their oysters stewed, or fried - or baked, or scalloped, or put in a pie - my labours were more delicate. Then I must open each oyster, and beard it, and transfer it to Mothers cooking-pot with all of its savoury flesh intact, and none of its liquor spilled or tainted. Since a supper-plate will hold a dozen fish; since oyster-teas are cheap; and since our Parlour was a busy one, with room for fifty customers at once - well, you may calculate for yourself the vast numbers of oysters which passed, each day, beneath my prising knife; and you might imagine, too, the redness and the soreness and the sheer salty soddenness of my fingers at the close of every afternoon. Even now, two decades and more since I put aside my oyster-knife and quit my fathers kitchen for ever, I feel a ghostly, sympathetic twinge in my wrist and finger-joints at the sight of a fishmongers barrel, or the sound of an oyster-mans cry; and still, sometimes, I believe I can catch the scent of liquor and brine beneath my thumb-nail, and in the creases of my palm.I have said that there was nothing in my life, when I was young, but oysters; but that is not quite true. I had friends and cousins, as any girl must have who grows up in a small town in a large, old family. I had my sister Alice - my dearest friend of all - with whom I shared a bedroom and a bed, and who heard all my secrets, and told me all of hers. I even had a kind of beau: a boy named Freddy, who worked a dredging smack beside my brother Davy and my Uncle Joe on Whitstable Bay.And last of all I had a fondness - you might say, a kind of passion - for the music hall; and more particularly for music-hall songs and the singing of them. If you have visited Whitstable you will know that this was a rather inconvenient passion, for the town has neither music hall nor theatre - only a solitary lamp-post before the Duke of Cumberland Hotel, where minstrel troupes occasionally sing, and the Punch-and-Judy man, in August, sets his booth. But Whitstable is only fifteen minutes away by train from Canterbury; and here there was a music hall - the Canterbury Palace of Varieties - where the shows were three hours long, and the tickets cost sixpence, and the acts were the best to be seen, they said, in all of Kent.The Palace was a small and, I suspect, a rather shabby theatre ; but when I see it in my memories I see it still with my oyster-girls eyes - I see the mirror-glass which lined the walls, the crimson plush upon the seats, the plaster cupids, painted gold, which swooped above the curtain. Like our oyster-house, it had its own particular scent - the scent, I know now, of music halls everywhere - the scent of wood and grease-paint and spilling beer, of gas and of tobacco and of hair-oil, all combined. It was a scent which as a girl I loved uncritically; later I heard it described, by theatre managers and artistes, as the smell of laughter, the very odour of applause. Later still I came to know it as the essence not of pleasure, but of grief.That, however, is to get ahead of my story.I was more intimate than most girls with the colours and scents of the Canterbury Palace - in the period, at least, of which I am thinking, that final summer in my fathers house, when I became eighteen - because Alice had a beau who worked there, a boy named Tony Reeves, who got us seats at knock-down prices or for free. Tony was the nephew of the Palaces manager, the celebrated Tricky Reeves, and therefore something of a catch for our Alice. My parents mistrusted him at first, thinking him rapid because he worked in a theatre, and wore cigars behind his ears, and talked glibly of contracts, London, and champagne. But no one could dislike Tony for long, he was so large-hearted and easy and good; and like every other boy who courted her, he adored my sister, and was ready to be kind to us all on her account.Thus it was that Alice and I were so frequently to be found on a Saturday night, tucking our skirts beneath our seats and calling out the choruses to the gayest songs, in the best and most popular shows, at the Canterbury Palace. Like the rest of the audience, we were discriminating. We had our favourite turns - artistes we watched and shouted for; songs we begged to have sung and re-sung again and again until the singers throat was dry, and she - for more often than not it was the lady singers whom Alice and I loved best - could sing no more, but only smile and curtsey.And when the show was over, and we had paid our respects to Tony in his stuffy little office behind the ticket-sellers booth, we would carry the tunes away with us. We would sing them on the train to Whitstable - and sometimes others, returning home from the same show as merry as we, would sing them with us. We would whisper them into the darkness as we lay in bed, we would dream our dreams to the beat of their verses; and we would wake next morning humming them still. Wed serve a bit of music-hall glamour, then, with our fish suppers - Alice whistling as she carried platters, and making the customers smile to hear her; me, perched on my high stool beside my bowl of brine, singing to the oysters that I scrubbed and prised and bearded. Mother said I should be on the stage myself.When she said it, however, she laughed; and so did I. The girls I saw in the glow of the footlights, the girls whose songs I loved to learn and sing, they werent like me. They were more like my sister: they had cherry lips, and curls that danced about their shoulders; they had bosoms that jutted, and elbows that dimpled, and ankles - when they showed

them - as slim and as shapely as beer-bottles. I was tall, and rather lean. My chest was flat, my hair dull, my eyes a drab and an uncertain blue. My complexion, to be sure, was perfectly smooth and clear, and my teeth were very white; but these - in our family, at least - were counted unremarkable, for since we all passed our days in a miasma of simmering brine, we were all as bleached and blemishless as cuttlefish.No, girls like Alice were meant to dance upon a gilded stage, skirted in satin, hailed by cupids; and girls like me were made to sit in the gallery, dark and anonymous, and watch them.Or so, anyway, I thought then.The routine I have described - the routine of prising and bearding and cooking and serving, and Saturday-night visits to the music hall - is the one that I remember most from my girlhood ; but it was, of course, only a winter one. From May to August, when British natives must be left to spawn, the dredging smacks pull down their sails or put to sea in search of other quarry; and oyster-parlours all over England are obliged, in consequence, to change their menus or close their doors. The business that my father did between autumn and spring, though excellent enough, was not so good that he could afford to shut his shop throughout the summer and take a holiday; but, like many Whitstable families whose fortunes depended upon the sea and its bounty, there was a noticeable easing of our labours in the warmer months, a kind of shifting into a slower, looser, gayer key. The restaurant grew less busy. We served crab and plaice and turbot and herrings, rather than oysters, and the filleting was kinder work than the endless scrubbing and shelling of the winter months. We kept our windows raised, and the kitchen door thrown open; we were neither boiled alive by the steam of the cooking-pots, nor numbed and frozen by barrels of oyster-ice, as we were in winter, but gently cooled by the breezes, and soothed by the sound of fluttering canvas and ringing pulleys that drifted into our kitchen from Whitstable Bay.The summer in which I turned eighteen was a warm one, and grew warmer as the weeks advanced. For days at a time Father left the shop for Mother to run, and set up a cockle-and-whelk stall on the beach. Alice and I were free to visit the Canterbury Palace every night if we cared to; but just as no one that July wanted to eat fried fish and lobster soup in our stuffy Parlour, so the very thought of passing an hour or two in gloves and bonnet, beneath the flaring gasoliers of Tricky Reevess airless music hall, made us gasp and droop and prickle.There are more similarities between a fishmongers trade and a music-hall managers than you might think. When Father changed his stock to suit his patrons dulled and over-heated palates, so did Tricky. He paid half of his performers off, and brought in a host of new artistes from the music halls of Chatham, Margate and Dover; most cleverly of all, he secured a one-week contract with a real celebrity, from London: Gully Sutherland - one of the best comic singers in the business, and a guaranteed hall-filler even in the hottest of hot Kentish summers.Alice and I visited the Palace on the very first night of Gully Sutherlands week. By this time we had an arrangement with the lady in the ticket-booth: we gave her a nod and a smile as we arrived, then sauntered past her window and chose any seat in the hall beyond that we fancied. Usually, this was somewhere in the gallery. I could never understand the attraction of the stalls ticket; it seemed unnatural to me to seat oneself below the stage, and have to peer up at the artistes from a level somewhere near their ankles, through the faint, shimmering haze of heat that rose above the footlights. The circle gave a better view, but the gallery, though further away, to my mind gave the best of all; and there were two seats in the front row, at the very centre of the gallery, that Alice and I particular favoured. Here you knew yourself to be not just at a show but in a theatre: you caught the shape of the stage and the sweep of the seats; and you marvelled to see your neighbours faces, and to know your own to be like theirs - all queerly lit by the glow of the footlights, and damp at the lip, and with a grin upon it, like that of a demon at some hellish revue.It was certainly as hot as hell in the Canterbury Palace on Gully Sutherlands opening night - so hot that, when Alice and I leaned over the gallery rail to gaze at the audience below, we were met by a blast of tobacco- and sweat-scented air, that made us reel and cough. The theatre, as Tonys uncle had calculated, was almost full; yet it was strangely hushed. People spoke in murmurs, or not at all. When one looked from the gallery to the circle and the stalls, one saw only the flap of hats and programmes. The flapping didnt stop when the orchestra struck up its few bars of overture and the house lights dimmed; but it slowed a little, and people sat up rather straighter in their seats. The hush of fatigue became a silence of expectation.The Palace was an old-fashioned music hall and, like many such places in the 1880s, still employed a chairman. This, of course, was Tricky himself: he sat at a table between the stalls and the orchestra and introduced the acts, and called for order if the crowd became too rowdy, and led us in toasts to the Queen. He had a top-hat and a gavel - I have never seen a chairman without a gavel - and a mug of porter. On his table stood a candle: this was kept lit for as long as there were artistes upon the stage, but it was extinguished for the interval, and at the shows close.Tricky was a plain-faced man with a very handsome voice - a voice like the sound of a clarinet, at once liquid and penetrating, and lovely to listen to.

On the night of Sutherlands first performance he welcomed us to his show and promised us an evenings entertainment we would never forget. Had we lungs? he asked. We must be prepared to use them! Had we feet, and hands? We must make ready to stamp, and clap! Had we sides? They would be split! Tears? We would shed buckets of them! Eyes?Stretch em, now, in wonder! Orchestra, please. Limes-men, if you will. He struck the table with his gavel - clack! - so that the candle-flame dipped. I give you, the marvellous, the musical, the very, very merry, Merry - he struck the table again - Randalls!The curtain quivered, then rose. There was a seaside backdrop to the stage and, upon the boards themselves, real sand; and over this strolled four gay figures in holiday gear: two ladies - one dark, one fair - with parasols; and two tall gents, one with a ukulele on a strap. They sang All the Girls are Lovely by the Seaside, very nicely; then the ukulele player did a solo, and the ladies lifted their skirts for a spot of soft-shoe dancing on the sand. For a first turn, they were good. We cheered them; and Tricky thanked us very graciously for our appreciation.The next act was a comedian, the next a mentalist - a lady in evening dress and gloves, who stood blindfolded upon the stage while her husband moved among the audience with a slate, inviting people to write numbers and names upon it with a piece of chalk, for her to guess.Imagine the number floating through the air in flames of scarlet, said the man impressively, and searing its way into my wifes brain, through her brow. We frowned and squinted at the stage, and the lady staggered a little, and raised her hands to her temples.The Power, she said, it is very strong tonight. Ah, I feel it burning!After this there was an acrobatic troupe - three men in spangles who turned somersaults through hoops, and stood on one anothers shoulders. At the climax of their act they formed a kind of human loop, and rolled about the stage to a tune from the orchestra. We clapped at that; but it was too hot for acrobatics, and there was a general shuffling and whispering throughout this act, as boys were sent with orders to the bar, and returned with bottles and glasses and mugs that had to be handed, noisily, down the rows, past heads and laps and grasping fingers. I glanced at Alice: she had removed her hat and was fanning herself with it, and her cheeks were very red. I pushed my own little bonnet to the back of my head, leaned upon the rail before me with my chin upon my knuckles, and closed my eyes. I heard Tricky rise and call for silence with his gavel.Ladies and gentlemen, he cried, a little treat for you now. A little bit of helegance and top-drawer style. If youve champagne in your glasses - there was an ironical cheering at this - raise them now. If youve beer - why, beers got bubbles, dont it? Raise that too! Above all, raise your voices, as I give to you, direct from the Phoenix Theatre, Dover, our very own Kentish swell, our diminutive Faversham masher ... Miss Kitty - clack! -Butler!There was a burst of handclapping and a few damp whoops. The orchestra struck up with some jolly number, and I heard the creak and whisper of the rising curtain. All unwillingly I opened my eyes - then I opened them wider, and lifted my head. The heat, my weariness, were quite forgotten. Piercing the shadows of the naked stage was a single shaft of rosy limelight, and in the centre of this there was a girl: the most marvellous girl - I knew it at once! - that I had ever seen.Of course, we had had male impersonator turns at the Palace before; but in 1888, in the provincial halls, the masher acts were not the things they are today. When Nelly Power had sung The Last of the Dandies to us six months before she had worn tights and bullion fringe, just like a ballet-girl - only carried a cane and a billycock hat to make her boyish. Kitty Butler did not wear tights or spangles. She was, as Tricky had billed her, a kind of perfect West-End swell. She wore a suit - a handsome gentlemans suit, cut to her size, and lined at the cuffs and the flaps with flashing silk. There was a rose in her lapel, and lavender gloves at her pocket. From beneath her waistcoat shone a stiff-fronted shirt of snowy white, with a stand-up collar two inches high. Around the collar was a white bow-tie; and on her head there was a topper. When she took the topper off - as she did now to salute the audience with a gay Hallo! - one saw that her hair was perfectly cropped.It was the hair, I think, which drew me most. If I had ever seen women with hair as short as hers, it was because they had spent time in hospital or prison; or because they were mad. They could never have looked like Kitty Butler. Her hair fitted her head like a little cap that had been sewn, just for her, by some nimble-fingered milliner. I would say it was brown; brown, however, is too dull a word for it. It was, rather, the kind of brown you might hear sung about - a nut-brown, or a russet. It was almost, perhaps, the colour of chocolate - but then chocolate has no lustre, and this hair shone in the blaze of the limes like taffeta. It curled at her temple, slightly, and over her ears; and when she turned her head a little to put her hat back on, I saw a strip of pale flesh at the nape of her neck where the collar ended and the hairline began that - for all the fire of the hot, hot hall - made me shiver.She looked, I suppose, like a very pretty boy, for her face was a perfect oval, and her eyes were large and dark at the lashes, and her lips were rosy and full. Her figure, too, was boy-like and slender - yet rounded, vaguely but unmistakably, at the bosom, the stomach, and the hips, in a way no real boys ever was; and her shoes, I noticed after a moment, had two-inch heels to them. But she strode

like a boy, and stood like one, with her feet far apart and her hands thrust carelessly into her trouser pockets, and her head at an arrogant angle, at the very front of the stage; and when she sang, her voice was a boys voice - sweet and terribly true.Her effect upon that over-heated hall was wonderful. Like me, my neighbours all sat up, and gazed at her with shining eyes. Her songs were all well-chosen ones - things like Drink Up, Boys!, and Sweethearts and Wives, which the likes of G. H. Macdermott had already made famous, and with which we could all, in consequence, join in - though it was peculiarly thrilling to have them sung to us, not by a gent, but by a girl, in neck-tie and trousers. In between each song she addressed herself, in a swaggering, confidential tone, to the audience, and exchanged little bits of nonsense with Tricky Reeves at his chairmans table. Her speaking voice was like her singing one - strong and healthy, and wonderfully warm upon the ear. Her accent was sometimes music-hall cockney, sometimes theatrical-genteel, sometimes pure broad Kent.Her set lasted no longer than the customary fifteen minutes or so, but she was cheered and shouted back on to the stage at the end of that time twice over. Her final song was a gentle one - a ballad about roses and a lost sweetheart. As she sang she removed her hat and held it to her bosom; then she pulled the flower from her lapel and placed it against her cheek, and seemed to weep a little. The audience, in sympathy, let out one huge collective sigh, and bit their lips to hear her boyish tones grow suddenly so tender.All at once, however, she raised her eyes and gazed at us over her knuckles: we saw that she wasnt weeping at all, but smiling - and then, suddenly, winking, hugely and roguishly. Very swiftly she stepped once again to the front of the stage, and gazed into the stalls for the prettiest girl. When she found her, she raised her hand and the rose went flying over the shimmer of the footlights, over the orchestra-pit, to land in the pretty girls lap.We went wild for her then. We roared and stamped and she, all gallant, raised her hat to us and, waving, took her leave. We called for her, but there were no more encores. The curtain fell, the orchestra played; Tricky struck his gavel upon his table, blew out his candle, and it was the interval.I peered, blinking, into the seats below, trying to catch sight of the girl who had been thrown the flower. I could not think of anything more wonderful, at that moment, than to receive a rose from Kitty Butlers hand.I had gone to the Palace, like everyone else that night, to see Gully Sutherland; but when he made his appearance at last - mopping his brow with a giant spotted handkerchief, complaining about the Canterbury heat and sending the audience into fits of sweaty laughter with his comical songs and his face-pulling - I found that, after all, I hadnt the heart for him. I wished only that Miss Butler would stride upon the stage again, to fix us with her elegant, arrogant gaze - to sing to us about champagne, and shouting Hurrah! at the races. The thought made me restless. At last Alice - who was laughing at Gullys grimaces as loudly as everybody else - put her mouth to my ear: Whats up with you?Im hot, I said; and then: Im going downstairs. And while she sat on for the rest of the turn, I went slowly down to the empty lobby - there to stand with my cheek against the cool glass of the door, and to sing again, to myself, Miss Butlers song, Sweethearts and Wives.Soon there came the roars and stamps that meant the end of Gullys set; and after a moment Alice appeared, still fanning herself with her bonnet, and blowing at the dampened curls which clung to her pink cheeks. She gave me a wink: Lets call on Tony. I followed her to his little room, and sat and idly twisted in the chair behind his desk, while he stood with his arm about her waist. There was a bit of chat about Mr Sutherland and his spotted handkerchief; then, What about that Kitty Butler, eh? said Tony. Aint she a smasher? If she carries on tickling the crowd like she did tonight, I tell you, Unclell be extending her contract till Christmas.At that I stopped my twirling. Shes the best turn I ever saw, I said, here or anywhere! Tricky would be a fool to let her go: you tell him from me. Tony laughed, and said he would be sure to; but as he said it I saw him wink at Alice, then let his gaze dally, rather spoonily, over her lovely face.I looked away, and sighed, and said quite guilelessly: Oh, I do wish that I might see Miss Butler again!And so you shall, said Alice, on Saturday. We had all planned to come to the Palace - Father, Mother, Davy, Fred, everyone - on Saturday night. I plucked at my glove.I know, I said. But Saturday seems so very far away ...Tony laughed again. Well, Nance, and who said you had to wait so long? You can come tomorrow night if you like - and any other night you please, so far as Im concerned. And if there aint a seat for you in the gallery, why, well put you in a box at the side of the stage, and you can gaze at Miss Butler to your hearts content from there!He spoke, Im sure, to impress my sister; but my heart gave a strange kind of twist at his words. I said, Oh, Tony, do you really mean it?Of course.And really in a box?Why not? Between you and me, the only customers we ever get for those seats are the Wood family and the Plushes. You sit in a box, and make sure the audience gets a look at you: it might give them ideas above their station.It might give Nancy ideas above her station, said Alice. We couldnt have that. Then she laughed, as Tony tightened his grip about her waist and leaned to kiss her.It would not have been quite the thing, I suppose, for city girls to go to music

halls unchaperoned; but people werent so very prim about things like that in Whitstable. Mother only gave a frown and a mild tut-tut when I spoke, next day, of returning to the Palace; Alice laughed and declared that I was mad: she wouldnt come with me, she said, to sit all night in the smoke and the heat for the sake of a glimpse of a girl in trousers - a girl whose turn we had seen and songs we had listened to not four-and-twenty hours before.I was shocked by her carelessness, but secretly rather glad at the thought of gazing again at Miss Butler, all alone. I was also more thrilled than I cared to let on by Tonys promise that I might sit in a box. For my trip to the theatre the night before I had worn a rather ordinary dress; now, however - it had been a slow day in the Parlour, and Father let us shut the shop at six - I put on my Sunday frock, the frock I usually wore to go out walking in with Freddy. Davy whistled when I came down all dressed up; and there were one or two boys who tried to catch my eye all through the ride to Canterbury. But I knew myself - for this one night, at least! - apart from them. When I reached the Palace I nodded to the ticket-girl, as usual; but then I left my favourite gallery seat for someone else to sweat in, and made my way to the side of the stage, to a chair of gilt and scarlet plush. And here - rather unnervingly exposed, as it turned out, before the idle, curious or envious gaze of the whole, restless hall - here I sat, while the Merry Randalls shuffled to the same songs as before, the comic told his jokes, the mentalist staggered, the acrobats dived.Then Tricky bade us welcome, once again, our very own Kentish swell ... and I held my breath.This time, when she called Hallo! the crowd replied with a great, genial roar: word must have spread, I think, of her success. My view of her now, of course, was side-on and rather queer; but when she strode, as before, to the front of the stage it seemed to me her step was lighter - as if the admiration of the audience lent her wings. I leaned towards her, my fingers hard upon the velvet of my unfamiliar seat. The boxes at the Palace were very close to the stage: all the time she sang, she was less than twenty feet away from me. I could make out all the lovely details of her costume - the watch-chain, looped across the buttons of her waistcoat, the silver links that fastened her cuffs - that I had missed from my old place up in the gallery.I saw her features, too, more clearly. I saw her ears, which were rather small and unpierced. I saw her lips - saw, now, that they were not naturally rosy, but had of course been carmined for the footlights. I saw that her teeth were creamy-white ; and that her eyes were brown as chocolate, like her hair.Because I knew what to expect from her set - and because I spent so much time watching her, rather than listening to her songs - it seemed over in a moment. She was called back, once again, for two encores, and she finished, as before, with the sentimental ballad and the tossing of the rose. This time I saw who caught it: a girl in the third row, a girl in a straw hat with feathers on it, and a dress of yellow satin that was cut at the shoulders and showing her arms. A lovely girl I had never seen before but felt ready at that moment to despise!I looked back to Kitty Butler. She had her topper raised and was making her final, sweeping salute. Notice me, I thought. Notice me! I spelled the words in my head in scarlet letters, as the husband of the mentalist had advised, and sent them burning into her forehead like a brand. Notice me!She turned. Her eyes flicked once my way, as if to note only that the box, empty last night, was occupied now; and then she ducked beneath the dropping crimson of the curtain and was gone.Tricky blew out his candle.Well, said Alice a little later, as I stepped into our parlour - our real parlour, not the oyster-house downstairs - and how was Kitty Butler tonight?Just the same as last night, I should think, said Father.Not at all, I said, pulling off my gloves. She was even better.Even better, my word! If she carries on like that, just think how good shell be by Saturday!Alice gazed at me, her lip twitching. Dyou think you can wait till then, Nancy? she asked.I can, I said with a show of carelessness, but Im not sure that I shall. I turned to my mother, who sat sewing by the empty grate. You wont mind, will you, I said lightly, if I go back again tomorrow night?Back again? said everyone in amusement. I looked only at Mother. She had raised her head and now regarded me with a little puzzled frown.I dont see why not, she said slowly. But really, Nancy, all that way, just for one turn ... And all on your own, too. Cant you get Fred to take you along?Fred was the last person I wanted at my side, the next time I saw Kitty Butler. I said, Oh he wont want to see an act like that! No, I shall go on my own. I said it rather firmly, as if going to the Palace every night was some chore I had been set to do and I had generously decided to do it with the minimum of bother and complaint.There was a seconds almost awkward silence. Then Father said, You are a funny little thing, Nancy. All the way to Canterbury in the sweltering heat - and not even to wait for a glimpse of Gully Sutherland when you get there! And at that, everybody laughed, and the seconds awkwardness passed, and the conversation turned to other things.There were more cries of disbelief, however, and more smiles, when I came home from my third trip to the Palace and announced, shyly, my intention of returning there a fourth time, and a fifth. Uncle Joe was visiting us: he was pouring beer from a bottle, carefully, into a tilted glass, but looked up when he heard the laughter.Whats all this? he said.Nancys mashed out on that Kitty Butler, at the Palace, said Davy.

Imagine that, Uncle Joe - being mashed on a masher!I said, You shut up.Mother looked sharp. You shut up, please, madam.Uncle Joe took a sip of his beer, then licked the froth from his whiskers. Kitty Butler? he said. Shes the gal what dresses up as a feller, aint she? He pulled a face. Pooh, Nancy, the real thing not good enough for you any more?Father leaned towards him. Well, we are told it is Kitty Butler, he said. If you ask me - and here he winked and rubbed his nose - I think theres a young chap in the orchestra pit what shes got her eye on ...Ah, said Joe, significantly. Lets hope poor Frederick dont catch on to it, then ...At that, everybody looked my way, and I blushed - and so seemed, I suppose, to prove my fathers words. Davy snorted; Mother, who had frowned before, now smiled. I let her - I let them all think just what they liked - and said nothing; and soon, as before, the talk turned to other matters.I could deceive my parents and my brother with my silences; from my sister Alice, however, I could keep nothing.Is there a feller youve got your eye on, at the Palace? she asked me later, when the rest of the house lay hushed and sleeping.Of course not, I said quietly.Its just Miss Butler, then, that you go to see?Yes.There was a silence, broken only by the distant rumble of wheels and faint thud of hooves, from the High Street, and the even fainter sucking whoosh of sea against shingle from the bay. We had put out our candle but left the window wide and unshuttered. I saw in the gleam of starlight that Alices eyes were open. She was gazing at me with an ambiguous expression that seemed half amusement, half distaste.Youre rather keen on her, aint you? she said then.I looked away, and didnt answer her at once. When I spoke at last it was not to her at all, but to the darkness.When I see her, I said, its like - I dont know what its like. Its like I never saw anything at all before. Its like I am filling up, like a wine-glass when its filled with wine. I watch the acts before her and they are like nothing - theyre like dust. Then she walks on the stage and - she is so pretty; and her suit is so nice; and her voice is so sweet ... She makes me want to smile and weep, at once. She makes me sore, here. I placed a hand upon my chest, upon the breast-bone. I never saw a girl like her before. I never knew that there were girls like her ... My voice became a trembling whisper then, and I found that I could say no more.There was another silence. I opened my eyes and looked at Alice - and knew at once that I shouldnt have spoken; that I should have been as dumb and as cunning with her as with the rest of them. There was a look on her face - it was not ambiguous at all now - a look of mingled shock, and nervousness, and embarrassment or shame. I had said too much. I felt as if my admiration for Kitty Butler had lit a beacon inside me, and opening my unguarded mouth had sent a shaft of light into the darkened room, illuminating all.I had said too much - but it was that, or say nothing.Alices eyes held my own for a moment longer, then her lashes fluttered and fell. She didnt speak; she only rolled away from me, and faced the wall.The weather continued very fierce that week. The sun brought trippers to Whitstable and to our Parlour, but the heat jaded their appetites. They called as often, now, for tea and lemonade, as for plaice and mackerel, and for hours at a time I would leave Mother and Alice to work the shop, and run down to the beach to ladle out cockles and crab-meat and whelks, and bread-and-butter, at Fathers stall. It was a novelty, serving teas upon the shingle; but it was also hard to stand in the sun, with the vinegar running from your wrists to your elbows, and your eyes smarting from the fumes of it. Father gave me an extra half-crown for every afternoon I worked there. I bought a hat, and a length of lavender ribbon with which to trim it, but the rest of the money I put aside: I would use it, when I had enough, to buy a season ticket for the Canterbury train.For I made my nightly trips all through that week, and sat - as Tony put it - with the Plushes, and gazed at Kitty Butler as she sang; and I never once grew tired of her. It was only, always, marvellous to step again into my little scarlet box; to gaze at the bank of faces, and the golden arch above the stage, and the velvet drapes and tassels, and the stretch of dusty floorboard with its row of lights - like open cockle shells, I always thought them - before which I would soon see Kitty stride and swagger and wave her hat ... Oh! and when she stepped on stage at last, there would be that rush of gladness so swift and sharp I would catch my breath to feel it, and grow faint.That is how it was on my solitary visits; but on Saturday, of course, as we had planned, my family came - and that was rather different.There were nearly twelve of us in all - more by the time we reached the theatre and took our seats, for we met friends and neighbours on the train and at the ticket-booth, and they attached themselves to our gay party, like barnacles. There wasnt room for us to sit in one long line: we spread ourselves about in groups of threes and fours, so that when one person asked Did we care for a cherry? or Did Mother have her eau-decologne ? or Why had Millicent not brought Jim? the message must be passed, in a shriek or a whisper, all along the gallery, from cousin to cousin, from aunt to sister to uncle to friend, disturbing all the rows along the way.So, anyway, it seemed to me. My seat was between Fred and Alice with Davy and his girl, Rhoda, on Alices left, and Mother and Father behind. It was crowded in the hall and still very hot - though cooler than it had been on the previous, sweltering Monday night; but I, who had had

a box to myself for a week, with the draught from the stage to chill me, seemed to feel the heat more than anyone. Freds hand upon mine, or his lips at my cheek, I found unbearable, like blasts of steam rather than caresses; even the pressure of Alices sleeve against my arm, and the warmth of Fathers face against my neck as he leaned to ask us our opinion of the show, made me flinch, and sweat, and squirm in my seat.It was as if I had been forced to pass the evening amongst strangers. Their pleasure in the details of the show - which I had sat through so often, so impatiently - struck me as incomprehensible, idiotic. When they sang out the chorus along with the maddening Merry Randalls, and shrieked with laughter at the comedians jokes; when they gazed round-eyed at the staggering mentalist and called the human loop back on to the stage for another tumble, I chewed my nails. As Kitty Butlers appearance grew more imminent, I became ever more agitated and more wretched. I could not but long for her to step upon the stage again; but I wished, too, that I might be alone when she did so - alone in my little box with the door shut fast behind me - rather than seated in the midst of a crowd of people to whom she was nothing, and who thought my particular passion for her only queer, or quaint.They had heard me sing Sweethearts and Wives a thousand times; they had heard me tell the details of her costume, of her hair and voice; I had burned all week to have them see her, and pronounce her marvellous. Now that they were gathered here, however, gay and careless and hot and loud, I despised them. I could hardly bear for them to look upon her at all; worse still, I thought I couldnt endure to have them look upon me, as I watched her. I had that sensation again, that there had grown a lantern or a beacon inside me. I was sure that when she stepped upon the stage it would be like putting a match to the wick, and I would flare up, golden and incandescent but somehow painfully and shamefully bright; and my family and my beau would shrink away from me, appalled.Of course, when she strode before the footlights at last, no such thing occurred. I saw Davy look my way and give a wink, and heard Fathers whisper: Heres the very gal, then, at last; but when I glowed and sparkled it was evidently with a dark and secret flame which no one - except Alice, perhaps - looked for or saw.As I had feared, however, I felt horribly far from Miss Butler that night. Her voice was as strong, her face as lovely, as before; but I had been used to hearing the breaths she drew between the phrases, used to catching the glimmer of the limes upon her lip, the shadow of her lashes on her powdered cheek. Now I felt as though I was watching her through a pane of glass, or with my ears stopped up with wax. When she finished her set my family cheered, and Freddy stamped his feet and whistled. Davy called, Stone me, if she aint just as wonderful as Nancy painted her! - then he leaned across Alices lap to wink and add, Though not so wonderful that Id spend a shilling a week on train tickets to come and see her every night! I didnt answer him. Kitty Butler had come back for her encore, and had already drawn the rose from her lapel; but it was no comfort to me at all to know my family liked her - indeed, it made me more wretched still. I gazed again at the figure in the shaft of limelight and thought quite bitterly, You would be marvellous, if I were here or not. You would be marvellous, without my admiration. I might as well be at home, putting crab-meat in a paper cone, for all you know of me!But even as I thought it, something rather curious happened. She had reached the end of her song - there was the business with the flower and the pretty girl; and when this was done she wheeled into the wing. And as she did it I saw her head go up - and she looked - looked, I swear it - towards the empty chair in which I usually sat, then lowered her head and moved on. If I had only been in my box tonight, I would have had her eyes upon me! If I had only been in my box, instead of here -!I glanced at Davy and Father: they were both on their feet calling for more; but letting their calls die, and beginning to stretch. Beside me Freddy was still smiling at the stage. His hair was plastered to his forehead, his lip was dark where he was letting whiskers grow; his cheek was red and had a pimple on it. Aint she a peach? he said to me. Then he rubbed his eyes, and shouted to Davy for a beer.

Behind me I heard Mother ask, How did the lady in the evening dress read all those numbers with a blindfold on?The cheers were fading, Trickys candle was out; the gasoliers flared, making us blink. Kitty Butler had looked for me - had raised her head and looked for me; and I was lost and sitting with strangers.I spent the next day, Sunday, at the cockle-stall; and when Freddy called that night to ask me out walking, I said I was too tired. That day was cooler, and by Monday the weather seemed really to have broken. Father came back to the Parlour full-time, and I spent the day in the kitchen, gutting and filleting. We worked till almost seven: I had just enough time between the closing of the shop and the leaving of the Canterbury train to change my dress, to pull on a pair of elastic-sided boots and to sit down with Father and Mother, Alice, Davy and Rhoda for a hasty supper. They thought it more than strange, I knew, that I should be returning to the Palace yet again; Rhoda, in particular, seemed greatly tickled by the story of my mash. Dont you mind her going, Mrs Astley? she asked. My mother would never let me go so far alone; and I am two years older. But then, Nancy is such a steady sort of girl, I suppose. I had been a steady girl; it was over Alice - saucy

Alice - that my parents usually worried. But at Rhodas words I saw Mother look me over and grow thoughtful. I had on my Sunday dress, and my new hat trimmed with lavender; and I had a lavender bow at the end of my plait of hair, and a bow of the same ribbon sewn on each of my white linen gloves. My boots were black with a wonderful shine. I had put a spot of Alices perfume - eau de rose - behind each ear; and I had darkened my lashes with castor oil from the kitchen.Mother said, Nancy, do you really think -? But as she spoke the clock on the mantel gave a ting! It was a quarter-past seven, I should miss my train.I said, Good-bye! Good-bye! - and fled, before she could delay me.I missed my train anyway, and had to wait at the station till the later one came. When I reached the Palace the show had begun: I took my seat to find the acrobats already on the stage forming their loop, their spangles gleaming, their white suits dusty at the knees. There was clapping; Tricky rose to say - what he said every night, so that half the audience smiled and said it with him - that You couldnt get many of those to the pound! Then - as if it were part of the overture to her routine and she could not work without it - I gripped my seat and held my breath, while he raised his gavel to beat out Kitty Butlers name.She sang that night like - I cannot say like an angel, for her songs were all of champagne suppers and strolling in the Burlington Arcade; perhaps, then, like a fallen angel - or yet again like a falling one: she sang like a falling angel might sing with the bounds of heaven fresh burst behind him, and hell still distant and unguessed. And as she did so, I sang with her - not loudly and carelessly like the rest of the crowd, but softly, almost secretly, as if she might hear me the better if I whispered rather than bawled.And perhaps, after all, she did. I had thought that, when she walked on to the stage, she had glanced my way - as much as to say, the box is filled again. Now, as she wheeled before the footlights, I thought I saw her look at me again. The idea was a fantastic one - and yet every time her gaze swept the crowded hall it seemed to brush my own, and dally with it a little longer than it should. I ceased my whispered singing and merely stared, and swallowed. I saw her leave the stage - again, her gaze met mine - and then return for her encore. She sang her ballad and plucked the flower from her lapel, and held it to her cheek, as we all expected. But when her song was finished she did not peer into the stalls for the handsomest girl, as she usually did. Instead, she took a step to her left, towards the box in which I sat. And then she took another. In a moment she had reached the corner of the stage, and stood facing me; she was so close I could see the glint of her collar-stud, the beat of the pulse in her throat, the pink at the corner of her eye. She stood there for what seemed to be a small eternity ; then her arm came up, the flower flashed for a second in the beam of the lime - and my own hand, trembling, rose to catch it. The crowd gave a broad, indulgent cheer of pleasure, and a laugh. She held my flustered gaze with her own more certain one, and made me a little bow. Then she stepped backwards suddenly, waved to the hall, and left us.I sat for a moment as if stunned, my eyes upon the flower in my hand, which had been so near, so recently, to Kitty Butlers cheek. I wanted to raise it to my own face - and was about to, I think, when the clatter of the hall pierced my brain at last, and made me look about me and see the inquisitive, indulgent looks that were turned my way, and the nods and the chuckles and the winks that met my up-turned gaze. I reddened, and shrank back into the shadows of the box. With my back turned to the bank of prying eyes I slipped the rose into the belt of my dress, and pulled on my gloves. My heart, which had begun to pound when Miss Butler had stepped towards me across the stage, was still beating painfully hard; but as I left my box and made my way towards the crowded foyer and the street beyond, it began to feel light, and glad, and I began to want to smile. I had to place a hand before my lips so as not to appear an idiot, smiling to myself as if at nothing.Just as I was about to step into the street, I heard my name called. I turned, and saw Tony, crossing the lobby with his arm raised to catch my eye. It was a relief to have a friend, at last, to smile at. I took the hand away, and grinned like a monkey.Hey, hey, he said breathlessly when he reached my side, someones merry, and I know why! How come girls never look so gay as that, when I give them roses? I blushed again, and returned my fingers to my lips, but said nothing. Tony smirked.Ive got a message for you, he said then. Someone to see you. I raised my eyebrows; I thought perhaps Alice or Freddy were here, come to meet me. Tonys smirk broadened. Miss Butler, he said, would like a word.My own grin faded at once. A word? I said. Miss Butler? With me?Thats right. She asked Ike, the fly-man, who was the girl that sat in the box every night, on her own, and Ike said you was a pal of mine, and to ask me. So she did. And I told her. And now she wants to see you.What for? Oh, Tony, what on earth for? What did you tell her? I caught hold of his arm and gripped it hard.Nothing, except the truth - I gave his arm a twist. The truth was terrible. I didnt want her to know about the shivering and the whispering, the flame and the streaming light. Tony prised my fingers from his sleeve, and held my hand. Just that you like her, he said simply. Now will you come along, or what?I did not know what to say. So I said nothing, but let him lead me away from the great glass doors with the blue, cool, Canterbury night behind them, past

the archway that led to the stalls, and the staircase to the gallery, towards an alcove in the far corner of the foyer, with a curtain across it, and a rope before it, and a sign swinging from the rope, marked Private.Chapter 2I had been back stage at the Palace with Tony once or twice before, but only in the daytime, when the hall was dim and quite deserted. Now the corridors along which I walked with him were full of light and noise. We passed one doorway that led, I knew, to the stage itself: I caught a glimpse of ladders and ropes and trailing gas-pipes; of boys in caps and aprons, wheeling baskets, manuvring lights. I had the sensation then - and I felt it again in the years that followed, every time I made a similar trip back stage - that I had stepped into the workings of a giant clock, stepped through the elegant casing to the dusty, greasy, restless machinery that lay, all hidden from the common eye, behind it.Tony led me down a passageway that stopped at a metal staircase, and here he paused to let three men go by. They wore hats and carried overcoats and bags; they were sallow-faced and poor-looking, with a patina of flashness - I thought they might be salesmen carrying sample-cases. Only when they had moved on, and I heard them sharing a joke with the stage door-keeper, did I realise that they were the trio of tumblers taking their leave for the night, and that their bags contained their spangles. I had a sudden fear that Kitty Butler might after all be just like them: plain, unremarkable, almost unrecognisable as the handsome girl I had seen swaggering in the glow of the footlights. I very nearly called to Tony to take me back; but he had descended the staircase, and when I caught up with him in the passageway below he was at a door, and had already turned its handle.The door was one of a row of others, indistinguishable from its neighbours but for a brass figure 7, very old and scratched, that was screwed at eye level upon its centre panel, and a hand-written card that had been tacked below. Miss Kitty Butler, it said.I found her seated at a little table before a looking-glass; she had half-turned - to reply, I suppose, to Tonys knock - but at my approach she rose, and reached to shake my hand. She was a little shorter than me, even in her heels, and younger than I had imagined - perhaps my sisters age, of one- or two-and-twenty.Aha, she said, when Tony had left us - there was a hint, still, of her footlight manner in her voice - my mystery admirer! I was sure it must be Gully you came to see; then someone said you never stay beyond the interval. Is it really me you stay for? I never had a fan before! As she spoke she leaned quite comfortably against the table - it was cluttered, I now saw, with jars of cream and sticks of grease-paint, with playing cards and half-smoked cigarettes and filthy tea-cups - and crossed her legs at the ankle, and folded her arms. Her face was still thickly powdered, and very red at the lip; her lashes and eyelids were black with paint. She was dressed in the trousers and the shoes that she had worn for her act, but she had removed the jacket, the waistcoat, and, of course, the hat. Her starched shirt was held tight against the swell of her bosom by a pair of braces, but gaped at the throat where she had unclipped her bow-tie. Beyond the shirt I saw an edge of creamy lace.I looked away. I do like your act, I said.I should think you do, you come to it so often!I smiled. Well, Tony lets me in, you see, for nothing ... That made her laugh: her tongue looked very pink, her teeth extraordinarily white, against her painted lips. I felt myself blush. What I mean is, I said, Tony lets me have the box. But I would pay if I had to, and sit in the gallery. For I do so like your act, Miss Butler, so very, very much.Now she did not laugh, but she tilted her head a little. Do you? she answered gently.Oh, yes.Tell me what it is you like then, so much.I hesitated. I like your costume, I said at last. I like your songs, and the way you sing them. I like the way you talk to Tricky. I like your ... hair. Here I stumbled; and now she seemed to blush. There was a seconds almost awkward silence - then, suddenly, as if from somewhere very near at hand, there came the sound of music - the blast of a horn and the pulse of a drum - and a cheer, like the roaring of the wind in some vast sea-shell. I gave a jump, and looked about me; and she laughed. The second half, she said. After a moment the cheering stopped; the music, however, went on pulsing and thumping like a great heart-beat.She left off leaning against the table, and asked, Did I mind if she smoked? I shook my head, and shook it again when she took up a packet of cigarettes from amongst the dirty cups and playing cards, and held it to me. Upon the wall there was a hissing gas-jet in a wire cage, and she put her face to it, to light the cigarette. With the fag at the side of her lip, her eyes screwed up against the flame, she looked like a boy again; when she took the cigarette away, however, the cork was smudged with crimson. Seeing that, she tutted: Look at me, with all my paint still on! Will you sit with me while I clean my face? Its not very polite, I know, but I must get ready rather quick; my room is needed later by another girl ...I did as she asked, and sat and watched her smear her cheeks with cream, then take a cloth to them. She worked quickly and carefully, but distractedly; and as she rubbed at her face she held my gaze in the glass. She looked at my new hat and said, What a pretty bonnet! Then she asked how I knew Tony - was he my beau? I was shocked at that and said, Oh, no! He is courting my sister; and she laughed. Where did I live? she asked me then. What did I work at?I work in an oyster-house, I said.An oyster-house! The

idea seemed to tickle her. Still rubbing at her cheeks, she began to hum, and then to sing very low beneath her breath.As I was going down Bishopgate Street,An oyster-girl I happened to meet -A swipe at the crimson of her lip, the black of her lashes.Into her basket I happened to peep,To see if shed got any oysters ...She sang on; then opened one eye very wide, and leaned close to the glass to remove a stubborn crumb of spit-black - her mouth stretching wide, out of a kind of sympathy with her eyelids, and her breath misting the mirror. For a second she seemed quite to have forgotten me. I studied the skin of her face and her throat. It had emerged from its mask of powder and grease the colour of cream - the colour of the lace on her chemise; but it was darkened at the nose and cheeks - and even, I saw, at the edge of her lip - by freckles, brown as her hair. I had not suspected the existence of the freckles. I found them wonderfully and inexplicably moving.She wiped her breath from the glass, then, and gave me a wink, and asked me more about myself; and because it was somehow easier to talk to her reflection than to her face, I began at last to chat with her quite freely. At first she answered as I thought an actress should - comfortably, rather teasingly, laughing when I blushed or said a foolish thing. Gradually, however - as if she was stripping the paint from her voice, as well as from her face - her tone grew milder, less pert and pressing. At last - she gave a yawn, and rubbed her knuckles in her eyes - at last her voice was just a girls: melodious and strong and clear, but just a Kentish girls voice, like my own.