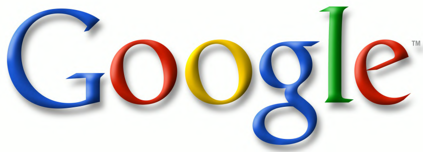

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Mrs Zoe Anderson Norris,
October 20, 1913

The Color of His Soul

By
ZOÉ
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This little book is very lovingly dedicated to my Madonna con Bambino

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PREFACE

Between Altruria and Bohemia there lies a land where allegiance is double and therefore doubtful. The moral outlaws and social banditti who occupy this land claim now censorship over society as a whole, and now individual exemption from the plainest and most righteous of human obligations. This as it happens to fall in with the inclinations of their lofty egotism or low desires.

Frank Bohemians and true Altrurians will consequently recognize in the poseur of this story one who is not single of his kind, not unique nor extraordinary; but who belongs to an ilk set apart and peculiar, to be eyed askance, not altogether admired, nor wholly trusted, by the good folk of either camp into which he more often than not forcibly intrudes.

Thanks are due "The New York Sun" for the privilege of republishing here material which has already appeared in its columns.

THE AUTHOR

The Color of His Soul

CHAPTER I.

I went up in the elevator and pounded at the door. I might have rung and rung and she would never have heard me. Often I wondered what would happen to Mrs. Mallon in case of fire. What if the building were in flames and she locked in her flat unhearing!

After a long time she came to the door.

"I heard you, you see," she said, proud of the fact, " but it was because I happened to be in the dining-room. If I had been in the front part of the flat you might have rung till doomsday. I am just having my supper. Will you have some with me?"

" I will sit here opposite you while you eat," I told her, "but I have had my dinner, thank you. Where is Cecil?"

" He went over to Jane's." Jane is

his aunt. "He said he would be back to supper, but perhaps he stayed there instead. I waited and waited. Everything is cold now. Cecil is not very considerate. He often lets me wait, then never comes home."

"He is young," I apologized.

"Don't tell him that. He would rather be thought inconsiderate than young. Shall we go into the other room?" By and by, folding her napkin and putting it into a ring, she said: "I dislike so the odor of the dining-room and kitchen. I get out of it always as soon as ever I can."

We took seats in the little parlor looking out from high windows upon the street.

Setting her glasses astride her nose she regarded me critically.

"That's your new spring suit, isn't it?" she asked.

"Umph hum," I answered.

"You always look so nice," she continued. "You have on some pretty new thing every time you come over here. Now look at me! I am in the kitchen. I have to be. Then how can I be

prettily dressed? I can't. I used to be like you five years ago when I was doing work for all the papers and making money. Then Mr. Mallon put me in the kitchen. It finished my work."

I was about to say, How is that? You have only the breakfast to get for no one but yourself and Cecil, for Mr. Mallon, who is a travelling man, is seldom at home. After the breakfast you have the day to work in until dinner time. The live long day.

She read my thought.

"You can't get your mind on the writing," she explained, "when you have every minute to be looking at the clock and thinking, now, in half an hour, it will be time to put on the potatoes and set the table."

"Listen," I interrupted, "I think it is the bell."

"How fortunate you are to be able to hear," she sighed, getting up and going to the door.

"Oh, I don't know," said I. "Deaf people have the advantage of missing most things that are said about them."

"Is that you, Cecil?" I heard her call

at the door.

His voice in a loud tone, a trifle surly, answered:

"Yes, mother, it's me."

He advanced and stood in the broad doorway between the dining-room and the parlor, where I sat, smiling down upon me from his splendid height of six feet two.

"I didn't know you were here," said he.

"Instinct should have told you the moment you put your foot in the hall downstairs," said I. "It is a pity you didn't. You might have used better grammar. Fancy a lecturer saying, 'Yes, mother, it's me!' Also perhaps you might have spoken more softly to that mother of yours out of deference to me."

"How could I have spoken softly to her? Would she have heard? It is necessary to yell."

"You know what I mean. You can yell in a gentle tone. Can't you?"

"Drop it," he commanded, "and let me look at you. My goodness! What glad rags you've got on! You are out of sight, girlie. Stand up and turn

around. I want to see how it sets in the back."

"I'm no wax figure in a show window. Look at me awhile in this pose. Then when I do stand up, you'll have a pleasant surprise, cat eye."

"If you don't quit calling me 'cat eye' I know what I'll call you."

"What?"

"I'll spend a day or two thinking it up. Mother, are you getting my supper ready?"

Her voice came clearly from kitchenward.

"It is ready now."

"What have you got for me to drink?"

"Chocolate."

"It won't do. Make me some coffee. I'll need it for my lecture, to clear my brain. Say, (to me) how did you happen to come over to-night?"

"To see you, of course."

"I wish I could believe it," tenderly. "But you are looking beautiful." He bent nearer to me.

I stared into his eyes. The pupils were rounded at the top and pointed downward most peculiarly. They were

the pupils of a cat's eye precisely, except for the fact that they were rounded at the top.

I shook my head.

"I never saw anything like them," I declared.

"I am proud," he averred, "that there is any sort of peculiarity about me that will make you stare at me like that. Not only proud, but glad."

"The coffee is ready," his mother announced. "Come on before it has time to get cold."

He rose to that full height of his, and backed away from me.

"Now," he gloated, "I shall see you get up."

I got up with a laugh. He bowed low, half mockingly, half admiringly.

"You'll do," he concluded, and led me to a place near him at the table.

"This chocolate I got ready for Cecil," remarked his mother, the cup in hand, "is going to waste."

"It's a pity to see anything going to waste these hard times," said I, "give it to me. I'll drink it."

Cecil drank his coffee and ate some

chops she had set before him.

"You are coming with me to-night," he said with such positiveness that I felt myself going whether I wanted to or not.

"I'm awfully tired," I commenced, deprecatingly.

"That's all you care for the cause of humanity," he sneered. "You can't even go to a lecture for the purpose of learning a few things about the poor."

"I love the cause of humanity," I declared. "My heart is with the poor. I have studied the slums in Italy, in Paris, in London."

"But not in New York, your own town in your own country?"

"Have you?" I asked.

He hesitated.

"You know you haven't," I followed up. "You lecture about it, but what do you really know. Things you learn from reading socialistic papers, and that's all. For me, if I wrote about a thing I would study it."

"I do study it."

"From statistics," I said. He did not deny it. "It is no way to learn. You must see to know."

"We will study it together."

"When?"

"Oh, sometime this summer."

"I admire your enthusiasm. And this is the beginning of May!"

"When would you have me commence? To-morrow?"

"You couldn't find a day that would be as near this one except yesterday, that's gone. Yes. To-morrow."

"You are wonderfully in earnest all of a sudden. And yet you hesitate to go with me to my lecture to-night."

"I've heard about that lecture. Some high-faluting pyrotechnics you have accumulated through fire brand literature. I know what it is quite the same as if I had heard it."

He faced me with blazing eyes.

"You go with me to-night," he decided, "or you'll know the reason why. Mother! shall I put on my glad rags? Dolly's got on hers."

"The last time you gave that lecture," she reminded him, "they mocked at your 'glad rags.' They got up and said they hoped their poor, oppressed, down-trodden children would grow up to look

as prosperous as you in your white neck-
tie and your dapper swallow tail."

"Then I wouldn't be downed," said I, "I'd wear them in spite of them."

"I will," he decided. "I wouldn't want to walk along side of you in my old clothes anyway. Would I?"

"If I am going with you, go on and get ready. I'm tired now. Dear knows what I'll be after that lecture of yours. Hurry!"

He vanished into his own room. His mother, her hat and gloves on, came and sat by me while he dressed.

"Cecil is young to be giving these lectures," she said, smoothing out the wrinkles of the gloves and buttoning them deliberately. "I am proud of him, but what I am afraid of is that he will overwork himself, and go into a decline. It is better, according to my notion, to be unknown and alive than famous and dead. He has been making himself quite celebrated lately. Have you seen the notices of him in the papers?"

"Some. I am waiting to hear him to dètermine whether his celebrity is due to the strength of his lecture, the cause of

humanity he has taken up, or to his extreme youth."

"It is a popular cause, socialism, and he is young, but I have heard him talk. There is much that is fine in it, that is rather wonderful, it seems to me, and I think I am just in my judgment, even though I am his mother. . . . Cecil! are you ready? It is eight o'clock. High time to start. Come on!"

He opened the door and appeared, radiant in his evening dress.

I stood off admiring him, his height, his clean length of limb, his young head erect in the pride of conscious ability, his cat eyes fixed upon me in a smiling gleam of satisfaction with himself.

"Well," said he.

"I'm looking at those eyes of yours," said I, "and wondering and wondering."

His mother had reached the elevator.

"Come on, you two," she cried. "It's late. Hurry!"

CHAPTER II.

E walked a block down Lexington Avenue, and then turned east.

Instinctively I gathered up the skirt of my gown. It was of a delicate grey lacking little of being white.

"Do we go on the Third Avenue L?" I questioned.

"Of course. How else can we get to the slums? You are a fine would-be philanthropist. Afraid of trailing out of the clean road of respectability and soiling your skirts. Raising them from the mud of the common people! Bah!"

"I am no would-be philanthropist," I remonstrated. "I'm the real thing. But this gown is so light, Cecil. Couldn't we go on the Sixth Avenue L?"

"Yes, and transfer sixteen times, and get there too late. We are late enough as it is. Hurry! That's our train."

Running up the steps he thrust a quarter into the aperture for our tickets, snatched them, rushed us through to the train which was upon the eve of starting,

and into the car. There we stood for a while. Presently, however, a seat was offered his mother and another to me. Soon some one moved away and gave the seat next to me to Cecil.

"They are courteous enough," said I, thanking him, "aren't they?"

"It's perhaps due partly to your dainty togs. Still, because a man is a working man is no reason why he shouldn't have something of the soul of a gentleman. You can't always judge by the clothes."

"You can pretty well judge of the class by the clothes. Take this train, for instance, and compare it with the Sixth Avenue. The difference in class is obvious to the naked eye. It's a different world, the east and the west. See the patches on that man's coat. Look at the woman with her baby wrapped up in a shawl. Look at those half drunken, hiccoughing boys coming home from the ball game, one with his arm around that little girl who is much too pretty to be so far from her mother at this time of night."

"I see it all. It is not class dis-

tinction. It is money distinction."

"Money makes class distinction."

"So it does in this country. And that's what I'm fighting. Money should be equally divided. There should be no very rich and very poor. A man is entitled to a division of the spoils, to a just proceed of his labor."

"In other words, the millionaires should be forced to divvy up?"

"Just so."

I laughed.

"That will come along with the millenium," I predicted.

He looked down on me with a frown.

"I'm not so sure. It is the end toward which I am working. It may come sooner."

"You!" and I laughed some more. I held my handkerchief to my mouth, convulsed with laughter.

His frown deepened.

"Sometimes," he muttered impressively, "I don't know whether I hate you or love you."

"Think it over," I suggested.

"What?"

"And meantime, observe the slanting brow of that man who nods in the corner over there, his loose collar, his necktie all awry. At least, poor though he may be, it takes no extra expenditure to keep the necktie tied, does it?"

"The slanting brow," he mused. "It is a good phrase."

"You think more of the phrasing than of the people," said I.

"I will let you say that, since it is you. The slanting brow. It is poverty that slants back the brow, that robs of delicacy of feeling, of sensitiveness, of pride that goes to adjust the necktie and pull down the vest. It is the ghastly struggle for daily bread, the fear of want, the horror of starvation, the existence upon pittances, paltry pay that leaves merely the power to live, with absolutely no margin."

"Workingmen and women of all classes are better paid in this than in the old country," said I, with conviction.

"I have studied the subject. I know. In Italy a man works for next to nothing or begs, and the little girls! Those who string coral, string it for five cents a day.

They labor all day long. The lace makers put out their eyes over bobbins for five cents, often, ten, not more, and the artists! They get a dollar. In Venice I went through the glass works and saw. There were scores of artists, finishing mosaics for a church in California. They were doing marvels in the way of execution and design, and what was their wage? Five francs. That is to say, one dollar, the pay of our laborers in the fields. . . . In Italy, it seems, they still live by the rules of St. Francis."

"And what are those rules?"

"You must work without money and be poor," I quoted. "You must work without pleasure and be chaste. You must work according to orders and be obedient."

"Say them over again and say them slow," he commanded.

I did so.

"Three more pernicious rules for the grinding of helpless victims into the bottomless pit of poverty I have never listened to," he vowed. "That old priest should have been tarred and

feathered and tied to a post and burnt. Was that what they did to him?"

"I give it up."

"Well, it's a shame if they didn't. What station is this?" peering out. "It's ours, by Jove! Come, mother. We get off here. Step lively."

"It's a good watchword for New York. Step lively."

"If you don't you're liable to get lost in the rush. Get a move on you. Come!"

We ran across the net work of car lines down two blocks, across two others, and finally brought up before a house, the second story windows of which, curtainless, showed bare walls illumined by the lights of one chandelier.

"I think this is the place," said Cecil, in a tone which spoke of slight disappointment; for the house was neither a large one nor sumptuous.

A group of small boys surrounded us.

"Yes, this is the place," they affirmed. "You go right in that doorway up there," pointing. "There's a boy anarchist going to lecture."

"Your fame precedes you," said I,

and screamed; for in alarming vicinity to my skirts a fire cracker had gone off with volcanic report.

Cecil turned angrily upon them, but the offenders had disappeared. Here and there above an iron railing frowseled heads bobbed up laughingly as we ascended the steps and entered the hall.

We had hurried needlessly. The hall was almost empty. Two fat women, a child in a bright red dress, and a short thin man occupied it.

A narrow table had been placed between the windows. Upon it was a water bottle and glass. Opposite it stood chairs in rows, cane bottomed chairs whose cane was slightly disfigured in spots and curled.

Cecil placed two near the table for his mother and me. We sat down directly across from the child in the bright red dress.

"I remember when I was that small," his mother began in the low tone common to deaf people, "I had the same sort of dress, as brilliant a red as dye could make it. There was an old turkey gobbler in the farm yard and

the fun I used to have with him in that dress! I would get in front of him and fan up and down, spreading out my skirts and screaming. It was like waving a red rag at a bull. The way that old thing would prance up and down, strutting and scraping his wings on the ground, tickled me nearly to death. Hours and hours I used to spend teasing him to strut."

The room began gradually to fill.

"I'm surprised to see the style down here in the slums," she kept on, whispering. "Look at the girl with the pretty pink waist and the stylish hat with the buckle on it. That slim woman over there looks nice too. They are dressed as if they were coming to church or prayer-meeting. I suppose it is a sort of religion with them, this study of socialism."

"I see only one man who looks like a working man here," I whispered back. "The one in the dark blue shirt, clothes the color of the soil, and with wrinkles all over his face. The one with the russet cheeks, I mean."

"Sometimes it's the very people who

are not working people who stir up the workingmen to all their devilment," she reasoned. "It's what I tell Cecil, but he won't hear to it, of course, not being what you might call a workingman himself and doing as far as I can see, a good deal of the stirring."

At that moment Cecil approached.

"I am going to begin now in a minute or two," he informed me.

"It is kind of you to prepare me."

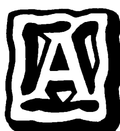
"There is a good deal of political economy and truck in the first part of this lecture I'm afraid you won't understand. . ."

"Make it plain as possible," I implored. "Talk as if you were talking to a child. I don't want to miss anything."

"Don't be silly. If you will try and listen through that part—you are a woman, it doesn't make much difference whether you understand it or not—you'll be waked up all right enough by the peroration. It's fierce."

"Go on," said I, "and be sure you wake me when you come to it."

CHAPTER III.



S he had said, the beginning of his lecture was principally dry statistics. He receded to the Middle Ages. He discussed feudalism, the commencement of slavery in which the slaves went with the land.

He passed to chattel slavery, dwelling briefly upon the slavery of the Southern States. Here he made several erroneous statements which I felt strongly inclined to stand up and refute. Remembering his youth, however, I forced myself to desist.

Now and then two little yellow-haired girls, at the peril of falling from the high stoop outside, leaned forward and looked in at the window, their curls dangling, their eyes shining.

They distracted the attention of the child inside of the bright red dress.

It was rather clever, the manner in which he classed the slavery of the different ages, finishing with the wage slaves of to-day. That was his favorite phrase, "The wage slaves." Those

fellowmen of his who labored day in and day out for barely sufficient to sustain life, the men who erected the houses in which we dwelt, who mined the coal that kept us warm, who built the massive roads over which we traveled in luxury throughout the length and breadth of this great land.

More than once loud reports of fire-crackers outside, followed by roars of childish laughter, roused those within; but the speaker maintained his calm and quiet mien, standing almost motionless, his gestures few and fairly fine, his head held proudly erect, his eyes ablaze with the fire of his own eloquence.

"It was futile," he declared, "to talk of a free Republic while Money ruled the land. While Money bought seats in Senate and Legislature. While Money turned the tide of law-making in favor of the moneyed few. While the head of affairs, the President of these United States was a mere tool in the hands of trusts and combines—a cat's paw for the rich. While at his command regi-ments were ordered out to protect the

interests of the oppressors of the poor and to shoot down the ragged outcasts who dared band together in the attempt to win the miserable right to live.

"Surrounded by the splendor of the White House, to him squalor and poverty were words utterly incomprehensible. He pursued the even tenor of his way, as serene, smiling and careless of the starving thousands rendered homeless by strikes as our millionaires who sail the Mediterranean and spend the money earned by their slaves abroad.

"And of what avail were those strikes? For one of those who dared to strike there were hundreds ready and willing, so strong is the incentive to preserve life, to work for the pittance they refused and take their places. A call for a thousand workingmen would bring them twenty thousand, clamoring for the vacancies, hungry for bread."

Heads were raised at this juncture about the room. The lone workingman looked stolidly at him out of gloomy eyes, accentuated by the glowing russet of flaming cheeks.

Then came the promised peroration. The speaker braced himself for it. A subtle change came over the spirit of his gesticulation. His strange eyes flashed.

"We glow with pride," he cried, "that with the blood of our glorious North we have wiped out the shameful slavery of the South; but what of the wage slaves of the North, of the South, of the East, of the West? The wage slaves at our elbow in the slums of New York, huddled into tenements, bowed in sweatshops, toiling by the dim light of windows opening onto air shafts, ground to the earth by the iron hand of the Almighty dollar. What of them?

"The shirt on your back," he continued, his voice raised slightly, "was stitched by the attenuated fingers of half starved women, bloodlessly white from the want of food that nourishes,—your vest, your coat, your overcoat. The 'L' that brought you here is run by men exhausted by the work of twelve hours out of the twenty-four. The meat you eat was cut up by half grown boys, standing ankle deep in the blood of slain animals, for a wage

barely sufficient to keep breath in their bodies and blood in their veins.

"What of these wage slaves? What of these serfs? Is it not time and past time for some John Brown to strike their note of freedom? A note that will sound and resound from state to state, from shore to shore, from ocean to ocean, a bugle call that shall strike terror to the heart of the oppressor of the poor, that shall unleash the bonds, unclash their crushing chains, and, snatching them up from the slough of despond, free them forever and forever. I say the time has come! And this is the hour!"

He sat down.

There was applause. There was the taking up of a small collection, as in church. There was some slight discussion at wild variance with the theme and unimportant; the meeting adjourned and Cecil came toward us.

"Well," he said, and paused expectantly.

"You were right about that peroration," I assented. "It *was* fierce."

He turned on his heel, disgusted. I followed hastily, to make peace; but he

strode on ahead down the steps and along the street in moody silence. Frightened I slipped on the other side of his mother and walked there until we ascended the elevator steps and took our seats in the car.

His mother and I sat together opposite him. She, tired, half nodded. By and by, relenting, he looked at me and smiled.

"What did you think of my gestures?" he enquired.

"A man so wrapped up in great questions concerning the public good," I began hesitatingly, fearful of once more offending, "the unclanking of chains and the freeing of the wage slaves, shouldn't think of his gestures, it seems to me."

He frowned.

"He should think of everything," he declared, "as means to the one great end."

It appeared plausible.

"But," I went on, changing the subject. "What I'm afraid of is the effect it will have on that lone workingman. Suppose he gets excited, goes out and burns down a house. Then your tirade against the President seemed to me to be in atrocious taste and uncalled for.

He has made a magnificent President. We should be proud of his record in the late war and those of us who are sane are."

He interrupted me with an impatient shrug. "I suppose then," he answered, "that I am to be adjudged insane."

"Something very nearly kin to it," I admitted. "You call yourself Socialist, but your principles, according to my notion, border very nearly upon Anarchism. Why should you incense illiterate, irresponsible creatures against our President? Two have been shot within the past twenty years. Isn't that enough? Shame on you! You should see the splendid picture in the Louvre of McKinley signing the Peace treaty. During my exile over there, often and often I stood before it, admiring him, proud as could be. Another thing! I was not particularly pleased with your tirades against the slavery of the South. It is a subject which fails to rejoice me. I am a Southern woman. Therefore, I am one of the victims of the War. My father

owned slaves. The war freed them. Now, in consequence, I am a slave to the New York editors."

"Why," he exclaimed, leaning forward and caressing my fingers, "you are one of my wage slaves. My wage slave!" he repeated fondly. "My little wage slave!"

"You might call it that. I never thought of it. It is what I am. Slavery was not abolished by the war. It was merely switched about. The negroes are free, but the whites are bound fast by the chains of poverty, and will be till the half century rolls around, necessary for the wiping out of the hideous ravages caused by any war. Look at me."

"I'm looking at you," he murmured.

"Instead of dwelling in marble halls, with vassals and slaves around me," I complained, "I pound the typewriter."

Leaning forward a second time he pressed a fold of my gown between his forefinger and thumb.

"The texture is fine," he mused. "There is lace on her bodice. There are flowers on her hat. The chains! The scourge! The knout! Where are they?"

"They are concealed in the little deadly printed slips with which the editors reject my manuscripts," I retorted. "In the failures! In the ....

"Never have I seen a wage slave dressed so fine," he interrupted. "Wit eyes so clear. With complexion so radiant."

"We keep a stiff upper lip," I retortec "we Southern women. But everywhere you will find us at work. More of us, I think sometimes, than the men. We are keeping boarding houses in larg cities. We are dress making. We are trimming hats. Still, with the inborn taste of the French—many of us are descended from the French—we love dress and when we can we wear it. Is this 125th?"

"It is," rousing. "Come, mother. We are here."

At the door of her apartment she kissed me good-bye and went on in.

"Don't keep her too long talking on the stoop, Cecil," she admonished. "She is tired, remember."

We walked slowly home, which was about two blocks away, he tall as a wil-

low, I some twelve inches lower.

"At any rate your lecture interested me," I told him. "So much so that I am going down to the slums to-morrow if I have to go alone. I want to find those half grown boys cutting up the meat we eat while they stand ankle deep in the blood of animals."

"You are so foolish, Dolly. "You won't find them there. They are at the packing houses in Chicago somewhere."

"Then you have never seen them?"

"No. But I know it is true."

I shook my head.

"I'll have to see it before I believe it," I averred. "In the meantime I'll try to find out what is going on in the slums."

We stood on the stoop. He toyed with the lace of my jacket.

"There is to be a meeting of the Sunset Club next week," he informed me presently, "and a dinner. Would you like to go?"

"What sort of club is it?"

"A sort of socialistic affair. They believe in jumping the broomstick, drinking a cup of tea together, or any

kind of old formula in the place of the regular marriage ceremony performed by the priest. And they don't believe in God."

I raised my eyes to the serene old moon, sailing on in its snow white fleece of clouds.

"There is something lacking, it seems to me," I reflected, "in those people who don't believe in God."

He laughed, his strange eyes gleaming in the moonlight.

"I should think," he said, "that a woman so advanced as you would have long ago recovered from that old fantasy."

Involuntarily I shrank from him, drawing away the lace out of his hands.

"From what old fantasy, Cecil?" I queried.

"That of religion," he replied. "The moth-eaten fable of Adam and Eve. I suppose you believe that too?"

I was silent.

"And that Christ was the Son of God?"

"I believe that," I said solemnly, as if the purple dome of the night was shut

out from view and we stood beneath that of some dim cathedral. "I do."

He laughed again.

"And when we die, we shall all go to heaven and wear shining robes and play on harps?"

"It is a beautiful belief. You are too young to do without it. Children and women must have the staff of religion to lean on. Otherwise they stumble."

"Lean on yourself. And the more you lean on yourself the stronger you will become. There is no other life," he added finally.

"What becomes then of our kindred souls? Shall we never see them?"

"How would you know a soul if you saw it? Do you think for one moment that if my soul came walking down the street, you would recognize it? No. Young as it is you would never take it for the soul you thought it to be. Why! If the soul of your best friend, the friend you think you know more intimately than any other, faced you suddenly you would in all probability run away from it screaming. It would be so black."

"Oh, no!"

" Or so strange and weird with thoughts and feelings you could not comprehend, so intangibly different from what you had imagined it to be, I say you would run away from it. Then how about meeting it in heaven? Wouldn't it be the same there?"

" It would be purified," I argued. " Clean and white as the clouds floating around that yellow moon."

" Then," he sneered, " you would be less apt to recognize it than ever. You wouldn't recognize it at all."

I regarded him in silence.

" Don't look at me like that," he said, " out of your big black eyes. Sweep these crude ideas from your head, Dolly, and you will be perfect. I hate to see your intellect cobwebbed with them. They are unworthy of you. You, with your advanced theories in all other directions, with your ability, with your brain."

I made him a sweeping curtsy.

" You do me too much honor," I smiled, " but the moon is going quite down behind those housetops yonder, and. . . "

"The hour is late," he finished. "I will go. Kiss me good-bye."

"You have asked me that before. When I want to kiss you, Cecil," and I quickly put up my handkerchief to suppress a yawn—"I will do so of my own accord."

At that he raised my hand to his lips and kissed it in so fine and courtly a way that I followed his tall figure down the steps and off with half a sigh.

CHAPTER IV.

E went swiftly down town on a whirling train, passed into a splendid station brilliant with electrics, took a street car or two and found eventually the hotel at which the Sunset Club was to dine.

Upstairs we peeled off our wraps in separate rooms and descending the stairs stood in the parlor looking about us, I, anxious to see whether or not those people who drank cups of tea in lieu of the marriage ceremony, and denied their God, had the same appearance as other folk.

No horns nor cloven feet showed themselves. Except that in some instances they were curiously dressed, they had every appearance of people ordinarily sane. They sat stiffly about, the men together and the women together, chatting low-toned, awaiting the announcement that dinner was served.

I was about to turn to the window and look out as a relief from the rows of uninteresting faces, when a small square

fresh-complexioned man entered the room, and with outstretched hand, approached me.

"So it is you," he smiled.

"Yes," I answered, "It is I."

Cecil shook hands with him.

"I'm rejoiced to see you, Tucket," he said. "How do you come to be here?"

"I had an invitation," he explained, "and so I came. And you," once more turning to me, "are you in league with these? Surely not!"

"Most assuredly not, but I gather material. It must be plucked, you know, from both weed and flower."

"I suppose," bowing, "that I, too, go in as material—of the flower variety, of course. If I am to be plucked, however, by so fair a hand, I shan't mind being plucked."

"You were born too late," I laughed. "You should have existed a century or so back with the buckled shoes and the knickerbockers."

At length dinner was announced. We walked into the dining-room along with the others. There were four of us by now; for Tucket had introduced a friend,

Ward Dickerson.

"A fish out of water," he explained to me sotto voce. "A deacon in the Methodist Church. Watch him get shocked. You also are liable to several severe shocks if you are not careful. Has Cecil revealed to you the nature of this club? That the president thereof, not believing in marriage after affection has taken to itself wings and fled, has left his wife and children, who are now with her father and mother, the same as in the olden days, with the exception of the children."

"As usual, the woman suffers."

"Naturally. That's what she was built for. Woman wouldn't be happy if she wasn't suffering. The man gallivants around. It's the same with the four-footed tribe. Then why not with man? There are other surprises in store for you besides. The last time I was here they put their napkins around their necks and one man resigned because the menu was in French. That's the kind of a club this club is."

We sat down at narrow tables, I between Cecil and Tucket, and Dickerson

on the other side.

First they served four oysters.

"You are not hungry, are you?" enquired Tucket, anxiously.

"Not very," ruefully. "Why?"

"Never come to a Sunset Club dinner hungry," he admonished. "It's a mistake. Did you ever hear that story of Nat Goodwin and the man who took him to a fifty-cent table d'hote? No! Well it's apropos. I'll tell it. The man at each course kept saying, 'Now, Nat, isn't this a fine dinner? Isn't it excellent? Did you ever eat a better dinner in your life for fifty cents?' Then at the last course, when he had repeated this formula some seven times—I think there were seven courses which rolled together would hardly have served for one—Nat said, 'Yes. It's a splendid dinner. A splendid dinner. Let's have another.'"

Tucket was an excellent talker. The dinner passed off bravely in spite of its scarceness, the chairs were turned and the speaking commenced.

The paper of the evening was read by a Japanese writer. His theme was, "Is Religion in its Decadence?"

His appearance was peculiar. Fairly tall, a shock of dark hair hanging loosely, the lower lip protruding in an odd and mask-like way, dark eyes back of glittering glasses, he rose from his chair as from the Orient.

Master of many languages, he spoke English with a curious intonation, a mixture of brogues which served to fascinate, the close reading of the manuscript alone taking away from its charm.

Being a Japanese, he could hardly be expected to be a Christian. In an unbiased way he discussed all religions. He gave an interesting resume of the commencements of sects, each headed by a leader, of spiritualism, of Buddhism, of Christianity, and of the gradual decadence of their intensity. It was a long paper and clever to a degree.

At the end first one and then the other essayed to criticise. The criticisms were meaningless. They were merely renewed assertions that there is no divinity, there is no other life. This world is the be-all and the end-all; eat, drink and be merry; for to-morrow we die.

The Japanese looked a trifle wearied.

Dickerson yawned outright.

"This thing fatigues me," he said to Tucket. "Why did you bring me here?"

Someone called upon Cecil to speak. I was proud of him as he rose to that giant height of his and discoursed upon his favorite theme, socialism, the wage slaves; though an East side socialist, following, scored him, dubbing him first of all a disciple of Herron's.

"D' tall young gent wot just spoke" he said, "reminds me o' Napoleon. When dat guy wanted a subject, all he had t' do wuz t' pull out a drawer of his mind, an' dere it wuz. Napoleon had several drawers. Dis gent only has one—Socialism, wage slaves, d' wiping off d' face o' de eart of d' moneyed powers an' dat, see!!"

Then he sat down.

"Hard on you, wasn't it, old chap," laughed Tucket. "Listen now. A woman. Hear what she has to say!"

I listened.

She was a short, stout woman, with grey hair, who should have been reading her Bible and preparing to die. This is what she said:

She had no religion. She had never been accused of having any and hoped she should never be so accused. She had several children who also, so far as she knew, were destitute of religion. Or so she hoped. She was assured of the fact that she had never been guilty of teaching them those ridiculous fairy tales commonly taught to the children of America in schools and at home.

Dickerson slowly stroked his blond mustache, looking sidewise at me. I breathed with difficulty.

She wanted her children, she continued, to be strong in their own might, independent, leaning upon no myths, no fables for support. She wanted all those cobwebs swept from their brains, if they had gathered there, with fine, clean brooms of thought, the free, progressive thought of the twentieth century, guiltless of mediaevalism and of cant.

I glanced quizzically back at Cecil, but he returned my look unflinchingly. These were much his own words of the evening before. So this was where his theories were sprouted! I made up my mind to talk to his mother awhile, to

persuade her into keeping him at home of nights after the ringing of the curfew and making him go to bed.

Dickerson drew me to him with a whisper.

"Examine her eyes," he suggested. "Isn't there something strange about them? See their glitter. It is almost as if she wore spectacles. They are part insane, these people who stand up and talk like that. They ought, by rights, to be put into straight jackets. They are like mad dogs, dangerous to the general public. They should be muzzled. When she gets through, what do you say to going? I feel smothered here."

"I'll go," I acquiesced, promptly. "So do I."

The woman had taken her seat. We had not heard the last of her oration. It was just as well.

"What are you about," asked Tucket, in surprise, as we rose.

"Going," replied Dickerson; laconically. "We are no gourmands. We know when we've had enough."

They followed us, Cecil little pleased

at the exit.

"Why didn't you stay?" he asked, angrily. "It's not half over."

I took Dickerson's arm.

"It is enough for men to say they have no religion," I volunteered, in explanation. "They are able, perhaps, to exist without it, but a woman! It is a flower without perfume, a rose without color, a day without the sun."

"Hear! Hear!" cried Tucket, throwing up his hat. "She's dropping into poetry."

He drew up beside me, Cecil walking sullenly in the rear.

"We'll go into some little cafe and have a bite to eat," he said. "You always need a bite to eat after a Sunset Club dinner," and led us to the little cafe.

"Cecil tells me you are interested in the wage slaves," he began, when we were seated. "So am I. It is a popular subject just now. I'm writing a book about it."

Then over the deviled crabs he repeated whole pages of his book. He did it cleverly too. I wondered how he

managed to remember whole pages of a book.

"It is to be the story of the wickedness of New York life," he informed us.

"And Tucket is the man to write it," broke in Cecil. "If anybody knows the true inwardness of New York life, it is Tucket."

"He flatters me," demurred Tucket. "Now listen."

And he told a glib tale of two girls of Bohemia who sat in a restaurant, waiting for two friends with whom they were to dine, in the meanwhile exchanging confidences.

" 'And you think Jack will stay with you always?' said Maggie. 'Ah! I hope so. Be happy while you may, for to-morrow comes, and with it, tears.'

" 'What! You talk of tears? I thought you were the gayest of the gay!'

"The other delicately mopped her face with her lace handkerchief.

" 'Gay! Oh yes, and fairly happy, too, now, with Charlie; but there was a time, not so far back though it seems like centuries, that first one, you know. He

was handsome as your Jack. How long did it last? I have forgotten. A few days. A few months of heaven, then some little quarrel that can never be patched up, or a look as if he had tired, which is worse than any quarreling, then —Oh, well, you wake up some fine morning and it is all over! What! Tears! Dry them quick. Here they come! Ah! boys, I'm glad to see you. We were getting mopy, Maggie and I, sitting here alone. What shall it be? A cocktail, a brandy soda, or a gin fizz?' "

Yes, he told it well. I could see the two girls sitting there, trying to be gay, crushing back their tears, their footsteps half over deadly precipices of the Fear of Being Forgotten, of the Going to Be.

"Good," I applauded. "Tell me another."

He was pleased.

"Sometime when I am not busy I will bring up the whole manuscript and read it to you."

I faced Cecil appealingly.

"Don't turn so pale," he pleaded. "How long is it?" to Tucket.

"Oh, not very long," he returned.

"No man's own story is ever long, but I'll be willing to wager that you'll not see her, coming with that manuscript, if she happens to see you first."

"Don't believe him," I soothed. "Bring it along. I'll listen to it. It may give me some pointers for my own."

"That settles it," he nodded. "My manuscript and I will stay right where we belong, at home."

The clock pointed to twelve. We got up to go.

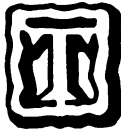
"You will come with me to Marian's restaurant some night, won't you?" asked Tucket. "It is very gay. You will meet plenty of Bohemians down there and pleasant people. Say what night."

"Any that pleases you. I shan't have so very much time just now. I'm studying the slums, or going to study them. The Wage Slaves, you know, Cecil's Wage Slaves."

At the foot of the steps he raised his hat, Dickerson also.

"We are all of us Wage Slaves," said he, and they turned to go.

CHAPTER V.



HE next day the slums were impossible. To begin with, it rained. The raindrops stood on the window pane, like tears.

Unhappily, I am a sort of barometer. My spirits rise and fall with the mercury The letter which lay at my plate did no tend to elevate them. On the contrary

It lay inside a rejected manuscript.

"I am sorry," it ran, "to be obliged to reject this; but it contains the same old fault of which I have so often spoken A lack of plot—a grievous lack of construction. If you will come down to th office some afternoon, I should be glad. I want to talk to you about your work."

Sensitive as that plant which closes green leaves at the touch, the mere announcement in cold penmanship tha my work was grievously lacking in anything robbed me of the power to write.

I put aside my manuscripts and busie myself with other things. Mrs. Tront, my landlady, brought in my linen. I

mended that. Muriel, her daughter, came and sat with me awhile. I endeavored to amuse her. She told me about the new boarders—they came and went in a kaleidoscopic manner wonderful to behold—a chorus girl belonging to a grand company and an ice man. Not a regular ice man, she explained, who carted around the ice, but the head of the firm. There was a big difference.

"I'd rather be an ice man," said I, wearily "than write for the magazines."

"I wouldn't mind being one myself," she assented, "if I could have the bossing of the job."

After lunch it still rained. The walks dripped. The papers of the small boy at the foot of the elevated were soaked through. With elaborate courtesy he folded one again and again and handed it to me as I passed him on my way down town. It moistened my glove.

The elevated car exhumed humidity rising from wet clothing, from dripping umbrellas that left little zig-zag streams on the floor. The panes were as wet inside as out.

I took a seat next to a dank um-

brella and opened my paper. The scare lines danced before me. I read a column before I realized that I had understood not one single word of what I had read.

Putting the paper down I looked at the wet windows and thought. Of my work, of my apparent success, of my pride in that success. And then of the blow of that morning.

All hollowness! All seeming! There was something lacking, a vital something. After all, I was a failure in the work I had set myself to do.

Occasionally, starting out in the rain at Harlem, I had arrived at City Hall Park in comparative sunshine. I hoped it would be so that day, but it was not. It poured. The hyacinths in the oblong beds about the park were drenched, the newsboys were drenched, the tall buildings lost their heights in a blur, the street cars ran in miniature lakes. To get at them it was necessary to wade.

Raising my umbrella I hastened along with the crowd, and arrived at the editor's office, where, giving my card to the boy at the door, I was finally admitted to the privacy of his sanctum.

The editor sat before a great table which was long and broad. He arose and advanced to meet me. I gave him a damp gloved hand and sat down, the table between us.

"Well," I said, and waited.

"First," he demurred, "give me the privilege of asking how you are, and how you have been all these days?"

I put back a curling strand of hair that had come down in the rain.

"I am very well," I answered. "I am always well. Perhaps I don't look it to-day in this rainy-day garb. I should have waited for the sunshine, so I could dress up in my pretty clothes to come down and see you."

He regarded me for a space.

"There is never anything the matter with your looks," he decided.

"I would rather," I sighed, "have some thing the matter with my looks than with my work."

"There is much that is beautiful in your work," he averred. "Much. Your style is exquisite."

"It is no credit. It is inherited."

"It is no discredit. Also I have never

seen any piece of yours, any little squib that wasn't finished to perfection."

"That," I inserted, "comes of the labor of copying and recopying."

"But the difficulty lies in the fact that you seldom write a story. Once in a blue moon you do hit on one; but I believe it is through no fault of your own. It is purely accidental and unintentional."

"Don't mind me," I plead. "Go on talking just the same as if I were out of the room and the subject altogether."

"There is a lack of surprise in your stuff," he went on. "The turn, the twist, the almost inexplicable thing that goes to make fiction. You should study conclusion."

"I have studied conclusion."

"You should study the best writers of short stories."

"I have studied Poe and De Maupaussant till I'm black in the face," I mutinied.

"Then you should be able at least once in a while, to write some little thing that might pass muster for fiction."

I tremulously stuck pins in the round

pincushion and took them out again, wondering who was going to pay my board while I recovered sufficiently from the shock of this discouragement to take up my writing again.

"Do all writers write fiction?" I argued. "Aren't many of them, and celebrated ones, totally lacking in plot as I am? Take Henry James, for instance. Take. . ."

"Now," he interrupted, "you are getting mad as mad as can be."

"No," I remonstrated. "I am not."

"Yes, you are. I can tell it by your eye. Don't you know I am interested in you? Don't you know I have followed your career and done what I could to help you? Can't you understand that what I am telling you is for your good?"

"Like the medicine they pour down our infant throats while they hold our noses," I assented, grimly, "everything bitter and bad to the taste is for our good."

"Nonsense! Haven't I mixed the sweet with the bitter?"

"Not enough."

"Haven't I told you over and over

again that your literary style was perfect? Often, to tell the truth, I have accepted your work on its literary merit entirely. But that was when you needed the money. Now that you are getting along better I tell you candidly that I will not accept anything short of a story. I am decided upon that."

"You fill the cup of my bitterness full," said I, surveying him out of the narrowness of half closed eyes, "telling me how you helped me when I needed money."

"It was true."

"You might have spared me so much truth on a day that rained."

He bit his lip and was silent.

After a long time:

"All that begs the question," he began. "You know I want you to succeed."

"I am succeeding fairly well. I make my living at my work and more. That in itself is extraordinary. I have been told so. One man said to me the other night, 'If you are able to earn your salt by your literary efforts, I take off my hat to you.'"

" But you lack so little of being great."

" Whatever it is, that little thing, it is impossible to me. I don't even understand what it is. Surprise, conclusion, the turn, the twist, the inexplicable thing that goes to make fiction. I can't reach it, no matter how hard I try. Besides, each has his own manner of writing. As for me, I write of life as I see it. My stories come to me. They develop before my eyes. If they contain occasionally the surprises necessary all well and good. If they contain more generally merely pen pictures of real people, ordinary, simple, humdrum, that is not so much my fault as the fault of the people. I do not paint things as I should see them, but as I see them in reality; and the pictures have been acceptable to many. There is, to a certain extent, a demand for them or they would not be bought. Why not let me go on in my own way then? Why discourage me? We each have our own niche. Let me fill mine as best I may and try at least to find contentment."

He leaned back in his chair and looked

at me.

"I am even beginning to be a little contented with filling it," I continued. "There is some pleasure in being made much of in ever so small a way. They toast me once in a while. They give me tastes of homage that are sweet; while you, with the chill breath of discouragement, take away all power to work. I shall not write now for weeks. How can I? Knowing myself to be a failure? They exalt me. You humble me to the dust."

He hung his head.

"I'm a brute, I know," he admitted, "but none of them begin to think half as much of you as I do."

I fell to tracing quick patterns on his blotter with his paper knife, laughing a laugh that was half tears.

Presently I looked up at the great window, full of raindrops as my own had been at home.

"I must go out in it again," I complained.

"And when shall I see you?" he asked.

"Not until I have written a story

which shall contain this elusive thing you say I lack."

His arms dropped inertly down. He dropped his chin upon his breast with a deep drawn sigh.

"I'm looking my last on her," he muttered, and his head bobbed slowly up and down for a moment, like that of a Chinese Mandarin done in bisque.

I began to laugh, sitting there opposite him, and then I began to cry. I sobbed spasmodically.

He rose. He sat down again.

"Don't," he begged. "This is an almost public office. Suppose someone should come suddenly in. What do you suppose they would think? That I had been beating you? Come. Hush! There! There! Dry your tears. Take what I say kindly. Think over it and write stories if you can and if it's true that you can't, keep on with your sketches. I'll stand by you through thick and thin. I'll be your friend."

I looked at him through my fingers. I brushed the tears hastily away with their tips and got up.

"I will," I promised him, and went

out of the office, down the stairs and into the wet of the street, back to the elevated, sitting dully through the sickening dampness of it until I reached Harlem and the drenched newsboy at the foot of the steps with his row of papers dripping raindrops, like a shingled roof.

From there I half ran on home and up to my room, where, tearing off my saturated clothing and throwing on something loose and warm, I crept under the covers of my couch, buried my head in the pillows and sobbed.

It seemed to me just then that all I had in life was my work. And in that I had failed. What if this were the beginning of the end? What if I should get like Cecil's mother, who had five years ago written for all the papers and made money and succeeded past her own expectations, and those of her friends, and who now spent her life in the kitchen waiting for Cecil, who took his time in coming, washing dishes she hated, scrubbing sometimes!

I clinched my nails in my palms.

It could not happen. Hers had been

assignments. She was told to go write up things and she did it. Mine was creative work!

But creative work in which something was lacking.

I stretched myself out and stared at the ceiling.

What if, by and by, I should get to be one of those wage slaves of Cecil's, delving in the slums!

I sat up and looked at the wet windows thinking how I wished I were outside under the ground somewhere, buried deep, the cool earth crushing with its grateful weight all memories of struggles and trials and hopes and fears. Thinking how some great man had said to me that life after all was only a process of drugging, each in his own way, some with drink, some with opium and others with love. And how true it was. Thinking how bitter it was that all three had been put somehow or other out of my reach. Thinking how the ancients had approved of suicide, and wondering why, since I had proved a failure, in the one thing left to me, I could not find the courage to go to sleep and never wake

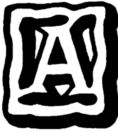
again this side of eternity. I sobbed again, hushed and listened.

It was Mr. Tront, Mrs. Tront's husband, who worked all night and slept all day. He wished to sleep. My sobbing had disturbed him, the sound of it coming down into the room below.

I lay very still, comparing my life with his.

I had no right to sob, nor to complain.

CHAPTER VI.



T first I had thought that, like most husbands of women who take a few parlor boarders for the pleasure of their company, he was either non-existent or indefinitely absent on a long vacation; but later I had discovered that he was neither of the two.

He was the engineer of a night train.

It seemed to me that he missed the joy of life, working all night and sleeping all day. It was as if he were a plant set out of reach of the sunshine.

I lay still, picturing him, his hand on the throttle, steering his fiery-eyed engine safe into the darkness, alert and watchful of danger for the lives in his charge while all the world slept.

Then he slept through the sunlight and the April showers and the blossoming of the lilacs in the square back yard beneath his window, and the blooming of the sweet peas, the marguerites and the daffy down dillies.

He missed it all.

Nobody seemed to care much either what he missed, or whether he slept or waked. Nobody was the quieter. Not a voice was hushed nor a footstep softened that he might sleep. The hand organs in the street dinned dismal music, the newsboys yelled, the hucksters screamed, the whistles blew and the elevated trains rolled grumblingly, thunderingly, three blocks from his door.

On the contrary. The mere fact that he must sleep raised a sort of insurrection in his own household. It interfered with plans. It conduced an order of things bordering upon a strike.

Now that I remembered, his wife, coming into my room, had stood with her back to the door and talked about it by the hour, talked and talked and talked, taking up the time.

" It is fifteen years," she said, " since he has had this position on the railroad and slept through the day. You would think it was he who ought to be pitied—most people think that—but it is not he, it is Muriel and I. It is we who have had to bear the brunt. Can you imagine keeping quiet all day long for somebody

else to sleep? (but they didn't keep quiet!) Can you think how wearing that would be? I couldn't stand it in the little flat with the shutters shut and the blinds drawn down. I had to get out and live among people. So I took this house. I had to have some distraction. It was killing me."

Involuntarily I had raised my eyebrows.

"I know," she had hastened to continue, reading my thought. "It doesn't look much like distraction, taking boarders. It looks more like work. But it is better than watching him sleep, sitting in a half dark room from morning till night, quiet as a mouse, tiptoeing about as if someone were dead, till six o'clock of an evening, till ten at night."

I could imagine her life. It had hardly been an enviable one. It takes a sunny nature to overlook life's little ironies such as these, and optimism sufficient to nourish the belief that they will eventually wash out in the soap suds of Eternity's laundry, or they get on the nerves.

She had waited for me to say some-

thing, but I had leaned my elbows on the table and looked at her silently. I was waiting to begin my work.

"There is a big, handsome cousin of mine who wanted to marry me," she had sighed by and by, " but girls are silly creatures. I thought I knew what was what. I would marry this other."

"Sometimes," she had added, after a moment's pause, " I wish I had taken that big, fine cousin and really lived."

Fixing my eyes on her I had endeavored to mesmerize her into going away. Apparently the telepathic conditions were unfavorable. She had remained motionless.

"I worry about it and worry about it," she had complained, toying with her apron string, " but what's the use? Maybe it is just as well that he sleeps all day. We get along better, perhaps, not seeing each other."

Then she had taken herself off, and I had sat idle a while longer, pondering upon this solution of the marriage question.

It was not a bad solution, as she had said, the not seeing each other.

Always my sympathies had gone out to those who care for us during the night. To the conductors, the brakemen, the engineers of the "L's." To the motormen on the surface cars, the switchmen on the tracks, the cabmen who stand sleepily waiting to bring us home, the waiters at the all-night restaurants. To the rank and file of night owls who rarely see daylight and never half enjoy it. But this was the first to come within range of my immediate vision.

As a rule the scales of life balance fairly evenly. For the things we miss we gain something. For the things we gain we lose something.

I wrenched my thoughts from my own discouragement, reckoning up his losses and his gains.

Through the steady sacrifice of those fifteen years he had lost apparently not only the respect but the affection of his wife and daughter.

Once I had found the girl nodding in the parlor at half-past nine.

"Why don't you go to bed?" I had asked her.

With a shrug of her shoulder toward

the door she had answered:

"I have to sit up and wake Papa in time for his train."

And the mother had chimed in:

"It is fifteen years now, that we've been doing the same thing. Sitting up and waking him for his train. We can't go to the theatre. We can't go out for a walk. We can't go anywhere. We are chained."

"What about his chain?" I was upon the point of questioning, on second thoughts concluding it was safer not; for I had seen him methodically issue from his room, walk down stairs to see that the kitchen doors were locked, come up again, turn out the light in the parlor, turn down the lights in the hall, and go to his cheerless midnight work without a parting kiss or a 'God Bless you.'"

His chain was a trifle longer than theirs. And that was all.

But perhaps to balance this loss of affection and esteem he had gained the respect of his employers. That must have been the case. Otherwise he would hardly have retained his position for a period of fifteen years.

The respect of his employers weighed too little. The scales hung unevenly.

For the better balancing, drawing upon my imagination I made pictures.

I fell to fancying the memory of some young faced old sweetheart—those memory faces never grow old—there beside him through the long night hours, her head on his shoulder, her slender twining fingers adding strength to his right arm, whirling, the two of them, into the black of the night, facing the stars.

Why not? Since the wife retained the memory of her big, strong cousin whom she wished she had married?

With the help of this picture the scales hung more evenly.

It was a shadow thing. But life is made up of shadow things, shadow memories of the past and hopes for the future that seldom take to themselves shapes other than those of phantoms, elusive, will-o'-the-wisp like, impalpable.

Tired of the fresco of the ceiling I thrust my feet into Japanese slippers and going to the window knelt, looking out.

Directly below was our back yard; at

the further end of which were roses. On either side were other back yards of the same shape and pattern, better tended, being private back yards, the roses held primly against the wall by strings. Further on yet rose the rear of a church, covered with vines, the tinkle of whose chimes told the half hours and the quarters.

It no longer rained. The roses lifted red heads wet as if with dew. The vines hung dripping. The black cats moved sinuously up and down, about and across the fences in between the square back yards as was their wont. Two of the cats I knew personally. They were my friends. They belonged to the place which began to seem like home since I thought of leaving it and going to the slums.

Outside the scrutiny of Cecil's keen eye I could own my aversion to going to the slums. The mere thought revolted me. I am not of the stuff of which martyrs are made. I knew if I went at all I must force myself to it.

Why go there in search of wage slaves, when wage slaves lay at my threshold.

What of this man who slept in a darkened room, missing the rain-washed roses, the dripping vines, the scurrying clouds and the joy of life?

The clouds parted, letting a wave of sunlight sweep over the walls of brown stone down upon a big leaved tree in the garden next to ours. They parted further and the waves swept into our garden and upon the cats. Suddenly tired of walking up and down these sat with their faces to this sunlight, blinking sleepily.

And he slept, missing the content of the cats, the raindrops, the roses, the glint of the sunlight, the glad daytime, the gem-like brilliancy of the gay old green world, basking in the glorious glare of day.

"If you are hunting for misery," I said, aloud, leaning on the sill to catch the odor of the roses, "you can find it on your door step. But why look for misery? Why not go in search of a little happiness instead?"

CHAPTER VII.

ON the following evening Cecil calling with a girl friend begged me to go with them to a noted Bohemian restaurant as chaperone.

I hesitated.

"Does your mother know?" I asked.

"We have explained it to her like this," they said. "She knows you want to see this place; it's worth seeing. There are a lot of freaks down there, writers and that—so we told her you insisted upon our taking you."

"Oh," I ejaculated, interrupting. "You told her that!"

"Yes. What difference does it make? Then we told Estelle's father—he hardly allows her to put her foot outside the door after dark, you know, he's so fiendishly strict—that you *would* go, and you wouldn't hear to going without Estelle."

Falling up against the wall, I stared at them speechless. Though I appeared to be getting rather the worst of it, I could

help admiring the ingenious facility with which they fabricated.

"Go get on your hat," they laughed, "and quit your foolishness."

Quite helpless, carried away by this tide of youthful fervor, I got on my hat. We boarded a neighboring steam car, changed from it to an electric, took still another electric, and finally landed at the Bohemian resort, where, descending three worn steps, we crossed an abbreviated portico, opened a door and encountered a cloud of tobacco smoke of a thickness to be cut with a knife.

Through this smoke gleamed excited faces and some brilliant eyes, mingled with others that were not so brilliant as they might have been.

Cecil led the way through the room into which had drifted a song or two from another to the right; into a third at the door of which Tucket, rushing up to me, grasped me by the hand.

"I've been dying to see you," he cried.

"It looks like it," said I. "Three times you have asked me to come down here with you, and three times you have

forgotten. Fancy my emotions, sitting alone in a dreary parlor, waiting for you."

"Carissima," he murmured, "some fellows took me off and gave unto me the highball, and I did drink. That's the reason. Believe me. That is the only reason. I will atone. From this moment I devote my life to you. . . ."

"Oh, well! If you call it atonement!"

"Forget the word. Call it any thing you like. Call it. . . Say, will you come down here with me next Saturday night?"

I glanced over the crowd.

"Once," I concluded, "will be quite enough of this to hold me for a while."

"Cruel!" he murmured—he is good at murmuring—and took me to a chair.

Then I lost Cecil and his companion, Miss Eaton.

Why should young people have a chaperone? Why shouldn't they be trusted?

In chaperoning I always trust them.

Somebody made a salad and passed it around. Then closing the doors the fun began.

They called it fun. I called it elocution.

A young woman in pink with gestures wonderful to behold recited something about a Japanese fan. She had recited this thing about the Japanese fan with such frequency that the gestures had grown to be second nature.

She raised her glass to her lips in a manner exactly the same.

A man with an excellent profile followed with Kipling's "Envoi."

An exquisitely gowned woman followed him with another recitation. And lo! Before the applause had had half time to die away, she recited again!

There were various factions apparently. We retired to an adjacent room, where, under a different leader there was singing.

A famous soprano sang, "Comin' thro' the Rye." A tenor commenced to mock her, whereupon, what with her faction and his faction, the excitement rose to heights, such exceeding heights that I deemed it best to look out for the personal safety of those two whom I had in charge.

I found them with difficulty, but I found them.

" Come on let's go home," I begged. " I'm afraid!"

" Silly," said Cecil. " There is nothing to be afraid of. It's a common thing here, this. They are not fights. They are discussions."

Looking back through the smoke it seemed to me I could see only a whirl of arms and legs mingled in a way which struck terror to my soul.

" I don't like these discussions," I groaned. "Come on. Let's go home."

He took out his watch.

" Well, we will," he assented. " It is time. Estelle's father will be furious, it's so late."

Going out into the night we climbed to the elevated.

" You needn't worry about me," I told them, taking the seat opposite. " Put me off at 125th and I will go home alone on the crosstown car. I'm not afraid."

Cecil took time to look up at me, shrug his shoulders and laugh.

" That's not the question," he

informed me. " From the way you flirted with those fellows to-night one would be led to suppose that Estelle was chaperoning you; but the fact of the matter is that you are chaperoning Estelle. You must, therefore, see her home. Her father would take off the roof if he didn't actually gaze upon your countenance. He wouldn't believe you had gone with us. He wouldn't . . . "

" What absolute confidence he must have in Estelle," I remarked casually, adding: " How far is it?"

" Don't let that worry you," they retorted, and forgot me entirely.

I am not a stern and inflexible chaperone. On the contrary. But upon deep reflection, I feel that there were some things at which I should have drawn the line that night.

Estelle had on a tight slipper, for instance.

She leant forward untying it, whereupon Cecil, leaning forward also, took the slipper entirely off and put it in his pocket.

I resolutely closed my eyes; for if I had observed this thing I was convinced

that it would have been my religious duty to remonstrate, and if my remonstrance had had no effect, to report the same to that fiendishly strict father of Estelle's, who hardly dared let her put her foot out of the house after the night had fallen.

I trembled to speculate upon his feelings, on discovering that that foot had been slipperless in a public car on the elevated train at one o'clock in the morning.

However, I believe it passed mostly unobserved. The passengers, like myself, nodded, waked and nodded again. The conductor called:

" Eightyfurstnxt!"

Then:

" Ninetiefurstnxt!"

Then:

" Nunderedndwendyfivfth!"

Leaving the elevated there, we took an electric which cut a shining pathway straight into the night. Alighting from this car after what seemed endless hours we commenced to walk.

That is to say, Cecil walked and I walked, but Estelle limped. She was

lame, very lame. She grew more and more lame until it was distressing to behold the way in which she crept along.

By and by Cecil, stooping from his great height, said to her softly :

" Let me carry you!"

And that was what he did!

She was very small. He, as I said before, was very tall. It was accordingly as if he were carrying a child.

It was hardly proper, I own, but it was rather pretty to see them wavering in the dusk, her arms about his neck, her small feet dangling, both laughing hilariously, uproariously, outrageously, in fact.

It was a great joke, truly, a thing to laugh at, though I must confess, it did not appeal to me. I failed to appreciate it as I should have done, kept from my well-earned rest, trudging along sleepily in the rear, not carried at all—just walking and walking!

We passed a long stone-walled church yard. We entered a large and beautiful wooded lawn giving upon the Hudson. We approached a house.

It was a big, brown house, hushed and

quiet and lightless as all self respecting houses should be at such an hour of the early morning.

We knocked at the door.

It was opened by Estelle's younger sister.

" But you'll catch it," she stormed, shaking a pink fist into the face of the girl.

Estelle, snatching me by the hand, swept me into the hall with a sudden movement that came near to upsetting my equilibrium.

" Be quiet," she commanded. " I've got a chaperone. Here she is. Look at her!"

" Yes," I assented quickly. " I'm her chaperone. I've been with her all evening. I have. Tell your father so. And I'm not going to say a word about the slipper. . . . or the . . . "

Cecil, grasping me by the shoulder, put me bodily out.

" Goodbye, Estelle," he called back to her over his shoulder. Then to me: " What do you mean? Are you crazy? You make me tired, you!"

" Tired!" I wailed. " I'm so tired I

don't know what to do. I'm so tired I'm ready to drop. I'm dead tired," and my voice trembled, for I was half ready to cry.

He bent tenderly over me, as he had bent over Estelle.

"Shall I carry you?" he asked.

I walked steadfastly off into the dark ahead of him.

"Not on your life," I replied. "I've never played second violin yet, and at this stage of the game it is too late to begin."

CHAPTER VIII.

HAT station do you get off at for Rivington Street?" I asked of the conductor, on the day after.

"At Houston," he answered, clanking the gates and yelling first into one door and then into the opposite one:

" Nunderedensixdeenxt!"

I read my paper too long. When I looked up we had passed the station. Alighting, I walked back several blocks under the elevated amid a whir of trams and big wheeled wagons, a crush of rushing electrics and a wild-eyed crowd of newsboys, selling strange papers with grotesque headlines in a language resembling Greek, but which I discovered later on was Yiddish.

The Third Avenue here cuts two worlds in half. On the west the thrift, enterprise and cleanliness of the new world, on the left the shiftless poverty of the old.

Poverty of the baldest, of bare headed women, of ragged children, munching

aged crusts,of unswept doorsteps,of push carts, propelled by a jumble of nationalities, of wares hawked in every language under the sun, seemingly,with the exception of English, of the riff raff of the continent, in other words, dumped in a screaming heap into the rank and seething cauldron of the slums.

Mrs. Mallon had given me the address of the College Settlement.

"They are people," she explained, "who live down there in order to disseminate refinement."

"You mean that by their mere presence refinement is scattered promiscuously about, like manna, as it were?"

"Umph hum."

"Wait till I take a room in the slums," said I, "and the job will be finished. There'll be no more slums. It will be a choice collection of aristocrats and the four hundred will shortly commence to build their palaces there."

At which she had laughed. She often laughed at my jokes, she explained upon one occasion, to keep from crying.

Finding the place, I was shown into the office of a tall, slim man, with a smooth face and hands that were delicately thin.

"I want to see the slums," I told him. "I don't mean from the outside, but the true inwardness, the sweat shops, the places where people work all day long in the dark, and that sort of thing."

He raised his eyebrows.

"If they heard you call it slums," he said, "they would be insulted. You mustn't call it slums."

"I won't," I promised. "But can you help me?"

He shook his head.

"I don't see how," he ruminated. "You might go to the woman's settlement, however. They may give you some assistance. They will if they can. Will you look at our place before you go?" and he showed me through room after room, beautiful apartments furnished in the style of the Japanese, of the Chinese, of the Turk, each a marvel of taste, finally ushering me out upon an iron veranda high up, from which we had a view of the slums, the tenements jagged

with rusty fire escapes, disreputable with forlorn windows stuffed with pillows and newspapers and breeze-blown rags, redolent of misery.

" In a dozen blocks about here," he informed me with a comprehensive sweep of his thin hand, " there are 25,000 Jews. We call it the land of the push cart."

I leaned further forward and looked toward the river, where the delicate grey of the mammoth bridge swung soft against the sky, a beautiful shadow bridge going somewhere over and far away from the land of the push cart—the land of unhappiness.

I looked below me at the surging swarm of dense humanity thronging the streets like flies, and sighed.

It would take all the courage of which I was mistress to live among them.

The slim man piloted me down again, and I went to the woman's settlement.

A dozen children played on the stoop. In lieu of marbles they played with worn and rusty buttons.

" Haven't you any marbles?" I asked

" No," they replied simultaneously.

I opened my pocketbook and producing a dime, gave it to the smallest.

"Go get you a few, anyway," I said, and the stoop was promptly vacated, the eleven following gaily in the footsteps of the inflated owner of the dime, marbleward.

A young woman with large blue eyes, calm and serene as an early May morning, let me in, closed the door and preceded me to a waiting room, neat waxed-floored and adorned with yellow flowers in a vase on one corner of the mantelpiece.

She helped me in the same manner in which the slim man had helped me.

Taking an opposite seat, she listened politely enough to my request to be shown the slums, and was quiet thereafter for a space, apparently thinking it over.

I wondered why she had taken the time to appear to think it over, since her reply was the stereotyped reply of the tall, slim man of the delicate hand.

It would be impossible for her to help me, she said. These people were averse to being looked upon as paupers. They

had their pride. Did I expect to live a while in the slums? If I did, then I could go looking for rooms. Whether or not I found one to suit me, I was apt to find more than enough of the poverty.

It was a good suggestion. I concluded to profit by it.

Coming out with smiles and bows and expressions of profuse gratitude I discovered the same crowd of children ostentatiously playing marbles on the stoop, with the same old buttons, eyeing my pocketbook furtively meanwhile.

Laughing, I passed them, went a little way down the street and entered a tenement house, at the door of which stood frowseled women chatting volubly together, while their still more frowseled children, uncombed, unwashed, played at their feet.

Above the knob was the sign of furnished rooms for rent.

"Can I see one?" I asked of nobody in particular, whereupon a girl child of six or thereabouts answered; "I will show you. Come on up."

I had forgotten that it was Monday, and washday. The odor of suppressed

steam reminded me. I followed the child up and up along narrow stairways clouded by steam, through which appeared dismal visions of unkempt women bending over washtubs, lifting clothing out of boilers by means of broom sticks, whitened by months of this perverted use, or the washing done, sprawled on all fours, scrubbing floors with the souse of the left-over suds.

I stopped on a landing and looked at the clothes. They were pitiful as the people. Clothes that should by rights have been hung in the sunlight fanned by fresh breezes for the whitening of them, strung on blackened lines between the narrowness of a darkened air shaft guiltless of a breeze, guiltless of one single ray of the bleaching sun.

The child threw open a door on the last flight of all.

" This," she said, " is the room."

Unable to endure the sight of the interior, sunken floored, low ceilinged, reeking with uncleanliness, I walked to the window and looked out over the roofs.

More soiled linen hung danglingly

between dingy air shafts. More tangled fire escapes laden with kitchen utensils, with bottles, with kegs and boxes and barrels and stray dogs and lazily sleeping cats curled on planks that were stretched across the apertures that should have been left free in case of fire, but weren't.

Then roofs and roofs and roofs and little narrow streets bewildering with their twists and turns, all happily leading to the phantom bridge that led over and away from it.

My soul turned sick at the thought of living in that room with the view of those roofs.

Silently, without explanation, I retraced my steps, followed by the wondering child, to the street.

Other tenements I entered, looking for a room.

Always a child led me, showing me rooms where children bent over sewing, over tubs, over cook-stoves,—young-old children taking up the too-early thread of life and weaving before their time; and leading me down again where babies rolled in gutters and scrambled away

from under the crushing wheels of carts.

When at last I stood at home in my own room, I ached with fatigue, bodily and mental.

It was a pleasant room. I had never before realized how pleasant.

The maid had cleaned it while I was gone. The nap of the big rug rose velvety from much brushing, the waxed floor shone. She had polished the furniture, she had dusted the bric-a-brac and had placed on chiffonier and mantel crisp doilies fresh from the wash.

It was almost like home.

I went to the window and looked out.

No network of fire escapes. No soiled linen, no pillows protruding from broken panes, no frowseled heads nodding in the dissemination of gossip on unclean door-steps. No slums.

Only the soft sweet green of the little back gardens, the vines on the wall of the church, the tinkle of the chimes at the half hour and the quarter, the roses looking up at me, and the cats, two of which were my personal and individual friends, moving sedately about.

Yes. It was like home.

CHAPTER IX.

ECIL let me in. He and his mother sat in the parlor, he smoking, she reading.

"Will you take off your hat?" she asked.

"No, thanks. It is light. I may as well keep it on. Who's that in the kitchen?"

"Papa," answered Cecil. "He got home to-day. He's washing the dishes. What makes you look at me so hard now? Is it my eyes again?"

"No. It's the shape of your head. It is most peculiar, if you want to know. I understand enough of phrenology to realize that some bumps are entirely lacking there,—some necessary for the making up of a perfect character. You are right, Cecil. Young as you are, I believe if I saw your soul come walking down the street toward me, I should run away from it screaming."

"Why this sudden tirade?" he demanded. "Is it because I am letting Papa wash the dishes there in the

kitchen?"

"That and the way you treat your mother. But then how can you expect natural and beautiful sentiments in a boy who prides himself upon not believing in God?"

The rattling of the dishes broke the silence.

"He's the best two out of this three," I said, listening.

"Who? Papa?"

"Yes. Papa."

"Mother tells me," he began by and by, "that you have been down to the slums. That you broke into those people's houses bodily and examined their contents."

"I should hardly call it 'breaking in,'" I demurred. "I was looking for a room. I shall take a room there if I can find one that is fairly fit to live in, and I can bring myself to living in it."

He stretched his long limbs, crossing one over the other.

"You'll never do it," he declared.

"The spirit is willing," I sighed, "but the flesh is weak."

His mother looked up from her paper.

"After all," she ruminated, "you may talk about your wage slaves and your wage slaves; but there are plenty of women living in flats all over New York who work day in and day out, never from one year's end to the other getting one cent of pay. These are wives, let me tell you, cultivated women who must do the work of servants at the command of their lords and masters, the men. The work of servants! Servants the world over get their livingand wages besides. These women get their living, what they can eat after cooking it themselves—and it's mighty little I want to eat if I have to cook it—but as for wages! They get nothing, absolutely nothing. From one year's end to the other, not a cent do they have in their pocketbooks to spend. No car fare. No nothing. Talk about wage slaves. They are slaves without the wage and I am one of them."

So saying she lapsed into silence once more and read.

Cecil threw back his head and laughed.

"She's a monomaniac on the sub-

ject," he vowed. " I never saw anything like it. For five long years this is the song I have heard her sing.

He had spoken in a low tone, but she heard. Like most deaf people she heard when it was not intended for her to hear, and when it was she didn't.

" Five years ago, yes, but before that" she reminded him. " Did you hear one word of complaint? Not one. I was doing the work then that was congenial to me. Work that I liked, writing, just as Dolly does now. Not only that, but making money hand over fist by it, taking care of you, dressing you beautifully, sending you to school, giving you little trips in the summer, living in furnished rooms and going out for our meals. No sweeping, no dusting, no dishwashing..."

" Who is that in there now?" I enquired, " washing the dishes?"

" Mr. Mallon. And he ought to wash them. It was he who put me into the kitchen and took away my brain power. They don't go together. You can't make them go together. . . . He has ruined my life. It is as little as he can do, once in a while, to wash the dishes."

"I was right," I nodded. "He is the best two out of three."

"What?" she questioned sharply.

"In all probability," I replied, "you are right. The brain requires to be quiet in order to do good work, to dwell on the one subject, to ponder. You can't be peeling potatoes one minute and writing an article on the psychological researches of the soul the next."

"Of course you can't," she snapped, and shut up again over her newspaper, like a clam.

His work finished, Mr. Mallon came into the room, rubbing his hands together for the drying of them.

I got up and took both hands in mine, looked into his ruddy face a minute, pushed a chair forward for him and rolled my own chair close to it, Cecil following each movement with a supercilious half smile.

"You are evidently a great favorite with her," he remarked, flipping the ash from his cigar onto the floor, whereat Mrs. Mallon left her place by the lamp, went to the kitchen, brought back the dust pan and a little broom, knelt,

brushed up the ash, took back the dust pan and broom, returned and sat still as before, reading.

"I like people who do their duty in life," I said, "without so much blowing of trumpets and flare."

Mr. Mallon laughed a ripe, mellow, country laugh he had brought to the city with him ten years before.

"It is all very well," he said, "this speech making for a side issue, but it is ruining Cecil for everyday life. I don't believe in socialism myself. It's the moneyed men who give me my position. If it wasn't for them I wouldn't have it. In that case I should possibly starve."

"That's a nice way to talk," broke in Cecil. "It looks well for people like us, poor as church mice, to uphold the millionaires."

"You have neither good manners nor over much common sense when it comes to such things," asserted his father. "What you ought to do is this. Drop all such questions and go to work. Get down to rock bottom and dig."

"Why?" I asked. "Aren't you working now, Cecil?"

He was silent. His father answered for him.

" One night," he explained, " he made a speech."

" The same old speech?"

" With slight variations. He became unduly elated, inflated in other words, by the compliments of these people who are in need of just such youthful fire-brands for the stirring up of the laborers to discontent. . . "

" And what then?"

" Why. Then the next morning, his employers, daring to give him some order or other, Cecil flared up, swore at them and left."

A flush rose to the roots of the boy's hair.

" They treated me like a dog," he muttered, " No man with a spark of independence in his soul would have stood it. Anybody would have sworn at them and left."

" Not when his bread and butter depended upon it," his father argued. " We owe a certain obedience—not servility—obedience to those in command, we who are privates; and I don't know

but what, since each naturally falls into his place as commander or private, there's justice in it. If you are born to command, you command. If you are born to follow, you follow. We are a great army, and in an army all cannot be lieutenants and captains. Most must be privates. There is quite as much credit in doing your duty as a private if you will only believe it, in closing up the ranks over the dead bodies and keeping a solid phalanx presented full-breasted to the enemies' fire."

"The dead bodies," cried Cecil. "That's just it. That's the point. There are too many dead bodies. There are too many ready and willing to trample them over, to take their places and fill in the ranks. It's not so much a fight to present a solid phalanx to the enemy as to keep enough bread and meat in your body to be able to stand up at all. In the army of life as in the army of the battle field fewer fall from the bullets of the enemy than from lack of provisions which should by rights be supplied to them while they fight."

He rose to his full height. I had never

before observed the exceeding smallness of his head, as compared with his height.

Involuntarily I brushed my hand across my eyes and looked again; for I had the fantastic impression for the moment that he was a snake uncoiling, capped by the little head, lighted by its strangely glittering, peculiarly pupiled eyes.

"I must be at a meeting by nine," he announced, taking out his watch and putting it back without looking at it. "If you are going home, I'll walk along that far with you."

"Don't hurry her off," objected his father.

"I'll go," I said. "Good-bye," to Mrs. Mallon, "and you," giving her husband my hand, "don't stay away so long the next time you go a traveling. We miss you."

The boy and I walked silently the few blocks between our homes, he with his long stride, I keeping up with him.

After a time he commenced to speak. With a delicate indirectness which produced somehow the impression that he was practiced in the art, he hinted at his

need of money, and later on, leading up to it with infinite tact and precaution, he suggested a loan.

By that time we were on the stoop.

I opened my pocketbook, took out a bill and handed it to him.

He folded it, put it into his vest pocket raised my hand to his lips, kissed it twice then walked down the steps, looking back up at me and smiling.

When he was quite out of sight I brushed the kiss off the back of my hand with my pocket handkerchief.

CHAPTER X.

IT was market day down in the slums. I edged my way along the sidewalks close to the push carts in the narrow path left between the jammed doorways and the curbs for those who walked.

The merchandise of the world was brought conveniently to the door by those carts. Laces, linens, ginghams, calicoes, apples, strawberries, cherries and fish. The man who sold onions was there. Likewise the man who sold garlic.

One held out a handful to me.

"Buy," he implored, but I turned and fled.

A swarthy youth took a handful of cherries from his cart and flung them into the lap of a dark haired girl who sat on a doorstep. She slowly munched them, laughing back at him, the ripe red of the cherries pressing the ripe red of her lips.

An old man stood knee deep in laces. At first glance he had the appearance of a cripple, but beneath the laces were his

legs. He stood in a cellar, the steps of which were his counters for the displaying of his goods.

Up and down the streets the push carts stood packed to the hilt, the hawkers yelling into the deafened ears of the passers by.

I left the crowd and turned into a quieter street. At the door of a house showing slight evidences of a desire to be clean there was a sign of rooms for rent. I entered and climbed to the top floor, where someone had said the janitress lived. Upon the opening of the door a round faced, cheery little woman of rotund proportions appeared. She showed me the room. It was a small room, full of flies, opening out on a dining room which was fuller yet of flies. In this room was a parrot. It squawked. Advancing, I stroked its head, a red topknot rubbed invitingly against the bars for stroking.

"Look out!" exclaimed the woman. "He'll bite!" and I jerked my finger away in the nick of time.

"He's a deceitful wretch," she explained. "He'll beg you to rub his

head, then bite you every time. Will you take the room?"

"I'll come back and let you know," I told her, but I knew I could not take that little room, so full of flies.

Further on, following the tinkle of a piano, I peeped into a half open door.

"Come in," said a voice.

I went in.

The Girl was at the piano playing dance music.

Another girl, at the head of a seemingly endless row of children, commenced to skip. The children, headed by a black haired child in a too-short dress and tight-curled ringlets, followed.

The girl led them around rows of benches, she circled a line, painted snake-like in the middle of the room, the children keeping as well as possible in the same line, all skipping, skipping, forty of them, for one—for I had counted them—with the girl.

By and by, out of breath, she stopped skipping; the music also stopped; she divided the children off into halves and took the younger of them with her across by the opposite windows of the long,

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narrow room.

The girl at the piano arose. She came forward.

" Perhaps you would rather see the babies," she suggested.

" What are these?" I asked.

None of them, it seemed to me, were over six.

" Oh, well, if you prefer to see my class," she smiled. " Sit here."

She gave me a chair and a girl about frying size rolled two immense Japanese curtains down from the ceiling, dividing the room into two. Through the tiny slats of these curtains I beheld the vision of phantom babies beginning to play with sand in shallow boxes set out before them by the girl who had skipped.

The six-year-olds took seats at benches built to suit their size, which was exceeding small. They ranged in a half square, at the open end of which was a promising toy wagon on four wheels.

Before disclosing the contents of this wagon the Girl walked slowly about, looking at their hands.

" Yours are rather clean this morning,

Sally," she said, " but Jane, I don't like yours. . . . . See your nails."

Jane, with drooped head, volunteered her explanation.

" What?" queried the Girl. " You haven't any soap? Nor any nail brush? I will give you soap, and take a tooth pick for your nails. That's very good. Go out and wash your hands, Jimmy. They are not clean at all."

Amid unconcealed merriment Jimmy went out to wash his hands, and the Girl, taking a seat in the infantile chair provided for her, motioned the first two children to the front.

They were a boy and a girl. The girl got up with an air, placed her hands across her belt after the manner of some great grandmother, who had chanced, perhaps, to wear satins, and stood before her, the boy at her side.

The Girl promptly took the hands off the belt and put into them a block which she had lifted out of the toy wagon.

" Build," she commanded.

The child placed the block on the floor in front of her.

The boy put one beside it.

Guided by the directions of the Girl, they built the solid foundation of one end of the bridge.

"That'll do," said she. "Come Sally and Johnny, you."

Sally and Johnny came slowly around the benches. Sally's curls were long. There were six of them. The two in front were tied with little bows of ribbon, fascinatingly pink. On their way a curl got entangled with a button on Johnny's cuff. Either that, or he pulled it.

"Ouch!" she cried, at which the Girl raised a warning finger.

"Johnny," she said sternly, "you behave!"

Then it was borne in upon me that the curl had not got entangled with the button on Johnny's cuff, but that he had pulled it.

The second two built an added ten inches to the foundation of the bridge. They laid four blocks sidewise and placed across them four more for the smoothness of the floor.

The building had been commenced by the children on the right. A child in an apron of the old blue worn by pinafored

children on our grandmother's plates, sat last in the row on the left.

She watched the privileged ones breathlessly, fearful lest the material give out before her time came around to lay on a block.

The Girl was obliged to keep her eyes open. It was necessary not only to oversee the building of the bridge, but to scrutinize carefully the would-be builders.

Johnny, for one, had grown obstreperous. He pulled corkscrew curls on either side of him until their possessors emitted ineffectually smothered screams of genuine anguish.

"Be quiet, Johnny," admonished the Girl.

And Johnny was quiet for a full half minute by the clock before he began pulling curls again.

While the third couple was busy building its portion of the foundation the rest were thrown into whirls of excitement by the advent of a youth of some five summers and a half, or maybe six.

He walked straight to the Girl and, erect as any toy soldier made of tin, his hat in hand, conversed with her for a

space. With his bright face topped by an abundant mop of hair of a cheerful red, he was like a little ray of stray sunlight leaked in.

Curly heads and shaved alike bobbed toward them, listening.

Impolitely, I essayed to listen too; but I was unable to understand, the conversation being carried on principally in the language of Babydom and Close Intimacy, a language well-known evidently to the Girl, but incomprehensible to me.

The building of the bridge went on.

Five couples, one after the other, had completed their fashioning of the foundation. Looking over into the wagon then, I saw to my consternation that the blocks had given out. I was not the only one concerned. Molly, of the old blue apron peeped sadly over too.

The corners of her infant mouth drooped.

What part were her hands to take in the building of that wonderful bridge?

But the Girl was resourceful. There were smaller blocks left in the bottom of the wagon. She took out two.

"Come, Charlie and Sue," she

motioned, "and build the steps."

Charlie and Sue built the steps with alacrity. Building steps was not like erecting a common foundation. It was the commencement of the finishing touch. They were accordingly undisguisedly proud.

However, they were not permitted to build all the steps. In that case there would hardly have been enough to go around. Only those at one side.

Another couple built those on the other side next to Molly, of the wide eyes and the bated breath and the fear that there would be none left for her.

The bridge seemed nearly built by now and a stately structure it was, led up to by steps; but there were surprises for us. There were triangular copings at juttings of the foundations, each placed there by the hand of a boy or a girl, and finally a toddling child in a pink dress over which hung a pinker apron, lacking two inches of reaching the hem, set on a splendid column at one corner, a fluted column with small fine squares at the bottom and at the top.

She lifted her hand lightly off, and

backing admiringly, said:

"There!"

She walked with arrogant footsteps to her seat where she whispered to the boy by her, while another girl put another column at another end.

The Girl looked suddenly up.

"Johnny," she said—in my absorption I had forgotten to observe Johnny—"You can bring your chair now and sit right here by me."

Johnny rebelliously raised his chair and placed it next to her. He took his seat there, and rolling up his sleeve bit viciously at his bare arm, glaring over it at the little girl, the pulling of whose curls had been the means of his degradation.

Other fluted columns had been added so that the bridge thus adorned at all four corners, to say nothing of the centers, on both sides presented an appearance bordering upon magnificence.

The Girl, turning her head, regarded it critically.

"Come here, Lucy," she said, "you and Tom."

Lucy and Tom came. She handed them a curious block rounded over at the top.

Standing irresolutely, first on one foot and then on the other, they stared at her appealingly.

"Move two columns up as far as the steps of the bridge," she said, "and put that ornament over them."

They did so. Then they, too, backed away.

Really, it was growing to be a most beautiful bridge.

Two others ornamented in like manner the opposite entrance to the bridge, and it appeared to be finished.

Molly's short legs dangled disconsolately from her little chair. A tear came to her eye. Was the bridge finished then? Wasn't there a single block left for her to add to the beauty of it?

Not one that she could see; but she had not counted on the Magic Unexpectedness of the Girl. In the curve of her palm she held a curious block, more beautiful in the quaintness of its carving than all the rest.

"Molly!" she called.

Molly, springing up, ran quickly to her.

She gave her the block.

The Girl indicated the cornice at the entrance of the bridge. Upon the top—I had not noticed it—there was a square spot left for the placing of this block.

Molly lifted high the block. Daintily she set it on, propped it for the space of a thrilling moment between the smallness of her two palms, then left it balanced, a tall, exquisite spiral thing, topping the entrance, completing the decoration, finishing the construction of this work of art so marvelously beautiful.

Presto! What skill! What architecture!

The splendor of it mirrored itself in the shine of twenty pairs of eyes.

And the Girl sat there in her little chair, like a serene young sphinx, calm of eye and tranquil, her elbow on her knee, her finger on her lip, surveying her handiwork with quiet pleasure, simple, unaffected and sweet, as if she were not helping to build the invisible bridge from Squalor, Degradation and Poverty, across to Civilization.

CHAPTER XI.

NABLE to work on those stories that were lacking, I haunted the slums. That morning they were one vast sweatshop. The sun blazed down on the writhing mass of it, scorching the bare heads of the women and the tangled curls of the children, swarming in droves.

Featherbeds bulged from fire escapes, wagon wheels deafened, dogs gave sharp quick yelps and hushed again, leaving the atmosphere comparatively free for the screams of the children.

Rows of half dressed tailors reaching back to the dimness of rear doors, bent over their stitching. In other shops similar rows of doubled-up girls worked listless sewing machines. But the interest for me centered in the thriving enterprise of the cellar doors.

In one stood a girl with bushy hair. She was surrounded by small bags of wheat, of meal, of corn, which she sold by cupfuls.

I stopped to talk to her. She shook

her head and pressed a finger to a silent lip. Mine was an unknown language.

Two old women, encompassed about by loaves of bread containing ominous seed of some unknown variety, likewise failed to understand; while near them a group of men gesticulated violently, discussing, I thought, the advisability of a third Presidential term—in a foreign language, the only language known to them.

A man stood complacently in a third cellar door. About him were pickles of every size, shape and variety. Small pickles and large pickles and pickles in jars; but mostly pickles in great wooden pails, swimming in vinegar of the palest, pickles which he also dipped out by cupfuls for the pickle-loving crowd.

"May I ask what you pay for the precious privilege of this cellar door?" I asked, with winning suaveness.

His mouth opened. His jaw dropped. "Huh!" he ejaculated.

I turned away. Evidently the case was hopeless. I might almost as well have been in a foreign country, so few of them understood.

The herring man was more loquacious. Added to which he spoke some dozen words in English. He sat hemmed in by herring barrels, unsavory and old. They were ranged some three feet from the bare wall of a house.

" I pay ten dollar a month for these place," he told me.

It was enough. The place was three feet by seven, not more, an oblong bit of the sidewalk, cut off by the barrels.

" And what do you do at night?" I asked. " Just leave them out for people to steal?"

No. He put boards over the barrels and fastened them down with padlocks. " Then where do you sleep?"

He jerked a horned thumb indefinitely toward the left.

" In a house," he said.

I backed away in surprise.

" No," I exclaimed, " not in a house!"

" Yes," he reasserted, " in a house," but I was not so sure. A certain vacillation of manner and expression somehow left me with the impression that he slept on the boards.

" Do you always make your ten

dollars rent. Say?"

He shrugged dusty shoulders.

"Nearly always."

"And much more?"

"Not much more now. They no buy much herring these weather."

"Why?"

"It's too warrum."

Suddenly lapsing into his vernacular, he began talking to me. There was no telling what he was saying; so I came rapidly away, walked along a street whose fire escapes bulged with unusual violence—a good sign of a choice quality of slums—and stopping before another cellar door, looked down upon the cheerful occupation of rag picking.

The cellar was cut in two in the middle. On one side was a shoemaker's shop, on the other the rag pickers. A man with black beard and a face to match sorted black and white rags from a giant bag situated at his feet. The white rags he put in one pasteboard box, and the black rags he put into another. Back of him, piled high and close together, were bags and bags above which dark haired, dark eyed men bent sorting the rags.

" Where do you get all these rags?" I enquired, descending a step, and peeping fearfully in.

Unless you ask, how are you ever to find out?

The man looked at me blankly; but the shoemaker left his work and advanced with a polite shuffle.

" He no speak English," he informed me, and in a quality of English so fractured as to be long past the stage where there was the slightest possibility of mending, he gave me a history of the rags.

The tailors made them presents of them. Our good American tailors, these were, of clean New York. Then they sorted the cloth and separated it from the cotton and sold both to the factories for coin.

Nothing was wasted, he assured me. It was a great industry, this selling of rags.

I thanked him and left the doorstep, watched a group of nearly naked children scrambling for strawberries dropped beneath the wheels of a strawberry cart, then walked on and on and

on down a street lined with pushcarts, ablaze with ragged awnings, red and white umbrellas and the faded pink of dresses worn by the fish wives, by the fruit venders, by the aged sellers of lace.

In one cart fresh eggs slowly cooked in the broil of the sun, in another plums ripened, in still another I found the brilliant red of cherries shadowed surprisingly and artistically by refreshing twigs of green.

Yards of cheap goods spread themselves out flat on the pavement, glaring hosiery depended from banisters, women sat prone on the pavement along with the goods, their wares in large baskets before them, or on their laps, and in an awningless cart three rows of china dolls gazed helplessly up at the sun.

Old women with brown wigs capping brown faces sold hairpins and needles and thread, girls at miniature soda fountains sold soda water, and boys dangled shoestrings, their upturned, imploring faces, like the faces of the dolls, baking in the sun.

I passed a bronzed, bloused fisherman. He pointed to a planked shad,

flattened out in the glare.

"It's goin' for nodding," he declared, disgustedly.

"If it don't go pretty soon," said I, "it will cook."

The sun was the only one doing any cooking apparently. Though it was high noon I saw no preparations going on for lunch. Presumably the fish wives ate raw fish, the fruit venders gobbled up their fruit and the lace makers munched on portions of their least delicate lace.

My head ached with the heat of the mid-day; but they seemed to revel in it. Italians, many of them, all natives of a warmer clime, they were in their element The perspiration poured from their reddened countenances. Some wiped it away. Others let it stay, not noticing that it poured, smiling feebly through its enervating rain.

Like the negroes of the south, they not only enjoyed the heat, but they gloried in uncleanliness, in shiftlessness, in poverty.

What they needed was strong, sweet breaths of country air; for people are like animals. Give them enough elbow

room and they will be fairly decent. Huddled in pens they descend naturally to uncleanliness and to its boon companion, vice.

Still, given the freedom of some fine country, I doubted if they would avail themselves of it. With them, as with the negroes of the South, companionship compensated for fresh air. It pleased them to see themselves reflected in the mirrors of each others eyes. No matter how small a part they played they must play it before the footlights on the other side of which sat an audience packed and jammed to the galleries of the gods.

I stood by a cart buying some cherries. Those about me discussed me freely in their own language. Having lived in France awhile, I was accustomed to that; but two spoke in English. They were two young men, red cheeked and robust.

"That's my sweetheart," said one.

"She's not," retorted the other, "she's mine."

But before they had time to decide the matter between them I had got my cherries and had gone.

The gate of the elevated was conveniently open. Embracing the opportunity I walked in without paying my fare.

"Is this a Harlem train?" I asked the conductor of the train which had just then stopped.

"All north-bound trains," he remarked wearily, in a manner which carried with it some reproach, "are Harlem trains."

But how was I to know that?

Inside I sat by a fresh-cheeked girl with a big bunch of roses in her lap.

She was next to the window. The wind blew in in whiffs.

The odor of those roses thus wafted to me was sweet after the sweatshop of the slums.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. TRONT opened the iron door of the basement for me.

"Well, how does this happen?" I exclaimed. "What are you doing awake in the daytime?"

"Once in a while," he explained, "I crawl out of my shell and take a look at the sun."

"Is lunch over?"

"Not quite. Some of them are in there yet."

The ice man was there with his wife, a small young woman with auburn hair and a voice that tinkled. He went always by the name of "ice man" with us in spite of the fact that he was handsome as a picture, and dressed invariably in the latest style.

"Bring me ice, Ida," I said to the maid, "and plenty of it. I'm dying of thirst. And what are these at my plate? Rejected manuscripts, rejected manuscripts, rejected manuscripts!" Ah! Pins, too! I wish I could stick pins in

these editors who stick pins in manuscripts."

"Never mind," they consoled, "it will all come out in the wash."

"It's a fine day for the slums," they added. "Why on earth did you pick such a day? Why not wait till wintertime?"

"If you are looking for slaves," said the ice man, "you don't have to go to the slums. Just gaze on me. If you knew what a time I have collecting my money after I earn it you wouldn't waste your pity on the slums. Of course, I know, everybody wants to be the ice man, but it ain't what it's cracked up tc be, I can tell you that. Why, there's a doctor up here in Harlem who has been owing us an ice bill of fourteen dollars for four years. But the ice has all melted. What's the use paying for it? The time I have had trying to collect that bill. I have sent boy after boy. No good. He isn't in. If they see his hat hanging in the hall, he isn't in. If they catch glimpses of his coat tails vanishing through the back door, no, he isn't in."

" After so long a time I put up a scheme on him. Finding out his office hours—a doctor has to be in his office hours if he's in at all—I lined up our whole force, thirty-two office boys and thirty-two wagons, on his street. The first boy drove to his door, jumped out, ran up, rang the bell and presented his bill. He was put off with some excuse. The second boy followed suit. With the same result. Then another and still another, till the entire thirty-two had passed in solemn procession, single file, like wagons belonging to a side show, by his house, to the intense entertainment of some score of people at windows on the opposite side of the street.

" Do you suppose it fazed him? Not at all. He probably went around explaining to his neighbors that the ice had been used, there was accordingly nothing to show for it, and that was why. Then they sympathized with him, and called me a brute. He owes us that ice bill to this day, and what's more, he'll keep on owing it if he lives till the Day of Judgment and the blowing of the horn.'

" We had another customer nearer

down town. She was a woman. She lived in a tenement house with several hundred others. Somehow she managed to run up considerable of a bill before we caught onto her. Then we tried to collect it, with the usual luck. We sent man after man. Each came back worsted. Finally we sent a fellow who appeared to have all the ear marks of a good collector. He stayed for hours. When he came back he was as white as a ghost, and the perspiration was running off his face in slabs. He dropped into the nearest chair and sat there half fainting. We threw water on him, he came to and told us about it.

" The woman, he said, had met him at the door with a pleasant smile which went a long way toward assuring him at once of his money. She had said ' Are you the ice man? ' and upon receiving a reply to the effect that he was, she had said further, ' Come right on in.'

" To all intents and purposes he felt the jingle of her money in his pocket. But things like that, he added, were things you couldn't always sometimes tell about.

" However, he went in, and she, back of him, shut and double locked the door. He looked at her in some amazement; but coming to the conclusion that she had at one time or another had difficulties with brutal burglars, he waited till she got things fastened to suit her taste and followed her into the parlor.

" There, to his infinite amazement, she also shut and locked that door. He began to tremble, thereupon, a little, but being fairly nervy he took a seat at her instigation, and the performance commenced. She told him the story of her life, beginning at the beginning. It was a sad story, but he was not much interested in it. He was more interested in collecting the ice bill. Once or twice he edged the subject neatly in, but she waived him off with delicate tact and went on back to the subject she had in hand.

" At length she let slip one remark or another that led him to doubt her sanity and made him afraid. Then she went to the drawer of her desk and brought out autographs of all the Presidents from George Washington down to the present

day, declaring that they had, one and all, of them kindly written them for her at her request, and his hair stood up. She looked old, but not one hundred and twenty-five years old, as she must have been if the Presidents from George Washington down, had written her their autographs as she had claimed.

"He was more than once upon the point of tears, telling us of his subsequent emotions and the tragic maneuvers to which he was obliged to resort to in order to get out of that house. She watched him like a cat, and it was only in her absence in the next room, where she had gone for an inadvertant instant to hunt up more Presidential signatures that he made a run for his life, unbolted the front door, unlocked the locks and skipping down the steps three at a time, made for the street.

"Since then he has gone out of the ice business and we have scratched the woman's name off our books. Not a man in the house will attempt to collect that bill; so she still owes it and will go on owing it till the end of time.

"People who would like to be the ice

man ought to try it awhile first and see."

"Was it any special day that you went down in the slums?" enquired Muriel. "Market day or anything?"

"Every day is market day, it seems to me," I replied. "No. I'm studying it. That's all. I'm trying to find a room down there if I can."

"You'd better stay where you are," interrupted the ice man. "Take a bird's eye view. There are tenements, if you want tenements, closer. We are in daily communication with them. We supply ice to them, and the trouble we have settling up our accounts! Talk of the trouble in the slums! For instance, Mrs. Eikstein on the fifth floor will order thirty-five pounds of ice. Then Mrs. Jacobs on the third floor will order twenty-five pounds. Then Mrs. Solomon on the first floor will order ten.

"The ice man puts them all on the dumb waiter and starts them up.

"The dumb waiter stops at the first floor, that is to say, at the flat of Mrs. Solomon. What does she do but take the big thirty-five pound piece of ice belonging to Mrs. Eikstein, and shove it

into her refrigerator.

" The dumb waiter, not being able to talk, says nothing, but goes on up to the third floor, where Mrs. Jacobs arrests it and takes off the next biggest piece of ice, weighing twenty-five pounds. Then what is left for Mrs. Eikstein on the fifth floor but the little, tiny ten pound piece which had been ordered by the scheming Mrs. Solomon on the first floor of all ?

" And Mrs. Eikstein had ordered the thirty-five pound piece?

" The squealing when it comes to settling up those bills! Lord!"

His wife chimed in.

" We've only been married a little while," said she, " and as I had nothing to do all day but sit around and mope, waiting for Jack, they gave me a job at the office. I was to take the old bills around and get what I could for them, you understand, anything they would be kind enough to offer me and let it go at that.

" The first one they sent me to was a woman who had been owing a bill for a year or two. She was out. She didn't

live very far, though, so I went home and loafed about with my hat on till close on to five o'clock, when I was sure she would be in. Nearly everybody is apt to be in, you know, somewhere about five o'clock.

"She was in all right enough. I wished afterward she hadn't been. She came to the door herself.

"'Are you the woman from the ice factory?' she asked.

"'I am,' I answered, and was upon the point of drawing out my bill and presenting it when she grabbed me by the arm, jerked me into the hall, and commenced to call me every awful name she could lay her tongue to. She nearly scared me to death. I broke away from her and ran. When I got home I was laid up for three days with a doctor's bill as long as my arm, from sheer fright. I didn't try to collect any more bills after that, I can tell you. They'll fall to pieces of age before I'll do any more collecting; because the older they are, the madder they get at you for trying to collect them."

"It does seem to be so," assented her

husband. " We have a pretty hard time of it. Still there are some customers who even up things by paying. I had one. A doctor. The best fellow I ever knew. He owed me five dollars. I went around after it one morning when I was short of cash. He was tending a bad case of delirium tremens at the time. The man was some better. He sat in the front room looking innocent as you please, but oh, my! Butter wouldn't have melted in his mouth, to look at him, but wait till I tell you. The doctor started off into the next room.

" ' See to this fellow for me a minute, Jack,' " he said, ' while I write you out a cheque.'

" ' All right,' I answered, ' I will.'

" With that I stood off and looked at the fellow, not expecting any excitement to speak of; but what you expect and what you get in this old world are hardly ever one and the same thing. He wasn't gone half a minute before the man began to see things. Then I had to hold him. His eyes got wild, he stared at me as if I were some green-eyed monster, then commenced slowly to pull yards and

yards and yards of invisible things and throw them back of him. When he got tired of pulling them—and they were the longest snakes I ever saw in my life—he stretched skinny claws out, grasping the air. I looked for the things he was trying to grasp. I could almost see them.

"Toads! Frogs! Young alligators! Reptiles with fangs! Crocodiles!

"By the time that doctor got back I was as white about the gills as the man himself—a physical wreck.

"If I ever earned a five dollar cheque in the ice business," he added reminiscently, "I earned it then."

"How about the undertakers," I asked. "Aren't they good customers?"

"Oh well, yes, as a rule, pretty good; but they want to Jew you down to the last notch. They use car loads of ice, but half the time they don't want to pay you for the trouble of hauling it."

He leaned back in a tired way a moment, rose and pushed away his chair.

"As I say," he repeated, "it ain't what it's cracked up to be, this being the ice man."

CHAPTER XIII.

RS. MALLON had been taken suddenly ill. We were sitting up with her, her sister Jane, Cecil and I.

She lay stretched in her darkened bedroom. We sat in the dining-room, talking, Cecil tilted back in his chair, his pipe alight.

"Are you really going to the slums?" asked his Aunt Jane.

"I can tell you," answered Cecil. "No. She is studying it at long range."

"That," I retorted, "is better than lecturing on it and not studying it at all."

Turning to his aunt:

"I can't tell," I added. "The College Settlement people won't let me come down there. I might interfere with the peculiar order of refinement they are engaged in distributing. It might get mixed, you know. That wouldn't do at all. And I can't find a room I could live in. Besides, so far as I can discover, just looking on, those people are not deserving of much sympathy. They

are satisfied with their condition. They rather enjoy it than otherwise, it seems to me."

Cecil prodded down the ashes in his pipe and laughed.

"It amuses me," he said, "to hear Dolly air her opinion of the slums. Enjoy living in sweatshops, roosting under cart awnings in the broiling sun, bending over sewing machines!"

"Go down there and see," I suggested. "Watch them laughing and chatting across to each other from cart to cart, holding their month-old infants up for the admiration of their friends—if a slum woman couldn't raise her baby out in broad day light, she wouldn't raise it at all—flirting between bites of cherries, chasing each other up and down in an occasional game of hide and seek, chastising the kids with industrious slippers before the gaze of the world. They have their own fun out of life. It's not all sack cloth and ashes by any manner of means.

"Then compare them with the old country. They are not worse off. They are not half as bad off. You find

the poor sprawling over London, not in particular spots, slums, but all over, every where. Market day in Houston Row is worse than any market day in our slums; Seven Dials is only a stone's throw from the lights of the Palace Theatre; go three blocks in most directions from Regent Street and Bond, and you find slums disreputable as those of the east side, and more so, impossible slums, packed and jammed with blear-eyed paupers, soiled children strung in rows, like small black pearls, hand in hand. . . What's that?"

They listened.

"It's Margaret, groaning," decided her sister. "There. She's stopped. . . You surprise me about London. I thought it was a rich and beautiful city."

"Rich enough, and beautiful, too, with its marvelous scheme of color, generated by the fogs; but the poor! Somebody has said that where you find exaggerated riches, there you find exaggerated poverty. London is a city of beggars. They stand on every street corner, holding out their hands. They petition you at the door of your cab.

They stand at your porch step and beg. No matter where you go you walk between an avenue of dingy, outstretched palms, grimy as the city itself, with its soot and its fog.

"What's this sudden apparition? She frightens me. One minute she is laid out apparently; the next she gets up and walks around."

"What is it, Margaret?" called her sister. "Do you want anything?"

"Never mind," returned Margaret, from the adjoining room. "I've got it now."

"How about the Paris slums?" enquired her sister.

"Paris is like her demi monde, who walk the streets exquisitely dressed, with hardly sufficient warmth of under-clothing to keep off the cold. She conceals her poverty. The poor are not allowed to beg. They are not permitted to moan, to wail, to stretch forth petitioning palms as in London, to annoy the passer-by with their lamentations. The real poverty of Paris is that of the little students in the Latin Quarter, who hide themselves in attics, who live on

a pittance, who frequently starve and starve heroically in the cause of art. You see them lounging about the galleries of the Louvre, not so much watching the paintings by great masters, as trying to keep warm. You see them wrapped in their artist's cloaks after dark, curled up on benches, trying to sleep. You see them everywhere, starving decently, bravely keeping up appearances till the last.

"As for the streets, they are clean of paupers, that is to say, beggars, as our Fifth Avenue. I walked for miles one day along the quays beneath the bridges, looking for paupers. I found them like the floors of kitchens as to cleanliness, swept diligently with brooms. A few men shaving dogs under the eye of their anxious masters, and fishermen, and that was all. There she is again, walking about as usual."

"She's a queer patient," remarked her sister. "Is there anything I can do for you, Margaret?"

"Nothing now," came the reply.

"I went out to Auteuil," I continued, "looking for poverty. It was as clean

out there. I found some people living rather poorly in boat houses along the Seine, but they were clean. No matter how poor French people are, they are clean. It's a pity you can't say as much for the English paupers. Nothing brought a single pang, with the exception of a girl of fourteen, who led a party of four children through an acrobatic performance in the chill fall air, and looked as if she had been whipped. Her eyes were red. Her cheeks were splotched by moppings of wet handkerchiefs. . .

" But as for Italy. No words can describe the poverty of that exquisite country, the land of beggars, cripples, slums and art. They demand money at every step. They scream at you. They run after you, screaming. It is as much as your life is worth in some places to pass through without distributing alms. The inhabitants of our slums are largely Italians. . . "

" And Jews and Japanese and Chinese and every nation under the sun, you might say," interrupted Cecil.

" What right have they to dump

themselves on our shores, to over-run us with their inherited Continental thriftlessness, to cheapen our labor with the pauperism of their wage slavery?" I demanded. "Why should they be allowed to deluge us with their ignorance? Not only that, but to run our country, practically, with the power we put into their hands of voting?"

Cecil tilted back his chair till his head struck the wall.

"I like to hear Dolly discuss politics," he laughed. "Talk about ignorance!"

Most people talked on most subjects with dense ignorance, according to Cecil, with the exception of himself, so without further cavil I waived the question.

"That is the way I feel about it part of the time," I continued, "but nearly always it leaves me with an ache. Go where you will you find the poverty of the world, the sorrow of the world, sorrow you find it possible to endure sometimes, and then again that rocks you helplessly back and forth and leaves you staring at the ceiling till the early dawn comes stealing in and lighting up the pattern of the paper on the wall. If

you would live, you must drown it. You must forget. Above all, if you would be happy, you must steel your heart and shut your eyes to the memories that stalk in the day, in the dawn, but most of all in the wee small hours, dark, mysterious and still as death, for the passing of their footsteps. Who is it said that back of every happiness there lies an open window, through which there steals a breath that chills the soul? It is true. It is true. So back of the happiness of the world there lies this open window of the sorrow of the world, of the poverty of the world, through which come breaths that chill our hearts and souls to freezing."

We sat in silence, Cecil for once neglecting to retort, peering instead into the room out of which a tall white figure came drifting, looming up in the dark.

It tilted forward and his mother stood in the doorway.

"There's nothing like having your friends around to take care of you," she stammered. "This is the third time I have had to get up and get my medicine myself."

We scattered precipitately, putting her back to bed, fanning her, waiting zealously upon her in the effort to compensate for our negligence.

Later on her sister looked near-sightedly at the clock.

"It is time for me to go," she said. "Will you stay with her a little while longer?"

"A little while," I replied.

She went.

Cecil disappeared into his own room and reappeared presently, his necktie freshly tied, his hat in hand.

"Will you stay with mother?" he asked in a whisper, "till I come back?"

"If you don't stay too long," I told him.

I stayed with her. I stayed for hours. The clock struck twelve. It struck one. She was restless. She suffered intensely. I gave her medicine. I bathed her face. I put cold cloths on her brow. All to no avail. It seemed impossible to ease her suffering.

I sat by her fanning through the heat of the oppressive June night, listening to her moans, distressed by their sound and

by my helplessness.

It was near on to three before he returned. Hearing his footstep I walked to the light and confronted him. In the unexpected flare of the electric his eyes gleamed, distended.

They were more than ever like the eyes of a cat.

"She is ill," I complained, "frightfully ill, but you, you are absolutely without heart. I don't believe you would care if she were dying."

CHAPTER XIV.

AT the door of the breakfast room I stopped, my hand on the knob, looking through the hall into the kitchen where Mr. Tront sat sprawled on a chair, asleep. The helpless abandon of his attitude gave me the heartache. I opened the door and took my seat at the table, where I opened my rejected manuscripts as usual and read the printed slips. I was engaged in mentally swapping stories, for "What will not suit the requirements of one editor often suits the requirements of another," and vice versa, when a sharp voice from the kitchen broke in upon my revery.

"Get up from here," it said, "you shan't come down here and sleep in the kitchen like this. Get up. Go on up stairs."

I heard shuffling footsteps shambling along the hall and ascending the stairs.

Then Mrs. Tront came smilingly into the dining-room.

"Is there anything you want?" she

asked.

There was, but I had lived at boarding houses long enough to refrain from wasting unnecessary breath, so I answered:

" No, thank you," adding. " It's a shame the way you talk to that dog of yours. I should think some fine morning he'd pick up and leave."

She puckered her eyebrows into a frown.

" I wasn't talking to the dog," she returned, " I was talking to my husband.

" Oh!" said I.

On the way upstairs I met the chorus girl. We had had merely a bowing and smiling acquaintance, her hours for meals being different from mine; but now she showed a strong inclination to be affable. I had always wanted to ask her a few questions in regard to her stage costumes, but considering the extreme scarcity of them, I had been afraid.

" Come in," I entreated, " and stay with me while I straighten up my room. The housemaid is supposed to do it, you know, but she never gets in till somewhere about the middle of the afternoon, so I do it myself. Is she like that with

you?"

"The same," she answered, taking a chair and looking about at the bric-a-brac and things.

"You've got a nice room," she said presently. "Mine is a little two by six on the top floor, but I'm hardly ever in it, so it doesn't much matter. We have to put up with a lot of things, we chorus girls."

"Tell me," I implored. "The first time you went on the stage, did you feel the ghastly sensation of wishing to grasp your skirts and pull them down, when there weren't any skirts to pull? I've heard some say they do."

"Not on your Life," she retorted. "By the time you have passed the examination, stood up before twenty men in a row, and had your good and bad points criticised as if you were deaf, dumb, blind and hadn't any feeling or interest in the matter whatever, you don't care so much as you might for the opinion of the general public. By the time they have half closed twenty pairs of keen, cold eyes, looked you over as if you were a senseless two-year-old, and said, 'Gunning,

you're a little off on the left side there. Pad,' or 'You're a bit too big in the waist. Lace!' you've about got over any little squeamishness you may have possessed, before you've had time to stand up and face the audience."

"Do you stand the examination dressed just as you are now?"

"Yes."

"I don't see for the life of me how they tell what you are going to look like in tights," said I. "Not for the life of me."

"They can't," she averred. "Nobody can ever tell how a girl is going to look in tights from her looks out of them. The managers may hold your arm all they want to, hold it till they are tired, but they'll only know as much as they did before. Anyway, what's the difference? Out of twenty-four girls in our chorus twenty-two wear symmetricals."

"And what?" I questioned, "are symmetricals?"

The girl looked at me disgustedly.

"Don't you know? They are the figures of the chorus girls. They buy them for so much and put them on."

I nearly let a vase fall, I laughed so.

" And what about the bald heads?" I
asped.

" It's good enough for them," declared
ıe chorus girl. " They sit in the front
ɔw and gaze beamingly at them, those
ymmetricals, and smile and giggle and
udge each other and ogle. They
ıight as well ogle so many rows of wax
gures, if they only knew it; but they
on't know it, so what harm does it do?
hey are just as well off, and those sym-
ıetricals help many a poor girl into the
horus who would be selling matches in
ıe street if it wasn't for them."

She leant back in her rocker, crossed
ne foot over the other and swung it in a
elicately reminiscent way.

" I shall never forget a new girl who
ıme into the chorus one night," she
egan, " looking as near like a dream as
girl in split tights could. She was per-
ct. Absolutely. I never saw such a
gure on anybody, and the rest of the
irls said the same. We were green
ith envy, the whole twenty-three of us.
Ve said, ' Now, we are done for. That
irl'll stand up before the footlights and

take the looking at away from every last one of us. That's what she'll do. We won't be in it.'

"It is exactly what she did, but we laid for her. One night she came in without her symmetricals, and we sized her up. Of all the figures! We didn't say a word about it. Oh, no!"

I had finished dusting by now, and was sitting at my typewriter table, cleaning my machine.

"You work pretty hard at that, don't you?" said she. "I hear it going every time I go by the door."

"It isn't so bad," I told her. "Some days I write a story and get a lot of money for it. Then other days I write one and never sell it at all. It's a gamble, all around, but you don't put any capital in it. Your brains, that's all. Then unexpected things happen. The other day, for instance, I raked up a two-year-old manuscript, recopied it and sold it for a dandy price. So there's no telling but any of my old stuff lying promiscuously about might be worth dead loads of money. If I could get the editors to think as I do about it, it would all

be worth its weight in gold."

She laughed.

"Nobody's life is all strawberries and cream," she reasoned. "We've most of us got our tales of woe. If you think you'd like to be a chorus girl,"—I never had thought it, not for a single minute—"you ought to try making a lightning change once, with the accommodations usually given to the chorus girl. This is what we have to do. Our rooms are on the top floor. They always are. We have, therefore, to run up five flights of stairs to undress. We begin undressing on the way up. We have then to change from tights to skirts, change slippers, stockings, neckties and gloves, hook our bodices—always fastened in the back—and run down again, all in the limited space of five minutes by the clock.

"Imagine twenty-four girls tearing up-stairs at breakneck speed in a jumbled row, unbuttoning each other's bodices as they run, then leaping back down again, buttoning them.

"Often I have gone on the stage, smiling and bowing fit to kill, with my bodice as wide open in the back as the

dried skin of a grasshopper; because, you see, I was first off and last on, and there was nobody back of me to button it."

"How much do you get a week?" I asked.

"Eighteen dollars, but if you are not careful, about half of it goes one way and another in fines and that. If there's a tear in your tights—and you have to keep them mended yourself, mind you—you are fined fifty cents. If your skirts are not span clean—you can fancy what the laundry bills are for lace skirts with a dozen ruffles—another fine, fifty cents. If you don't get on the stage in time, fifty cents. If you get off too quickly, fifty cents. It doesn't take very many of these fifty centses to make some dollars, if you want to know, and they seem to try and see how often they can fine you. If you turn around they fine you. If you don't turn around they fine you. So there you are."

It suddenly dawning upon her that I was waiting to commence work, she rose to go.

"I know," she said wistfully, at the door, "to see a girl standing up before

the footlights, serene and blooming in pink tights, a yellow wig and a pleasant smile, you'd think her life was one long, radiant dream; but that's just where you'd find yourself very much mistaken," she finished, and sighed.

CHAPTER XV.

I STOOD still, watching a woman of the slums go upstairs. Her movements were peculiar. They were old-worldish. She bent double, so completely double, that I thought she was a cripple, until she stood comparatively erect on the first landing. In her right hand was a glass of milk. It was the holding of this milk to keep it from spilling, which had exaggerated her contortions.

I followed in her footsteps in search of a room. In the apartment of the janitress a child stopped cooking the late breakfast, or early lunch, and volunteered to show me the vacant room which was situated, as ordinarily, at the top of the house among the chimneys.

As usual, too, it was an impossible room. I was coming despairingly down, when a door burst open on the second landing, and the janitress pushed a young girl violently out.

"Go," she cried. "You no pay rent. You no stay."

The girl shrank against the wall, her apron to her face. She sobbed convulsively. I could not bear to hear her sob. It was like the gasping distress of a hurt child.

I went up to her and took the apron away. Her eyes had the look of a hunted animal. They ran over with tears. The cheeks were flushed and mottled, but the face was as pretty as a picture.

" What's the matter?" I queried.

" I have no work. . . " sobs punctuated the sentences. " Nobody will give me work now." The " now " was pitiful. " So how can I pay my rent?"

The apron went back to the eyes and she once more sobbed.

I thought a little while, then:

" You can come with me, if you will," I said. . . . . "I think I know of a place where they will take you. I am almost sure."

She drew away the apron and looked at me as if she had not quite understood.

" Come with me," I repeated, " and I will find you a home."

In her room was a satchel, in which she

packed what few belongings she had left from the pawn shop, and it was not long before we were out in the street on our way to the elevated.

Though she had on a little cape, which partly hid her, she shrank from glances. She was hatless, but that was not remarked in the slums, where hats are the exception to the rule. It was only when we reached the elevated that they looked hard at us, first at her with her yellow hair bared in the sun and then at me.

In the car I glanced at her, sitting so demurely by me, with her frightened air and her startled, hunted eyes, trying to think how she had drifted to the slums. She was not Italian, Japanese, nor yet Jewish. She was my sister, a country-woman, an American.

"What is your name?" I questioned by and by.

"Elsie Rysner."

"And you are not very old, are you?"

"I am just eighteen." She looked younger and her ways were those of a child.

As we whirled on she brightened per-

ceptibly. It was as if she were on the frolic of a vacation, her trouble for the moment half forgotten.

"How clean it is here," she said, looking out on the streets towards the west. "I am not used to the slums. I haven't been there long. Once I lived over with the clean, white people; not so very long ago, a few months only, until they wouldn't let me sew there any longer.

"Then I sewed in the slums, till they wouldn't let me sew there any longer, either," and her trouble coming back in a rush of memories, her voice died away in the choke of a sob.

"You can tell me all about it sometime," I soothed, "not now. We must see what is best for you to do. I know a hospital near the river, kept by the Little Sisters of Misery. It is a big red building, with a sort of a tower. I will show it to you, but you must go to it alone.

"I know the place well. It is kept for just such girls as you. If you go to them and tell them quite simply that you are destitute, that you have nothing and no friends, they will take you in and

keep you through your trouble. I will stand outside a little way off, and watch and see. If it should be that there is no room—and it sometimes happens—we will have to think of some other plan, some other thing to do."

I helped her down the steps at our station. We walked toward East River.

A block away from the Little Sister of Misery I stopped and she went on alone.

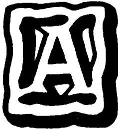
She approached the hospital, wistfully looking up at the windows of the tall brick building. I saw her slowly ascend the steps and lean against the door, waiting.

By and by someone came. She talked to them, her light head moving pleadingly as she talked. I saw her turn her face, nod brightly at me, and enter.

The door closed on her.

Then I came away home.

CHAPTER XVI.



DAY later I, too, went up the steps of the hospital kept by the Little Sisters of Misery, looking at the name printed in large gilt letters in the glass over the door.

While I awaited a response to my knock I watched two of the little sisters emptying ashes, bringing them out from the side gate and dumping them into the street. No occupation was too menial for these little sisters. They emptied ashes as gracefully as they led processions to mass or told their beads.

At length the door opening four inches or more, disclosed a small face about which were white bands, coffin-shaped, further enveloped in the long black veil worn by the nuns.

"What is it?" asked the little sister.

"I should like to see Elsie Rysner," I said.

"The young girl who came yesterday?"

"Yes."

She opened the door wide enough to let me in, but no wider, and clanking great brass chains, fastening it, she stood and looked at me.

"Are you her friend?" she enquired.

"Yes," I answered, as before, awed by her demeanor, her dense blackness of garb, and the dimness of the hall into which she had admitted me, from which ran other halls, leading into rooms full of pictures of saints and statues of Madonnas, surrounded by luxuriant growths of flowers and ferns.

She gave me a seat in a square room bare-floored and sparse enough as to furniture, with upright chairs, one divan, and an old-fashioned square piano in the corner; but neat as wax and much polishing by nimble fingers could make it. . . . . .

Leaving me there she went soft-footed to a consultation with superiors in regard to Elsie and me and as to my seeing her.

Other soft-footed nuns passed by the doors in sedate and solemn rows. From below or above, it was impossible to say which, came the sound of subdued chanting. I thought I smelt incense.

quiet, the peace of the place sank
my soul. I could have sat there for
s, letting life roll by like a slow and
quil river, my mind and heart
ied by the grateful inertia of
body, at rest.
r and by the little nun came back
led me through a great wide hall and
stairway in process of being
bbed by a neat girl with rich brown
ls and sleeves rolled to the elbow,
e long ward where Elsie was.
e sat in a straight up and down
: by her bed, which was one of
y, one of a vista of beds alike as
, stretching indefinitely.
ie desolation of her attitude caught
y heart. I hastened to her and
d her.
I am so glad to see you," she fal-
l.
Yes. Don't cry now. There is
ing to cry about. You are com-
ble here, aren't you, aren't you?"
epeated the words unconsciously,
ous to hear her reassure me. Com-
ble, perhaps; but what misery,
rowding with so many others. I

had never thought of that.

The little sister stood aside. I went to her and talked with her, telling of Elsie, and how I had found her and of my interest in her youth and unhappiness.

Her framed face confronted me calmly. She was used, apparently, to similar tales of woe.

" And aren't there rooms where she can be with one or two?" I questioned. " Not with so many?" For as we talked I could see patient after patient come in and move about the ward at the farther end, patients of a class far below Elsie's. She was refined, the girl, and charming in spite of her destitution, partly perhaps because of it.

" There are rooms," replied the sister, carefully choosing her words after the manner of nuns, " but they must be paid for."

She named the price. It was not unreasonable. I made a rapid mental calculation as to the extent of my funds, flinging a thought after some stories I had sent out the night before, hoping against hope that they would stick,

praying for Elsie's sake that my editor friend was wrong and no material deficiency existed in my work to rob it of its selling qualities.

"It will not be for long," I said, smiling back at the girl, "and she must be comfortable. I shall not be satisfied unless she is. I will pay for it."

Then Elsie and I moved her belongings to the new room. It was across another long wide hall, at the far end of which stood a Madonna surrounded by candles and diminutive pots of blooming flowers. It had two beds only, snowy beds, wide of pillow and long of coverlid. They were enclosed by screens and at the head of each was a cheery rocking chair, brightly covered with chintz. The sunny window was high and big, a dressing table stood near it and two neat washstands against the wall opposite the beds finished the furnishing.

"You'll be comfy here, won't you?" I said, arranging her comb and brush on the dressing table and hanging up her clothes—all of them of good quality and neat—in the roomy closet close to the door, stopping to look at the sign read-

ing: " Please pray for the Lady who furnished this room," and the little china receptacle for the holy water.

Then I sat down on the floor by her rocking chair.

" It's a beautiful room," she nodded, assentingly.

" But you must have something to occupy you," I argued, " something to keep you from getting lonesome or worrying. I know what we'll do. I will get you some bits of linen and you can make a few little clothes. How would you like that?"

She clasped her hands delightedly.

" I want to. I want to," she cried, " and I can make them beautifully, too, being a sewing girl. I know how to sew well. You should see my work." She put a taper finger to her lip.

" Maybe that was why I happened to be a sewing girl," she murmured, " to make the little clothes. And you are going to get them for me? What is your name?"

" Dolly."

" To think I didn't even know your name," she pouted, " and may I call

you by it?"

"Of course. Call me Dolly."

She stroked my hand.

"How good of you to get me some linen! I haven't anything. Not even needles and thread."

"I will get them for you, too," I told her.

A girl in a long slatted sunbonnet entered the room, followed by a nurse in so neat a gown of gingham it was good to see her.

The girl took off her bonnet and stretched herself exhaustedly on the bed. The nurse pulled the screen about her.

Elsie and I talked in whispers, so as not to disturb her rest.

After a time.

"I must go," I said.

She threw out her arms with the pleading movement of a child.

"But to-morrow," I hurried explaining, "I am coming again, and then I will bring the little things."

She threw back her head and looked long at me.

"Do you live far?" she queried. "Oh you don't live far. Do you?"

" Not very. And remember, I am coming back early to-morrow. I must go now, Elsie. Good-bye. Good-bye."

It was like tearing oneself away from the arms of a clinging infant.

At the door I glanced back at her. She was sitting where I had left her, facing me and the door, her fair head drooped to one side.

Her big eyes were full of tears and one had fallen.

CHAPTER XVII.

RS. MALLON had recovered sufficiently to sit up in an arm chair by the window and look over into the street, from which the noises came shrilly up. The curtains had been taken down for the letting in of the breeze. It gave to the flat a forlorn air. Her attenuated figure lost in the recesses of the chair, her frail hands extended upon the arms of it, her profile outlined against the dusk of the open window, added a touch of solitariness.

I had opened the kitchen door and gone in without knocking, a habit I had formed during her illness when, confined to her bed in the inner room, it was impossible for her to hear either knock or ring.

I crept upon her, turned her white face and kissed her.

"I never heard a sound," said she.

"I knew you hadn't. Some of there fine days a burglar will come and carry you off bodily without your knowing it."

Finding a big palm leaf fan, I took a chair at the other window facing her, and fanned.

" I believe you like being convalescent," I smiled, " You get out of doing the work."

She smiled back.

" It is a rest," she acknowledged. " Mr. Mallon has been at home. He does it for me."

" Without a word of complaint, too," I added in my thought, saying verbally, " and Cecil?"

" Cecil is so occupied with his lectures he can't do much of anything else. Besides, he is very delicate. He has grown up too quickly or something."

" Where is he now?"

" Gone to the lecture of a leading socialist. You know of him, don't you? The papers are all full of him just now."

" I seldom read the papers."

" You ought to. You show that you don't. About many things you display dense ignorance, if you want to know."

I rose, bowed and sat down again.

" I make up for not reading the papers," I explained, " by coming over

here and talking to you and Cecil. It's more improving and saves the eyes. It's a liberal education, in fact. Well. And what about this leading socialist?"

"Nothing. Only he has left his wife and gone gallivanting around this country and Europe with another woman, a younger woman."

"It's not uncommon."

"No, but his being a bright particular star in the socialistic firmament attracts particular attention to him. If a man makes a mark of himself by the display of unusual ability in any direction, he is sure to be shot at. He may count on it. You would think they would be sort of careful, knowing that, and behave. But they don't. I can't tell whether it is because they occupy such prominent places that they are so often advertised by escapades like this, these leaders, or because the women fling themselves at their heads. You seldom find a leader of any sect, socialistic or religious, who hasn't scores of idiotic women followers tagging at his heels."

"True enough. Man is a thin skinned animal. He is easily pricked by the

needles of vanity. Did the young woman go about with him alone?"

"No. That's the strangest part of it. Her mother went with her. Wasn't that a queer thing for a mother to do? Assist at the defamation of a daughter's character?"

"Impossible to account for it. Fanaticism perhaps. The foundation of socialism is a deep and absorbing interest in the human family at large. Isn't it? Inform me. I am densely ignorant, you know, about many things, not having read the scare lines of the dailies."

"It's something of the sort," she assented, vaguely.

"In the human family at large," I repeated, "Now, as in the old days, a few victims must occasionally be served up for the good of the whole. Perhaps it was her idea that her daughter's intellect was needed to perfect that of this great leader of the people. How does that sound?"

"It sounds idiotic, but go on."

"So she cheerfully sacrificed her reputation, which when all is said and

done, is about the greatest thing a mother can possibly part with in a daughter, and thus exhibited her heroism. Then what became of the wife?"

"She's left, deserted, in other words, forsaken, abandoned."

"You must have been studying synonyms. How old is this woman?"

"Forty-five, I believe. Maybe fifty."

"It serves her right," I asserted, fanning vigorously. "What business had she to grow old? What business had she, I say. What woman should dare to survive her first wrinkle? Heavens! It irritates me! She should die of it. It is absolutely the only way of retaining her husband's affections. Dead, it is barely possible that he might cherish an ash of her memory till the flowers bloom again; but wrinkled! I don't see how you could have expected him to stay with her."

She observed me with vague, grey eyes.

"I never can tell," she complained weakly, "whether you are in fun or serious."

I leaned forward, still fanning.

"Did you ever hear of an old man?" I asked. "A really old man, I mean, one too old to attract attention and keep up his end of a more or less lively flirtation?"

"I don't know that I ever did," after a moment's thought. "Except, of course, Mr. Mallon; but then, you never know what he's doing even, when he's out on the road."

"If I trusted anybody in the world of the male persuasion, I'd trust him," I averred. "The precious old dear; but youth, perennial youth, is the prerogative of man. And so, she was deserted, was she, this wife who dared to grow old?"

"Yes, but I think there was a money compensation of some sort. The mother and daughter are wealthy people very wealthy. They settled a sum upon her, sufficient to compensate for the loss of the husband's affection."

"I'm glad I didn't read all this in the papers. The excitement would have kept me away from work it was necessary for me to do. Tell me. What price did they consider necessary for

compensation?"

"Some fifty thousand dollars, I think though I am not quite sure."

I lay back in my chair, fanning.

"It was a noble price," I panted. "I don't know a single man of my acquaintance for whose affection I would not take fifty thousand dollars with a 'thank ye' too. Evidently she had an eye to business, setting the price so high. There are about seven sides to this question. This warm evening I don't know which to take. There's something paltry in selling her husband's affections for any price at all; but then, on the other hand, were they hers to sell? They were gone already. So long as they were gone, why not take the money? Still, I can't help thinking it was a paltry thing to take it, all the same. What would you have done?"

"Man's affection is vacillating," she argued. "You can't always be sure you've got it. When you are surest you've got it, you haven't got it at all; and when you've got it, you are surest you haven't got it. Fifty thousand dollars is a good lump sum, and it's not

vacillating. When it's in bank, it's in bank and stays there till the bank fails and the money goes to the directors or somebody it oughtn't to go to, which it most generally does. However, that's a thing you've got to risk. Everything in life is a risk. I can't decide, I am sure, but money is a mighty good thing. Dolly. It's an awful thing to be poor. An awful thing, I know."

We fanned silently. The passing of the street cars made talking difficult. I looked out of the window. Far away in the north a tower scintillated with electrics.

"What is that tower?" I questioned. "I have always wondered."

"It is a pretty thing, isn't it? You would think if you didn't know, that it was a brilliant steeple-like finger, pointed heavenward, but it isn't. It's the tower of a distillery."

I laughed. She was full of these contradictions and quaintly comical, this friend of mine.

The increased noise of the cars cut our conversation short.

"Has Cecil found a place yet?" I

asked when it had ceased somewhat.

"Not yet," she sighed. "They are not so easy to find, these places. You don't pick them up every day in the year. I am sorry he didn't get along with his employers. Still, if they treated him badly, I don't blame him for resenting it. They are making a great fuss over his speeches everywhere. He has been asked to speak again and again. There is hardly a socialistic or an anarchistic meeting at which he is not present, either speaking or listening. He is getting to be well known. Perhaps they may begin to pay him for his speeches in the course of time."

"In the course of time, yes," I repeated.

"It doesn't look very encouraging. And in the meantime, his father must work day in and day out to take care of us all. It's his own fault though. If he hadn't put me in the kitchen, I could have helped."

"He'll have to sell several barrels of ink, won't he?" I sighed; for that was what he did.

"He will. Listen. Did you hear the

bell?"

I got up, went to the door and opened it. Cecil stood outside.

"I'm surprised to see you home so early," I exclaimed. "It isn't eleven o'clock yet."

"Oh, come off," he ejaculated. "I don't stay out every night till two or half past. Give the devil his due."

He took a chair near us, lighting his cigarette. We sat in the dark, we three of us, fanning.

"Well," began his mother. "How was the lecture?"

"Splendid. He's a glorious man, one in a thousand, an ideal fellow and brainy. By Jove, but he's brainy!"

"Cecil is one of his most zealous followers, his most earnest disciples," his mother volunteered complacently stroking the arm of her chair with thin white fingers.

"But what of this story I'm hearing about him?" I demanded to know.

"It's all right now. It was all right in the first place, so far as that is, but it's patched up for the benefit of the gaping world by their marriage. They say

he has married her."

" That makes it all right, too, I suppose, for the deserted wife and children. There are children, aren't there. There mostly are."

" Some few. Four or five or six. Of course it's all right. Why shouldn't a man take more than one wife openly and above board if he wants them. They've done it from the beginning, and they'll go straight on doing it to the end. It's the natural order of things. You can't alter it. Whether the woman wants to be or not, she is the lower animal. She must sit by the fire and spin while man migrates. It's the same with animals. Man is only a higher order of animal, after all."

" I haven't quite decided yet whether or not he is of a higher order," I reflected. " I'm brooding over it."

" A man on a high plane like this man," he continued, waiving the question, " a leader, brilliant as to intellect, gifted in word painting, is naturally admired by the women. His wife, therefore, on a lower intellectual plane, ceased to interest him, so he took

another. He was perfectly justified in so doing. The mind, as well as the body, must be mated."

"Perhaps," I suggested, "in the raising of those, four, five, or six children, she has had less time than he for the cultivation of her mind. That has sometimes been known to happen."

"It shouldn't be allowed to happen. A woman's first duty is to her husband. She should use every endeavor to keep abreast with him first. The children come afterward."

"You may be right. I'm not saying. This woman, it seems, was a woman of many faults. She deserved to be deserted in all probability. Aside from that fact she failed to keep abreast with that husband of hers, she committed, as I was just saying to your mother, the added crime of growing old. In a woman it is the crime unpardonable."

"Certainly," he acquiesced. "A woman should die at twenty-five or at thirty at the very least. That is, if she wants to save herself tears."

"My opinion precisely."

"Otherwise man is not to be blamed

for taking unto himself a fresh spouse, or, if the divorce be awkward, a new sweetheart sub rosa. It is his prerogative. Read your Bible, why don't you? It says, 'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife,' but it draws the line there. Never once does it say in the whole book 'Thou shalt not take sweethearts.' Do you know the reason of this?"

"No."

"It is simple as A B C. The Jews prided themselves upon their purity of lineage. The law was to preserve this. 'Thou shalt not take unto thyself thy neighbor's wife.' Why? Because in that case it will be uncertain as to the parentage of the children, but as for concubines, those old duffers had them by the dozen hanging around on trees.

"That's all there was to it," he added, yawning. "It was not in the least a question of morality. Not in the very least."

I dropped my fan suddenly and got up. It was with difficulty that I refrained from striking him with it.

"I knew of a woman once whose child was born with the head of a reptile," I

said in too low a tone for his mother to hear. "They crushed it. It is a pity that someone at your birth did not take that little head of yours, that abnormally little head, and crush the life out of it."

His mother turned away from the window.

"Are you going, Dolly?" she asked.

"Yes," I answered. "I must go. It is late."

"Go with her, Cecil," she commanded

"Never mind," I hastened to object. "It isn't far. I will go alone."

CHAPTER XVIII.

OMETIMES the sisters sent Elsie down stairs to see me. Occasionally they permitted me to go to her room.

That afternoon we were together in the waiting room, sitting on the divan, talking in a subdued tone for fear of being heard, since the atmosphere appeared to be permeated by little black clad nuns, their low-toned voices humming in every direction as also the almost silent pit-a-pat of their still-shod feet.

In Elsie's hand was a tiny sleeve on which she was whipping the lace. Presently, laying it down in her lap, she curled herself close to me and rested her head on my shoulder.

"You can never tell, can you, Dolly?" she whispered. "whether you are going to live or die?"

"Many live," I answered back, my arms around her, my fingers toying with the ruffles of a white fichu she had knotted about her shoulders, the ends of which hung long over her dark loose

gown.

"I think," she sighed, "that I should like to see him once, if it is to be that I am not to live. If I live I would rather not, because, because he was cruel to me Dolly. He deserted me."

"Yes. But never mind now."

"It is strange, isn't it, how, when they want to make you wicked, there is no wrong in it. It is right, perfectly right. There are so many, many reasons they have to prove it. I couldn't tell you the reasons he gave why there should be no tie to bind except the tie of love which is stronger than all others. 'Why chain two people?' he said. 'The moment they are chained, love flies'. . . . Well, love flies anyway, but if there is a tie, then that is well for the children, isn't it?"

"The question is old as time, Elsie," said I. "It is not for us to settle it. Without the marriage tie society would be more chaotic than it is now, which is plenty chaotic enough. Yes. They are full of felicitous promises before, these men."

"But afterward it is an awful sin, and

t is the woman who is the sinner. And
:he first to treat her as a sinner is the
nan who has been the cause of her sin."

Raising my hand from her ruffles I
>atted her cheek, lying soft and close
igainst my shoulder.

" You are young to have been so well
aught in this unhappy school," I
amented.

" I have had a brilliant teacher," she
xplained with some slight grimness
trange for one of her years. " He was
young but he was very brainy, very
nighly thought of for his intellect, I
believe, among the class of people he
vent with, whom I, being only a sewing
girl, never saw. He taught me well, as
you say. He led me along a path that
was full of bitterness."

" How did you meet him, Elsie?"

" I met him one day as I was coming
home from my work. He passed, smiled,
bowed, turned back and spoke to me. I
smiled, but did not answer. Then after
I had walked a block or two he came
hurrying after me with a bunch of
scattered violets in his hand.

" ' Are these your violets?' he asked.

Of course they were not. He had bought them from the man at the corner and scattered them himself to make believe he had found them on the pavement.

"It was a pretty way of winning me, wasn't it? Through flowers. He had many beautiful ways then. Afterward I got to be half afraid of him. He was so strange. He was like a man without a soul. . . . Anybody would have spoken to him, bringing flowers like that. Wouldn't you, now?"

"Perhaps. Women are weak. You can lead them anywhere if you only take them by the heartstrings."

"You would if you had been sad as I was, working all day long, then sitting alone in my room of evenings, nobody at all to keep me company, only some flowers I had planted in a box in the window and the cats on the garden wall."

"Cats do keep you company," I acquiesced, thinking of my own two friends.

"But flowers most. He did well to win me with flowers, coming as I did from the country where they grow so

plentifully, to the city where they don't grow at all. . . . After that I saw him again and again, and always he talked very beautifully of love. They always talk very beautifully of love before. Don't they?"

"They do."

She commenced to work her fingers nervously together in her lap.

"I shouldn't have trusted him from the first," she panted, "because he didn't believe in God. Don't you believe in God?"

"I do," I affirmed.

She raised her hand and pressed it to my cheek.

"You can't think what he said to me one night," she muttered. "It makes my blood run cold to remember it. I knelt, saying my prayers. He stood watching me. 'Women are strange creatures,' he sneered. 'With them the passion of religion often takes the place of passion for men,' and he laughed. I raised my head, looking at him, wonderingly, surprised that God didn't strike him dead for talking so. 'Do you know what Voltaire said,' he asked, 'but how

can you, a sewing girl, know anything about Voltaire?' I think sometimes he began to hate me because I was a sewing girl, but I was that when he brought me the violets. 'Voltaire,' he explained 'was an atheist. He said that a woman gives herself to God when man no longer cares for her.' That is, after she is old and grey. But that isn't true, is it? Look at these beautiful little young nuns, too young, too pretty to be called, 'mother,' and 'sister,' as they call them. They have given themselves to God. You know Voltaire, don't you, Dolly? You belong to the class of people that he belonged to. Did he say that?"

"Yes, and many other blasphemous things; but he died in horrible convulsions, calling out on the God he had traduced to come and help him."

"I wish I had known you then, Dolly," she cooed, pressing my hand still closer to her cheek. "You would have helped me. Wouldn't you? As it was. . . . but how can you know they are going to quit caring when they promise so . . . and women are weak."

"They are weak where they should

be strongest, vulnerable through the affections, all. When they become as a class coldly calculating as the men—and there are a few now who are sufficiently so to partly avenge their weaker sisters—then it will be the men who will suffer; but that time is far distant, if it ever comes."

" It was not very long," she continued, " before, in a way I can hardly explain, that I could only feel, he began to make me understand that it was I who was the sinful one. In little things, I cannot tell you how, he put me on a lower plane and took the stand of the immaculate.

" He had done no wrong. It was I. I. Was that fair? After all his talk of the rightness of it, the idiocy, that was what he called it, of having a priest stand up and mutter some words over you, of the holiness of two lives mated like the birds, held by love and by love only."

" When it comes to a question of love, justice so far as woman is concerned, flies out of the window," I averred. " You are lucky if you get any at all."

" If he had only said he loved me and

then left me, but he left me so cruelly, so cruelly. He wanted to be decent, he said. Decent! After all that talk of the holiness of being held by love! That word on his lips should have killed my love at once; but it did not. Love is hard to kill."

"Woman's love." I corrected.

"I mean woman's love. Decent! If he had meant that, then bitter as it was I should have thought it at least heroic. If he had said, 'I love you but I want to quit this life, and lead a better one,' I should have gone on idealizing him, but there were other girls. I was not the only one to whom he had brought violets. I knew that afterward from one of the girls."

She was silent a while.

"I thought I should die," she broke out then with a passion that startled me, she had hitherto spoken with such apparent calmness, "my heart hurt so! Who thought of my ruined life, torn from its purity—I hadn't an evil thought that he had not taught me—dragged through the mire, then turned adrift, and he . . . he talked of decency!"

"There are two standards of morality," I asserted, "one for the man and another for the woman. It is so that some semblance of purity may still perfume the world. Once lower woman's standard of morality to that of man, and we descend to the kingdom of the animal. . . . Unless a woman is born immoral, inherits immorality from some particularly vicious paternal ancestor to such a degree that she is to all intents and purposes soulless, and there are some such women, one sin reduces her to a condition of despair which few men know who have committed a hundred. It is best so, or what would the world be? A Sodom and Gomorrah!"

Taking up a ruffle of her fichu she wiped away her tears.

"The nights I have sobbed through," she faltered. "That I have walked the floor. . . from door to window, have sat up in my little bed, rocking back and forth, like the pendulum of a clock, pressing the bed clothing into my mouth to stifle my cries. The nights! The nights!

"And do you know what he said when

he left me? Oh! I had knelt, frantic, clasping my hands, wild with the terror of the future, half mad with grief, anticipating the nights to come, begging God to help me, and he stood at the door. 'Go to your God,' he said, his strange eyes glittering, 'and let the passion of religion stand you in stead for the passion of man.' "

I took her in my arms and rocked her back and forth, pressing my hands to her wet cheek and to her hair.

" Don't think of it," I implored. " Those days are over now, and so are the nights. Think of your little white cot up stairs with the screen around it and of this still and pleasant room. Think of this haven of rest you have dropped into so softly. and listen to the nuns. You are not alone. For all of us there are chambers of horrors, the doors of which we must shut or go mad. For all of us there have been nights through which we have been rocked by heart-pain, swung back and forth as you say like the pendulum of a clock, dumb with grief. Forget those nights and listen to the nuns."

For tender as the voice of a mother singing to her child rose the voices of the nuns, now resonant and seemingly near, now liltingly far away and soft and sweet as the palpitation of an echo.

Elsie sobbed convulsively, listening.

"But there's one thing, Dolly," her broken voice continued by and by, "that I am glad of. And that is, he never gave me money. On the contrary, he often borrowed it of me."

"Oh no, Elsie!"

"Yes. Often. That is something that helped to keep up my pride. I was never dependent on him. I never owed him anything. Not a dollar. Not a cent."

"And did he know of the child?"

"Yes. I think it made him afraid. He didn't know what trouble it might bring on him and his family. Besides, I believe he was held in high esteem by the people with whom he went; and that, if known, would hurt him. And so he left me."

"To bear it alone."

"To bear it alone. It is always the way. It is the way with these girls here,

or they wouldn't be here. One was brought by her priest. Her parents don't know where she is. She is only sixteen and her sweetheart left her. Another was the stenographer of a married man. Nobody knows his name. She will not let them know. He deserted her, but she protects him and his name. I kept on at my place, as I said, as long as they would let me stay. Then I drifted to the slums where my good angel sent you to me. How could I help believing in God when he let my good angel send me you?"

I tightened my arms about her.

"Listen to the voices," I whispered "Aren't they sweet, the voices of those nuns, those gentle women, shut away from the world and its temptations, away from some happiness, maybe; but happiness that must be paid for with one's life blood, with more, much more than its weight in pain."

The chant rose melodiously clear as if a door opening between had let the sound in to us.

"They are like angels singing," wept Elsie.

"If they know nothing of such happiness," I went on, "what do they miss? Nothing. And is it happiness? That is the question.

"How good it is to live serenely aloof from the companionship of man, a companionship which is so often the synonym of unhappiness, helping those who, like you, are paying the penalty of some short while of that seeming happiness."

We were quiet a space, tuned to the music of the chant.

"You are right," I said, then, "they are like angels singing, these pious women of the holy lives."

The voices sank to a whisper. It was as if someone had slowly shut the door.

Elsie sobbed anew, listening.

"Hush now," I begged, "hush now. Lie still and forget."

They died away. Her sobs ceased with them. She lay like a tired child in my arms, her red lips parted, her long wet lashes on her flushed cheek, resting.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN place of the accustomed rejected manuscripts I found at my plate three letters, accepting stories and asking for more. Ah! I could scarcely restrain my joy. In a miraculous way Elsie and I were to be provided for. I rushed to my room, tossed up some stories in a heads or tails fashion, inserted them in envelopes, addressed them promiscuously, mailed them and hurried to the hospital, where I was surprised to find a man on the top step, red faced and raving; some children lower down eyeing him openmouthed, anxiously awaiting developments.

Giving him as wide a berth as possible I passed up and in a frightened way rang the bell.

Sister Annunciata, who tended the door, opened it to the extent of revealing one dilated eye.

"Is he there yet?" she gasped.

"Yes. But open the door just wide enough to let me in and you can shut it

gain."

She obeyed. I rushed through and
ıe hastily clamped the brass chain down
fter me.

"His wife is here with a week old
aby," she explained, "and he wants to
e her. He can't. It is against the
ıles. So he threatens to burn the
ouse down."

"You are taking care of his wife and
aby without pay," I mused, "and he
ıreatens to burn the house down."

She smiled.

"That is nothing unusual," she
ffirmed. "It's the way they mostly
eat us. We've sent for a policeman.
Ve often have to send for a policeman to
rotect us from these people we spend
ur lives in befriending."

"Can I see Elsie to-day?"

She was disposed to be lenient.

"Go up to her room," she said. "You
ill find her there."

I found her busy sewing. She threw
ıer arms around me, then made room
or me opposite her in another rocking
hair.

"Do you know," she began, bending

again over her work, " that there are eighty-five babies up in the dormitory?"

" Eighty-five!" I exclaimed.

" Yes. All ages from four or five down. The prettiest babies in the world. I saw them yesterday. But only a few of them have names. That's hard, isn't it? For a little baby to start out in the world without a name?"

" I don't know. They are probably quite as well off as they would be with the names of the wretches who forsook their mothers. I think it would be a good plan anyway for the child to take the name of the mother. Then it would be certain of a name. Whose babies are these?"

" The girls' who come here. They leave them. The nurses take them away before they can see them. Otherwise they grieve and grieve. Some grieve as it is. They cry for them and cry for them. I heard a girl in the next room crying for hers last night, way in the night, just sobbing. I asked the nurse what was the matter, and she told me that was it. She was crying to see her little baby they had taken away. . .

And do you know, Dolly," her voice sank lower, "a girl died here last night. They tried not to let us know, but she was on this floor. We couldn't help knowing. The sisters were all out in the hall, kneeling before the blessed Virgin there, praying for her soul. It was the little sixteen year old girl I was telling you about, the one who was brought here by her priest. The priest came to give her absolution. I saw him pass by in his long black robes, the nuns following with candles. You don't know how weird it was to see all that way in the night. It frightened me."

She was silent a moment.

"Maybe there'll be a procession like that soon for me," she said then; "and nuns kneeling in the hall, praying for my soul."

"Hush! Hush!"

"He pardoned all her sins, that priest," she went on. "She smiled up at him, they told me, and said, 'I am going to Jesus.' Then in a few minutes she died. It seems strange that a man can forgive sins; but it must be comforting, mustn't it, to go out of the

world, shriven? Do you believe that a priest can absolve you?"

"I don't, but I am very lenient with all beliefs. Believe any thing out of which you can wrench a drop of happiness, is my motto in this drab old world so full of unhappiness that it seems hardly worth while living in it."

"Why, Dolly," looking up at me in amazement. "I didn't know you ever felt like that. You who are always so gay."

"I don't often. And so the little girl died last night, and went all white and forgiven of her sins, shriven, as you say, to heaven?"

"I'm almost sure she went to heaven," asserted Elsie, running her needle slowly through a tuck.

"And I know it. A baby girl like that, hardly out of the cradle herself, and so sinned against! Of course she did. She died then away from her father and mother and brothers and sisters, if she had any, away from everybody who cared for her?"

"Yes. Dolly, if I should die, do you think I will go to heaven? Never a

night passes that I don't beg to be forgiven."

"I am sure of it as I am that the little girl is there now. But why talk of dying? You will live and we won't let the baby go up stairs and you lie here grieving for it, crying in the night. We will keep it and find work later on when you are able and perhaps you and I can live together in a little flat. Who knows! Any happy thing might happen. We will make it happen." And I blessed the editors who had accepted my stories that morning, asking for more, thus making the thought of the flat possible. Also I tried to root out some bitterness that lurked in my heart against my editor friend who had discouraged me so. How dared he? Sometimes I was wicked enough to wish that all those who had wilfully discouraged me might burn. Was it wickedness, or just wrath? Those old Bible duffers, as Cecil called them, were always praying for the heavens to fall and paralyze their enemies.

"I want to keep the little baby," she breathed presently, fondling the tucks. "I want to keep it. We will keep it;

won't we Dolly?"

"Of course we will," I assured her. "Of course."

I took up a hem of the skirt she was sewing on.

"You are making this so beautifully," I admired. "I never saw neater sewing than yours, Elsie."

She laughed delightedly.

"Didn't I tell you I sewed well," holding it up. "Look. Aren't the tucks fine. Aren't they tiny, and straight as straight can be?"

"They are. . . You are like a French woman for aptness with your needle, dear. Do you know, I should like to see all those eighty-five babies up stairs. It must be a bee hive of babies. Do you suppose they will let me see them?"

She peeped around the screen.

"Nurse," she called softly. "Can we go upstairs and see the babies to-day?"

"I'll ask Mother St. John," returned the nurse and vanished.

"What odd names they have. Mother St. John."

"They are named after every saint in the calendar and all the priests in the

Bible. It's like walking through Palestine to hear the roll call."

The nurse came back.

"Mother St. John says you can come," she informed us.

Elsie, leaving her sewing, went with me. At the head of the steps stood Mother St. John. Swinging to her skirts was a red cheeked boy of four. One chubby hand grasped her crucifix hung from the long black beads that encircled her waist.

Opening the wide doors for us they issued us into the dormitory, where I came to a standstill, awe struck at the number of babies massed under that roof.

Two rooms stretching indefinitely, filled with two rows of cots. Eighty-five babies in snowy cribs set side by side in two long rows. It was a sight to remember.

Some lay still and slept. Some sat erect and crowed, while some sobbed softly, big tears welling over lids as if they knew.

Mother St. John walked by me, the boy still clinging to her skirts, toddling

fondly.

"What becomes of them?" I asked her, "after they leave here?"

"They are put in a home," she answered, "where they are taught a trade. Then at the age of ten or twelve they are self-supporting."

At the age of ten or twelve!

At an age when children with names played in the dawn of rosy futures, these nameless children would begin laboriously, hopelessly, the work of life!

Homeless, placeless, they would start out on difficult paths towards futures doubly darkened by the flush of shame.

"Are these the mothers who sit at the heads of the cots, tending them?" I questioned.

"No," she replied. "They are the hired nurses."

Hired nurses!

Then their infant eyes opened on strange cold eyes. Their infant cries fell on strange and apathetic ears, dull, insensible.

The thought of it hurt my heart. I hurried Elsie down. On our way we passed a balcony along which girls

walked slowly to and fro. Their faces were hidden by slatted sun-bonnets. They were completely hidden. Not an eye could be seen. Not a nose nor a mouth.

"Why do they wear those sun-bonnets?" I asked.

"Many of them belong to good families," she replied. "They are afraid of being seen. . . . Why do you smile? What are you thinking about?"

"I was just wondering," I explained, "if the fathers of their children were going about in long slatted sunbonnets, ashamed to be seen. That is all."

"Must you go now?" she interrogated, stopping at her door. "Don't go. Stay a little while longer with me."

"No. I must go. . . It will soon be lunch time. I can't stay to lunch here, you know. They won't have me. Come, walk down stairs with me."

"It is like part of my heart going out of the door with you every time, Dolly. Say?"

"Well. What is it?"

She took my fingers up and toyed with them as she talked.

" They won't send for you. They told me so. It is against their rules. They have so many rules, you know. So that, I suppose, when I need you most, I shall be without you."

I took her face between my hands.

" When you need me," I said, looking into her eyes, " call me. Strange things happen to me sometimes. They have always happened to me. Strange things and weird. I believe if you are in great pain and want me, Elsie, I shall somehow hear your voice. You may be sure I will."

" Then I will call your name, ' Dolly, Dolly,' and you will hear?"

" I am sure."

I kissed her twice and left her standing in the hall.

At the open door, prompted by some inexplicable impulse, I ran back and kissed her again. . . A sort of joy leaped into my heart at the glad surprise shining in her big sad eyes as I kissed her, and stayed there.

CHAPTER XX.

I HAD been invited with formal pomp and ceremony to hear Cecil's great speech given before a down-town club. The leader of the socialists was to be there, and his new wife.

I went alone, but I was met at the door by Tucket. He escorted me to a seat.

"Cecil gave me explicit instructions to watch after you," he explained. "He is busy talking to his friends. You can see him if you look. There he is, standing head and shoulders above most of them. He is a finely built man."

At that moment, with a smile and a bow he came forward, distinguishing me by a handshake. His manner was subtly different. I had the feeling of being put off a yard or two, while the honor he was doing me by walking the length of the room to take me by the hand pressed heavily in upon me.

I looked admiringly up at him, trying hard not to think of the quantities of ink

his father was engaged in distributing over the state in the gigantic effort to support him—and of the money he owed me.

The seats near us filled up. People talked in low tones of the speaker.

"He is wonderful, they say," declared one, "this young disciple of Herron's, this almost anarchist. It will be a rare treat to hear him. This speech of his has already caused several strikes."

Tucket turned a large calm eye upon me.

"Noble business this," said he. "Deliberately lying awake nights thinking up a speech that will cause strikes. What's the world coming to? How about your slums?" with a quick change of subject. "Have you deserted them?"

"Yes. The weather is too hot for slums. Besides, I am better occupied."

"How?"

But of course I could not tell him about Elsie. So:

"Who's that going up on the stage?" I begged to know.

He craned his neck.

"It's Herron. See him beam on Cecil. He is very much interested, they say, in his young disciple."

"I wonder how he feels about all these things they are saying of him."

"At present he is like a terrapin without his shell," he explained. "He'll be somewhat sensitive, I imagine, until it has had time to grow on again. Hush! They are calling us to order."

"'Hush!' Was I talking?"

He evaded the reproach of my glance, and fixed his eyes on the stage, where, after a few choice words of introduction from Herron, Cecil rose, stood for a moment in silence, looking calmly over the audience, then in clear and even tones began.

His argument was the same as in the hall in the slums, with the exception that it had been elaborated upon. During those months of physical idleness he had not been mentally idle. He had employed his time well in chiseling his speech. As nearly perfect as a speech of that character could be, he had made it.

From repetition his various classes of slavery had become familiar to me,

feudal, chattel, and wage, the slavery of to-day. As before, he gloated over his favorite phrase, the "Wage Slaves!" Wage slaves! Wage slaves!

"They are beginning to pall upon me a little," I whispered to Tucket, "those wage slaves of Cecil's. Listen. Now he is commencing about the sweatshops. Soon he'll describe the half grown boys standing knee deep in the blood of animals, cutting up the meat we eat. It sounds well, all that; but do you know, I looked and looked, and I never did find those half grown boys standing knee deep in blood."

"They are probably born of Cecil's lively imagination," he reflected; then, "This world is pretty much what you make it," he continued, "and how you look at it. If you go on a still hunt for trouble, you'll find it every time. If you hunt for sunshine, you'll find that, too. Naturally we are all of us more or less slaves in one way or another. We belong to the great bee hive of the world which must hum in order to make the honey; but there's often much of pleasure in the humming."

"Now hear him," said I, after an interval of listening, "tearing to pieces our political party, our leaders, our President, our millionaires. I know this old speech by heart, and I am tired of it. In every bee hive there is the king bee. He is necessary. So long as there must be a leader, why permit the little bees to sting him to death?"

"I should like to have Cecil hear you call him a little bee once," whispered Tucket. "What! The young disciple of Herron, a little bee! Watch the rapt countenance of these listeners. A little bee indeed!"

I looked about me. There was no nodding among those cultured people as among the people of the slums. No boisterous and impertinent fire crackers disturbed the even tenor of his discourse. No saucy slum children bobbed curls at the window panes, distracting the attention of those within. On the contrary. Flower filled hats of the finest moved delightedly forward in assent to the flowing smoothness of his periods and men of countenances intellectual followed his words with reverence, many with an

expression faintly resembling that of awe.

I was amazed at the wonderful progress made by the boy orator. Observing his striking aspect, his splendid gestures, his improved pronunciation and accent, I came to the final conclusion that he had been "called." Perhaps after all they might give him a job as speaker which would enable him to earn his salt and pay some of his debts. My hopes arose; but, realizing that the higher the hopes, the greater the fall thereof, I succeeded in suppressing to a certain degree their jubilance.

If the peroration had been fierce in the slums it was cyclonic now, gathering added force from the approving glances of his infatuated audience. Frequently he was interrupted by applause at which times, sweeping the audience with the magnetism of his peculiar eyes he waited patiently until his voice could once more make itself heard, then woke the echoes with the noble peal of its resonance.

As I had expected the boys standing ankle deep in blood came in on the last round, loping, the Wage Slaves at our

elbows in the slums of New York, huddled into tenements, bowed in sweat-shops, toiling by the dim light of windows opening onto air shafts, ground to the earth by the iron hand of the Almighty Dollar, followed close at their heels—and then came the climax. It was the same old climax with an added touch of fierceness for the further heating of the blood necessary for the engendering of strikes.

"What of these wage slaves?" he demanded ferociously, his eyes on fire. "What of these serfs? Is it not time and past time for some John Brown . . ."

"Poor old John," interpolated Tucket. . . .

"to strike their note of freedom? A note that will sound and resound from state to state, from shore to shore, from ocean to ocean, a bugle call that shall strike terror to the heart of the oppressor of the poor, that shall unleash the bonds, unclash their crushing chains and, snatching them up from the slough of despond, free them forever and forever. "I say the time has come. And this is the hour."

He sat down amid a thunder of applause. A subdued rustle ensued as admiring faces were turned to admiring faces and hands caught sleeves in the nervous thrill of excitement generated by the power of his marvelous magnetism; a louder rustle as they arose simultaneously and pressed toward the stage in the frantic hope of touching the hand that had so felicitously animated the atmosphere, or of hearing one word spoken by the eloquence of his gifted tongue, a personal word, such as, 'I am happy to meet you!' or, 'I am glad to see you here!'

"It's miraculous," averred Tucket, mopping his large brow with two large handkerchiefs. "I never saw anything like it in my life. I can hear the echo yet. I have the greatest notion in the world to go right out now and get up a strike!"

I laughed.

"It is no laughing matter. Think of those wage slaves! Those Wage Slaves! THOSE WAGE SLAVES!"

"Hush. They'll hear you."

"I can't hush. I'm excited. I'm half mad with excitement. That's what

I am. Who wouldn't be? If I had a gun convenient, who knows but I might rush madly from this room and shoot those awful millionaires or the President?

"Hush," I cautioned. "Don't breathe the thought."

"But it's just such geniuses, such firebrands as this great boy orator who bring about such results. And will you stop for one moment and ponder upon the fact that we know this youth, this Wonder of the Age! That we have actually a speaking acquaintance with him, that we have sat at the same table, have clasped his hand—have been touched by him!"

I caught his eye.

"What! You, too!" I cried.

He turned his head in a quizzical way he had, and observed me minutely.

"Now look here," he ejaculated. "You don't mean to say that you are another victim? How much did he borrow? Well, never mind. Shake. We are friends, companions in misery. Shake again."

"I am afraid they will tear him to pieces," I exclaimed, "and carry the

pieces away as souvenirs. Who is that tall girl sailing up to him? The girl in white with the big white hat?"

"That is Miss McAllister. It is reported that they are to be married in the fall."

"On what?"

"Don't you worry. It is she who has the dough. Who is going home with you?"

"Cecil supposedly."

Cecil just then started toward us, elbowing his way carefully, politely, fearful of offending his crowd of admirers by an attempt at pushing.

Eventually he reached us.

"Tucket," he said. "Will you see Dolly home? I should like to escort Miss McAllister."

"May I have the pleasure?" enquired Tucket of me, bowing servilely.

"Since I am not permitted to go with the sun," I answered, "I suppose I must endeavor to put up with a lesser planet."

Whereupon Cecil, with a low, grave, smileless bow, left me.

Tucket and I exchanged astonished glances.

"I believe he thought I meant it," I gasped.

"I am perfectly sure," said he, "that he did."

CHAPTER XXI.

AT four o'clock I roused suddenly and sat up in bed. I rubbed my eyes open and stared through the shutters at the dim gray of the dawn just commencing, the early dawn, out of which there had come a voice calling to me,—Elsie's voice.

I lay back a moment, trying to lull myself into the belief that I had been mistaken; but sleep had forsaken me. The impression bearing in upon me that she suffered, that she had cried out for me as I had told her to do would not let me rest.

Early as it was I rose, dashed cold water into my eyes, dressed, and opening my door noiselessly, crept down-stairs to the hall, opened that also noiselessly and went out into the street.

It was empty at that hour and desolate. Some few men in white, like ghosts of men, swept the gutters. A tired policeman sauntered slowly by. The whir of an empty car broke the quiet

and passed.

I hurried to the corner and took one of those cars. I was its only passenger. We rushed onward for blocks, I changed then to one drawn by two sleepy white horses, driven by a sleepier driver, and alighted at length at the corner, beyond which loomed the dark red tower of the hospital kept by the little Sisters of Misery.

Sister Annunciata admitted me. Her eyes were red with sleeplessness.

"Did someone telegraph you?" she asked.

"No," I answered, not endeavoring to explain the calling of Elsie, which, though quite simple to me, would in all probability have seemed inexplicable to her.

"She has been ill all night," she told me. "But since four o'clock she has been worse."

I went along the gray hall, up the steps and into the upper hall out of which opened the door to Elsie's room.

I entered.

"She is not in here," said the girl who occupied the second cot. "She is in the

next room, the operating room, you know."

"Do you think they will let me in?" I queried.

"I am almost certain they will not. It is against their rules."

Going back, I stood in the hall. While I had talked with the girl one little sister after another had come from this door or that and knelt before the figure of the Blessed Virgin. Quiet, black-robed figures, kneeling, praying and telling their beads in the dim light of the dawn.

They were praying for Elsie.

I knelt back of them near the door of the shut room where she was.

Presently the door opened and the nurse coming out saw me. She approached me.

"Will you tell her," I implored, "that I am here. If I could only go in to her!"

"You cannot. It will not be allowed. But I will tell her that you are here."

Then wearily commenced my vigil, my thoughts going back over the bitter pathway of Elsie's life, rushing then to her future, which I promised myself

should be a happy one. No matter what sin they commit men stand by one another. I resolved to stand by her. Ah! Good, that my work had succeeded, that, started by a little pastel which had made a hit, my stories were now in demand.

She was more sinned against than sinning. She was pure in heart as any child. Together we would raise the child, and then, and then—my thoughts flew fast to the meeting maybe of some good strong man who would take her in his arms and compensate for all her misery.

My knees hurt with so long kneeling. The little sisters unmindful of the hurt, knelt as if grown to the floor. One leant exhaustedly against the wall, her veined lids closed, her pale lips moving.

All were pale as so many statues; for the livelong night they had come again and again, kneeling and praying for Elsie.

It was six by the great clock in the hall when the nurse opened the door a second time.

" The child is born," she said, but

added quickly as the sisters rose from their knees, " it is dead."

They sank silently down again, praying for the passing of its soul.

" You may go to her room now," the nurse whispered to me, " and wait there till we bring her in."

Her cot had been made ready for her, but I patted the pillows and straightened out the sheet to pass away the time.

On a near-by table she had laid out tenderly, carefully with dainty mother fingers the clothes for the child. A tear fell on them as I fingered the ruffles I had seen her stitch, and the lace.

It was not long before the nurse flung wide the door and stood aside making room for the strong young doctor who bore Elsie in his arms from the operating room, as if she had been a child, helpless, frail, livid, her head on his shoulder, her small bare feet hanging pitifully down.

He laid her on the cot and they stretched the white sheet over her up to her throat.

She turned her head and her eyes fell on me; but there was no sign of recognition in their bright blue depths.

"What is it?" I faltered. "She does not know me! I——"

The doctor smoothed the matted yellow hair away from her face.

"Hush!" he said, his tone as low as a whisper. "She is very ill."

CHAPTER XXII.

ALL through the day we had waited and watched and tended her. All night also, and it was dawn again, early dawn, and Elsie was dying.

Out in the long hall the little nuns knelt praying for her soul, the candles lighted before the Blessed Virgin to illumine the way of its passing.

Never once had she looked on me with a glance of recognition. There was apparently no suffering. There had been no crying out with pain. Her soul was quietly leaving her body. That was all.

They had telegraphed to the man who had deserted her. At the first she had given them his name with directions that they were to let him know in case there was no hope.

We waited for him.

And while we waited her life went out snuffed like a candle.

The nurse pressed the white lids down, she shut the lips from which the red had

gone, and Elsie's soul had followed the soul of the little sixteen year old girl straight to heaven.

For a while I knelt by the bed and sobbed. Then, standing aside I had watched them straighten the sheet over her still form and place candles at her head and at her feet.

The candles shed a lambent glow over the marble of her face, and over the yellow wealth of her soft fair hair.

I fell to sobbing again as I looked at her in the light of those candles, though in my heart I knew it was best that the aching heart should cease to beat and the small feet rest from treading the path that had been a path of thorns.

"He is coming," announced the nurse, from the door. Then: "He is here."

I brushed away the tears, looked and saw, standing in the doorway first, then advancing with some hesitation into the room, Cecil!

I started back with a smothered cry. Impossible! And yet! And yet! I should have known. Again and again she had described him to me. It was only my density that had prevented my

knowing.

"A tall young man, with strangely peculiar eyes, brilliant as to intellect, full of blasphemy, soulless, heartless and Godless!"

Yes. I should have known.

He stood across the cot from me, looking down at her. There was not a quiver about his lip. There was not a tear in his eye.

The nurse, tiptoeing, left the room.

We were alone with the dead.

I breathed hard. My soul surged with bitterness toward him, knowing her life. I bit my lip to keep back the torrent of words that fought for utterance.

After one glance he had turned his strange eyes away from the calm of her face and rested them on me.

Still, not a tear. Defiance rather, as if he would have employed his flower of eloquence in his defense.

His attitude left me with the wish to grapple at his throat. I understood intuitively the thirst for blood in husbands of wronged wives, in fathers of wronged children.

The hushed lisp of the little Sisters, praying for her soul, helped still the passionate anger of my own.

"You are right," I said, my voice trembling with the effort to be calm. "Young as you are, if I could see your naked soul coming toward me I should run away screaming. I have a glimpse of it now. I know the color of it, and it is black. I could cry out with terror at the sight, but I will not.

"Hush! You have no defense. She has told me the story. No. Do not talk. This is your first crime, perhaps, a double crime, for the child, too, is dead, but it will not be your last. There are some men to whom women are natural prey, and you are one of them. My soul sickens under the gleam of your eyes. It recoils. It faints.

"Go. Leave this place. It is too holy for the touch of your footstep. . . . It is the place of prayers for the constant passing of the souls of martyred girls.

"Go. Leave me with my dead."

I sank on my knees and buried my face in the sheet that covered Elsie.

When at last I raised my eyes the

candles at her head and at her feet had burned low in their sockets—and he was gone.