JACOB AUGUST RIIS

CHILDREN OF THE TENEMENTS

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Children of the Tenements

Riis J.

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Содержание

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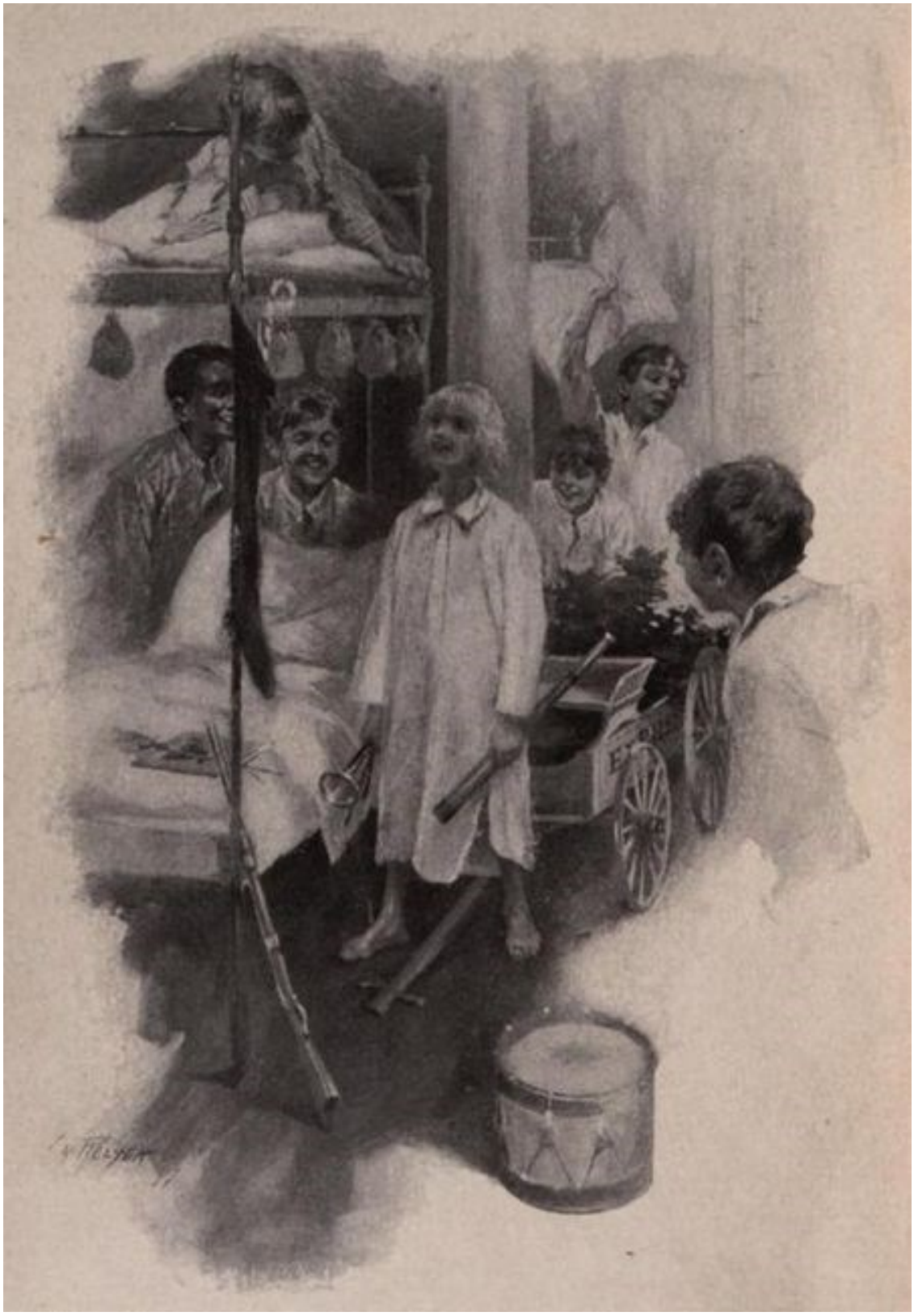

"The Kid was standing barefooted in the passageway."

PREFACE

I have been asked a great many times in the last dozen years if I would not write an "East-side novel," and I have sometimes had much difficulty in convincing the publishers that I meant it when I said I would not. Yet the reason is plain: I cannot. I wish I could. There are some facts one can bring home much more easily than otherwise by wrapping them in fiction. But I never could invent even a small part of a plot. The story has to come to me complete before I can tell it. The stories printed in this volume came to me in the course of my work as police reporter for nearly a quarter of a century, and were printed in my paper, the *Evening Sun*. Some of them I published in the *Century Magazine*, the *Churchman*, and other periodicals, and they were embodied in an earlier collection under the title, "Out of Mulberry Street." Occasionally, I have used the freedom of the writer by stringing facts together to suit my own fancy. But none of the stories are invented. Nine out of ten of them are just as they came to me fresh from the life of the people, faithfully to portray which should, after all, be the aim of all fiction, as it must be its sufficient reward.

J. A. R.

THE RENT BABY

Adam Grunschlag sat at his street stand in a deep brown study. He heeded not the gathering twilight, or the snow that fell in great white flakes, as yet with an appreciable space between, but with the promise of a coming storm in them. He took no notice of the bustle and stir all about that betokened the approaching holiday. The cries of the huckster hawking oranges from his cart, of the man with the crawling toy, and of the pedler of colored Christmas candles passed him by unheard. Women with big baskets jostled him, stopped and fingered his cabbages; he answered their inquiries mechanically. Adam's mind was not in the street, at his stand, but in the dark back basement where his wife Hansche was lying, there was no telling how sick. They could not afford a doctor. Of course, he might send to the hospital for one, but he would be sure to take her away, and then what would become of little Abe? Besides, if they had nothing else in the whole world, they had yet each other. When that was no longer the case—Adam would have lacked no answer to the vexed question if life were then worth living.

Troubles come not singly, but in squads, once the bag be untied. It was not the least sore point with Adam that he had untied it himself. They were doing well enough, he and his wife, in their home in Leinbach, Austria, keeping a little grocery store, and living humbly but comfortably, when word of the country beyond the sea where much money was made, and where every man was as good as the next, made them uneasy and discontented. In the end they gave up the grocery and their little home, Hansche not without some tears; but she dried them quickly at the thought of the good times that were waiting. With these ever before them they bore the hardships of the steerage, and in good season reached Hester Street and the longed-for haven, only to find—this. A rear basement, dark and damp and unwholesome, for which the landlord, along with the privilege of keeping a stand in the street, which was not his to give, made them pay twelve dollars a month. Truly, much money was made in America, but not by those who paid the rent. It was all they could do, working early and late, he with his push-cart and at his stand, she with the needle, slaving for the sweater, to get the rent together and keep a roof over the head of little Abe.

Five years they had kept that up, and things had gone from bad to worse. The police blackmail had taken out of it what little profit there was in the push-cart business. Times had grown harder than they ever were in Hester Street. To cap it all, two weeks ago gas had begun to leak into the basement from somewhere, and made Hansche sick, so that she dropped down at her work. Adam had complained to the landlord, and he had laughed at him. What did he want for twelve dollars, anyway? If the basement wasn't good enough for him, why didn't he hire an upstairs flat? The landlord did not tell him that he could do that for the same rent he paid for the miserable hole he burrowed in. He had a good thing and he knew it. Adam Grunschlag knew nothing of the Legal Aid Society, that is there to help such as he. He was afraid to appeal to the police. He was just a poor, timid Jew, of a race that has been hunted for centuries to make sport and revenue for the great and mighty. When he spoke of moving and the landlord said that he would forfeit the twenty dollars deposit that he had held back all these years, and which was all the capital the pedler had, he thought that was the law, and was silent. He could not afford to lose it, and yet he must find some way of making a change, for the sake of little Abe as well as his wife, and the child.

At the thought of the child, the pedler gave a sudden start and was wide awake on the instant. Little Abe was their own, and though he had come in the gloom of that dismal basement, he had been the one ray of sunshine that had fallen into their dreary lives. But the child was a rent baby. In the crowded tenements of New York the lodger serves the same purpose as the Irishman's pig; he helps to pay the rent. "The child"—it was never called anything else—was a lodger. Flotsam from Rivington Street, after the breaking up of a family there, it had come to them, to perish "if the Lord so willed it" in that basement. "Infant slaughter houses" the Tenement House Commission had called

their kind. The father paid seventy-five cents a week for its keep, pending the disclosure of the divine purpose with the baby. The Grunschlags, all unconscious of the partnership that was thus thrust upon them, did their best for it, and up to the time the trouble with the gas began it was a disgracefully healthy baby. Since then it had sickened with the rest. But now, if the worst came to the worst, what was to become of the child?

The pedler was not given long to debate this new question. Even as he sat staring dumbly at nothing in his perplexity, little Abe crawled out of the yard with the news that "mamma was most deaded;" and though it was not so bad as that, it was made clear to her husband when he found her in one of her bad fainting spells, that things had come to a pass where something had to be done. There followed a last ineffectual interview with the landlord, a tearful leave-taking, and as the ambulance rolled away with Hansche to the hospital, where she would be a hundred times better off than in Hester Street, the pedler took little Abe by the hand, and, carrying the child, set out to deliver it over to its rightful owners. If he were rid of it, he and Abe might make a shift to get along. It was a case, emphatically; in which two were company and three a crowd.

He spied the father in Stanton Street where he was working, but when he saw Adam he tried to run away. Desperation gave the pedler both strength and speed, however, and he overhauled him despite his handicaps, and thrust the baby upon him. But the father would have none of it.

"Aber, mein Gott," pleaded the pedler, "vat I do mit him? He vas your baby."

"I don't care what you do with her," said the hard-hearted father. "Give her away—anything. I can't keep her."

And this time he really escaped. Left alone with his charge, the pedler bethought himself of a friend in Pitt Street who had little children. Where so many fed, there would be easily room for another. To Pitt Street he betook himself, only to meet with another setback. They didn't want any babies there; had enough of their own. So he went to a widow in East Broadway who had none, to be driven forth with hard words. What did a widow want with a baby? Did he want to disgrace her? Adam Grunschlag visited in turn every countryman he knew of on the East Side, and proposed to each of them to take the baby off his hands, without finding a single customer for it. Either because it was hurt by such treatment, or because it thought it time for Hansche's attentions, the child at length set up a great cry. Little Abe, who had trotted along bravely upon his four-years-old legs, wrapped in a big plaid shawl, lost his grip at that and joined in, howling dolefully that he was hungry.

Adam Grunschlag gave up at last and sat down on the curb, helpless and hopeless. Hungry! Yes, and so was he. Since morning he had not eaten a morsel, and been on his feet incessantly. Two hungry mouths to fill beside his own and not a cent with which to buy bread. For the first time he felt a pang of bitterness as he saw the shoppers hurry by with filled baskets to homes where there was cheer and plenty. From the window of a tenement across the way shone the lights of a Christmas tree, lighted as in old-country fashion on the Holy Eve. Christmas! What had it ever meant to him and his but hatred and persecution? There was a shout from across the street and voices raised in laughter and song. The children could be seen dancing about the tree, little room though there was. Ah, yes! Let them make merry upon their holiday while two little ones were starving in the street. A colder blast than ordinary came up from the river and little Abe crept close to him, wailing disconsolate within his shawl.

"Hey, what's this?" said a rough, but not unkindly voice at his elbow. "Campin' out, shepherd fashion, Moses? Bad for the kids; these ain't the hills of Judea."

It was the policeman on the beat stirring the trio gently with his club. The pedler got up without a word, to move away, but little Abe, from fright or hunger, set up such a howl that the policeman made him stop to explain. While he did so, telling as briefly as he could about the basement and Hansche and the baby that was not his, a silver quarter found its way mysteriously into little Abe's fist, to the utter upsetting of all that "kid's" notions of policemen and their functions. When the pedler had done, the officer directed him to Police Headquarters where they would take the baby, he need have no fear of that.

"Better leave this one there, too," was his parting counsel. Little Abe did not understand, but he took a firmer grip on his papa's hand, and never let go all the way up the three long flights of stairs to the police nursery where the child at last found peace and a bottle. But when the matron tried to coax him to stay also, he screamed and carried on so that they were glad to let him go lest he wake everybody in the building. Though proverbially Police Headquarters never sleeps, yet it does not like to be disturbed in its midnight nap, as it were. It is human with the rest of us, that is how.

Down in the marble-tiled hall little Abe and his father stopped irresolute. Outside it was dark and windy; the snow, that had ceased falling in the evening, was swept through the streets on the northern blast. They had nowhere to go. The doorman was called downstairs just then to the telegraph office. When he came up again he found father and son curled up on the big mat by the register, sound asleep. It was against the regulations entirely, and he was going to wake them up and put them out, when he happened to glance through the glass doors at the storm without, and remembered that it was Christmas Eve. With a growl he let them sleep, trusting to luck that the inspector wouldn't come out. The doorman, too, was human.

So it came about that the newspaper boys who ran with messages to the reporters' offices across the street, found them there and held a meeting over them. Rudie, the smartest of them, declared that his "fingers just itched for that sheeny's whiskers," but the others paid little attention to him. Even reporters' messengers are not so bad as they like to have others believe them, sometimes. The year before, in their rough sport in the alley, the boys had upset old Mary, so that she fell and broke her arm. That finished old Mary's scrubbing, for the break never healed. Ever since this, bloodthirsty Rudie had been stealing down Mulberry Street to the old woman's attic on pay-day and sharing his meagre wages with her, paying, beside, the insurance premium that assured her of a decent burial; though he denied it hotly if charged with it. So when Rudie announced that he would like to pull the pedler's whiskers, it was taken as a motion that he be removed to the reporters' quarters and made comfortable there, and the motion was carried unanimously. Was it not Christmas Eve?

Little Abe was carried across Mulberry Street, sleeping soundly, and laid upon Rudie's cot. The dogs, Chief and Trilby, that run things in Mulberry Street when the boys are away, snuggled down by him to keep him warm, taking him at once under their protection. The father took off his shoes, and curling up by the stove, slept, tired out, but not until he had briefly told the boys the story he had once that evening gone over with the policeman. They heard it in silence, but one or two made notes which, could he have seen them, would have spoiled one Hester Street landlord's Christmas. When the pedler was asleep, they took them across the street and consulted with the inspector about it.

Father and son slept soundly yet when, the morning papers having gone to press, the boys came down into the office with the night-gang of reporters to spend the dog-watch, according to their wont, in a game of ungodly poker. They were flush, for it had been pay-day in the afternoon, and under the reckless impulse of the holiday the jack-pot, ordinarily modest enough for cause, grew to unheard-of proportions. It contained nearly fifteen dollars when Rudie opened it at last. Amid breathless silence, he then and there made the only public speech of his life.

"The pot," he said, "goes to the sheeny and his kid for their Christmas, or my name is mud."

Wild applause followed the speech. It awakened the pedler and little Abe. They sat up and rubbed their eyes, while Chief and Trilby barked their welcome. The morning was struggling through the windows. The snow had ceased falling and the sky was clear.

"Mornin'," said Rudie, with mock deference, "will yer worships have yer breakfast now, or will ye wait till ye get it?"

The pedler looked about him in bewilderment. "I hab kein blam' cent," he said, feeling hopelessly in his pockets.

A joyous yell greeted him. "Ikey has more nor you," shouted the boys, showing the quarter which little Abe had held fast to in his sleep. "And see this."

They swept the jack-pot into his lap, handfuls of shining silver. The pedler blinked at the sight.

"Good morning and Merry Christmas," they shouted. "We just had Bellevue on the 'phone, and Hansche is all right. She will be out to-day. The gas poisoned her, that was all. For that the police will settle with the landlord, or we will. You go back there and get your money back, and go and hire a flat. This is Christmas, and don't you forget it!"

And they pushed the pedler and little Abe, made fast upon a gorgeous sled that suddenly appeared from somewhere, out into the street, and gave them a rousing cheer as they turned the corner going east, Adam dragging the sled and little Abe seated on his throne, perfectly and radiantly happy.

A STORY OF BLEECKER STREET

Mrs. Kane had put the baby to bed. The regular breathing from two little cribs in different corners told her that her day's work was nearing its end. She paused at the window in the middle of her picking-up to look out at the autumn evening. The house stood on the bank of the East River near where the Harlem joins it. Below ran the swift stream, with the early twilight stealing over it from the near shore; across the water the myriad windows in the Children's Hospital glowed red in the sunset. From the shipyard, where men were working overtime, came up the sound of hammering and careless laughter.

The peacefulness of the scene rested the tired woman. She stood absorbed, without noticing that the door behind her was opened swiftly and that some one came in. It was only when the baby, wakening, sat up in bed and asked with wide, wondering eyes, "Who is that?" that she turned to see.

Just inside the door stood a strange woman. A glance at her dress showed her to be an escaped prisoner. A number of such from the Island were employed under guard in the adjoining hospital, and Mrs. Kane saw them daily. Her first impulse was to call to the men working below, but something in the stranger's look and attitude checked her. She went over to the child's bed and stood by it.

"How did you get out?" she asked, confronting the woman. The question rose to her lips mechanically.

The woman answered with a toss of her head toward the hospital. She was young yet, but her face was old. Debauchery had left deep scars upon it. Her black hair hung in disorder.

"They'll be after me," she said hurriedly. Her voice was hoarse; it kept the promise of the face. "Don't let them. Hide me there—anywhere." She glanced uneasily from the open closet to the door of the inner room.

Mrs. Kane's face hardened. The stranger was a convict, a thief perhaps. Why should she—A door slammed below, and there were excited voices in the hall, the tread of heavy steps on the stairs. The fugitive listened.

"That's them," she said. "Quick! lemme get in! O God!" she pleaded with desperate entreaty, as Mrs. Kane stood coldly unresponsive, "you have your baby. I haven't seen mine in seven months, and they never wrote. I'll never have the chance again."

The steps had halted in the second-floor hall. They were on the last flight of stairs now. The mother's heart relented.

"Here," she said, "go in."

The bedroom door had barely closed upon the fugitive when a man in a prison-keeper's garb stuck his head in from the hall. He saw only the mother and the baby in its crib.

"Hang the woman!" he growled. "Did yez—"

A voice called from the lower hall: "Hey, Billy! she ain't in there. She give us the slip, sure."

The keeper withdrew his head, growling. In the street the hue and cry was raised; a prisoner had escaped.

When all was quiet, Mrs. Kane opened the bedroom door. She had a dark wrapper and an old gray shawl on her arm.

"Go," she said, not unkindly, and laid them on the bed; "Go to your child."

The woman caught at her hand with a sob, but she withdrew it hastily and went back to her baby's crib.

The moon shone upon the hushed streets, when a woman, hooded in a gray shawl, walked rapidly down Fifth Street, eying the tenements with a searching look as she passed. On the stoop of one, a knot of mothers were discussing their household affairs, idling a bit after the day's work. The woman halted in front of the group, and was about to ask a question, when one of the women arose with the exclamation:—

"Mother of God! it's Mame."

"Well," said the woman, testily, "and what if it is? Am I a spook that ye need stare at me so? Ye knowed me well enough before. Where is Will?"

There was no answer. The women looked at one another irresolutely. None of them seemed to know what to say. It was the newcomer who broke the silence again.

"Can't ye speak?" she said, in a voice in which anger and rising apprehension were struggling. "Where's the boy? Kate, what is it?"

She had caught hold of the rail, as if in fear of falling. The woman addressed said hesitatingly:—

"Did ye never hear, Mame? Ain't no one tole ye?"

"Tole me what?" cried the other, shrilly. "They tole me nothing. What's wrong? Good God! 'tain't nothin' with the child?" She shook the other in sudden anger. "Speak, Kate, can't you?"

"Will is dead," said Kate, slowly, thus urged. "It's nine weeks come Sunday that he fell out o' the winder and was kilt. They buried him from the Morgue. We thought you knowed."

Stunned by the blow, the woman had sunk upon the lowest step and buried her face in her hands. She sat there with her shawl drawn over her head, as one by one the neighbors went inside. One lingered; it was the one they had called Kate.

"Mame," she said, when the last was gone, touching her on the shoulder—"Mame!"

An almost imperceptible movement of the head under its shawl testified that she heard.

"Mebbe it was for the best," said Kate, irresolutely; "he might have took after—Tim—you know."

The shrouded figure sat immovable, Kate eyed it in silence, and went her way.

The night wore on. The streets were deserted and the stores closed. Only the saloon windows blazed with light. But the figure sat there yet. It had not stirred. Then it rose, shook out the shawl, and displayed the face of the convict woman who had sought refuge in Mrs. Kane's flat. The face was dry-eyed and hard.

The policeman on the beat rang the bell of the Florence Mission at two o'clock on Sunday morning, and waited until Mother Pringle had unbolted the door. "One for you," he said briefly, and pointed toward the bedraggled shape that crouched in the corner. It was his day off, and he had no time to trouble with prisoners. The matron drew a corner of the wet shawl aside and took one cold hand. She eyed it attentively; there was a wedding ring upon it.

"Why, child," she said, "you'll catch your death of cold. Come right in. Girls, give a hand."

Two of the women inmates half led, half carried her in, and the bolts shut out Bleecker Street once more. They led her to the dormitory, where they took off her dress and shawl, heavy with the cold rain. The matron came bustling in; one of the girls spoke to her aside. She looked sharply at the newcomer.

"Mamie Anderson!" she said. "Well, of all things! Where have you been all this while? Yes, I know," she added soothingly, as the stranger made a sign to speak. "Never mind; we'll talk about it to-morrow. Go to sleep now and get over it."

But though bathed and fed and dosed with bromide,—bromide is a standard prescription at the Florence Mission,—Mamie Anderson did not get over it. Bruised and sore from many blows, broken in body and spirit, she told the girls who sat by her bed through the night such fragments of her story as she could remember. It began, the part of it that took account of Bleecker Street, when her husband was sent to State's Prison for robbery, and, to live, she took up with a scoundrel from whom she kept the secret of her child. With such of her earnings as she could steal from her tormentor she had paid little Willie's board until she was arrested and sent to the Island.

What had happened in the three days since she escaped from the hospital, where she had been detailed with the scrubbing squad, she recalled only vaguely and with long lapses. They had been days and nights of wild carousing. She had come to herself at last, lying beaten and bound in a room in

the house where her child was killed, so she said. A neighbor had heard her groans, released her, and given her car fare to go down town. So she had come and sat in the doorway of the Mission to die.

How much of this story was the imagining of a disordered mind, the police never found out.

Upon her body were marks as of ropes that had made dark bruises, but at the inquest they were said to be of blows. Toward morning, when the girls had lain down to snatch a moment's sleep, she called one of them, whom she had known before, and asked for a drink of water. As she took it with feeble hand, she asked:—

"Lil', can you pray?"

For an answer the girl knelt by her bed and prayed. When she had ended, Mamie Anderson fell asleep.

She was still sleeping when the others got up. They noticed after a while that she lay very quiet and white, and one of them going to see, found her dead.

That is the story of Mamie Anderson, as Bleecker Street told it to me. Out on Long Island there is, in a suburban cemetery, a lovely shaded spot where I sometimes sit by our child's grave. The green hillside slopes gently under the chestnuts, violets and buttercups spring from the sod, and the robin sings its jubilant note in the long June twilights. Halfway down the slope, six or eight green mounds cluster about a granite block in which are hewn the words:—

> These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

It is the burial-plot of the Florence Mission. Under one of the mounds lies all that was mortal of Mamie Anderson.

THE KID HANGS UP HIS STOCKING

The clock in the West Side Boys' Lodging-house ticked out the seconds of Christmas eve as slowly and methodically as if six fat turkeys were not sizzling in the basement kitchen against the morrow's spread, and as if two-score boys were not racking their brains to guess what kind of pies would go with them. Out on the avenue the shopkeepers were barring doors and windows, and shouting "Merry Christmas!" to one another across the street as they hurried to get home. The drays ran over the pavement with muffled sounds; winter had set in with a heavy snow-storm. In the big hall the monotonous click of checkers on the board kept step with the clock. The smothered exclamations of the boys at some unexpected, bold stroke, and the scratching of a little fellow's pencil on a slate, trying to figure out how long it was yet till the big dinner, were the only sounds that broke the quiet of the room. The superintendent dozed behind his desk.

A door at the end of the hall creaked, and a head with a shock of weather-beaten hair was stuck cautiously through the opening.

"Tom!" it said in a stage-whisper. "Hi, Tom! Come up an' git on ter de lay of de Kid."

A bigger boy in a jumper, who had been lounging on two chairs by the group of checker players, sat up and looked toward the door. Something in the energetic toss of the head there aroused his instant curiosity, and he started across the room. After a brief whispered conference the door closed upon the two, and silence fell once more on the hall.

They had been gone but a little while when they came back in haste. The big boy shut the door softly behind him and set his back against it.

"Fellers," he said, "what d'ye t'ink? I'm blamed if de Kid ain't gone an' hung up his sock fer Chris'mas!"

The checkers dropped, and the pencil ceased scratching on the slate, in breathless suspense.

"Come up an' see," said Tom, briefly, and led the way.

The whole band followed on tiptoe. At the foot of the stairs their leader halted.

"Yer don't make no noise," he said, with a menacing gesture. "You, Savoy!"—to one in a patched shirt and with a mischievous twinkle,—"you don't come none o' yer monkey-shines. If you scare de Kid you'll get it in de neck, see!"

With this admonition they stole upstairs. In the last cot of the double tier of bunks a boy much smaller than the rest slept, snugly tucked in the blankets. A tangled curl of yellow hair strayed over his baby face. Hitched to the bedpost was a poor, worn little stocking, arranged with much care so that Santa Claus should have as little trouble in filling it as possible. The edge of a hole in the knee had been drawn together and tied with a string to prevent anything falling out. The boys looked on in amazed silence. Even Savoy was dumb.

Little Willie, or, as he was affectionately dubbed by the boys, "the Kid," was a waif who had drifted in among them some months before. Except that his mother was in the hospital, nothing was known about him, which was regular and according to the rule of the house. Not as much was known about most of its patrons; few of them knew more themselves, or cared to remember. Santa Claus had never been anything to them but a fake to make the colored supplements sell. The revelation of the Kid's simple faith struck them with a kind of awe. They sneaked quietly downstairs.

"Fellers," said Tom, when they were all together again in the big room,—by virtue of his length, which had given him the nickname of "Stretch," he was the speaker on all important occasions,—"ye seen it yerself. Santy Claus is a-comin' to this here joint to-night. I wouldn't 'a' believed it. I ain't never had no dealin's wid de ole guy. He kinder forgot I was around, I guess. But de Kid says he is a-comin' to-night, an' what de Kid says goes."

Then he looked round expectantly. Two of the boys, "Gimpy" and Lem, were conferring aside in an undertone. Presently Gimpy, who limped, as his name indicated, spoke up.

"Lem says, says he—"

"Gimpy, you chump! you'll address de chairman," interrupted Tom, with severe dignity, "or you'll get yer jaw broke, if yer leg *is* short, see!"

"Cut it out, Stretch," was Gimpy's irreverent answer. "This here ain't no regular meetin', an' we ain't goin' to have none o' yer rot. Lem he says, says he, let's break de bank an' fill de Kid's sock. He won't know but it wuz ole Santy done it."

A yell of approval greeted the suggestion. The chairman, bound to exercise the functions of office in season and out of season, while they lasted, thumped the table.

"It is regular motioned an' carried," he announced, "that we break de bank fer de Kid's Chris'mas. Come on, boys!"

The bank was run by the house, with the superintendent as paying teller. He had to be consulted, particularly as it was past banking hours; but the affair having been succinctly put before him by a committee, of which Lem and Gimpy and Stretch were the talking members, he readily consented to a reopening of business for a scrutiny of the various accounts which represented the boys' earnings at selling papers and blacking boots, minus the cost of their keep and of sundry surreptitious flings at "craps" in secret corners. The inquiry developed an available surplus of three dollars and fifty cents. Savoy alone had no account; the run of craps had recently gone heavily against him. But in consideration of the season, the house voted a credit of twenty-five cents to him. The announcement was received with cheers. There was an immediate rush for the store, which was delayed only a few minutes by the necessity of Gimpy and Lem stopping on the stairs to "thump" one another as the expression of their entire satisfaction.

The procession that returned to the lodging-house later on, after wearing out the patience of several belated storekeepers, might have been the very Santa's supply-train itself. It signalized its advent by a variety of discordant noises, which were smothered on the stairs by Stretch, with much personal violence, lest they wake the Kid out of season. With boots in hand and bated breath, the midnight band stole up to the dormitory and looked in. All was safe. The Kid was dreaming, and smiled in his sleep. The report roused a passing suspicion that he was faking, and Savarese was for pinching his toe to find out. As this would inevitably result in disclosure, Savarese and his proposal were scornfully sat upon. Gimpy supplied the popular explanation.

"He's a-dreamin' that Santy Claus has come," he said, carefully working a base-ball bat past the tender spot in the stocking.

"Hully Gee!" commented Shorty, balancing a drum with care on the end of it, "I'm thinkin' he ain't far out. Looks's ef de hull shop'd come along."

It did when it was all in place. A trumpet and a gun that had made vain and perilous efforts to join the bat in the stocking leaned against the bed in expectant attitudes. A picture-book with a pink Bengal tiger and a green bear on the cover peeped over the pillow, and the bedposts and rail were festooned with candy and marbles in bags. An express-wagon with a high seat was stabled in the gangway. It carried a load of fir branches that left no doubt from whose livery it hailed. The last touch was supplied by Savoy in the shape of a monkey on a yellow stick, that was not in the official bill of lading.

"I swiped it fer de Kid," he said briefly in explanation.

When it was all done the boys turned in, but not to sleep. It was long past midnight before the deep and regular breathing from the beds proclaimed that the last had succumbed.

The early dawn was tinging the frosty window panes with red when from the Kid's cot there came a shriek that roused the house with a start of very genuine surprise.

"Hello!" shouted Stretch, sitting up with a jerk and rubbing his eyes. "Yes, sir! in a minute. Hello, Kid, what to—"

The Kid was standing barefooted in the passageway, with a base-ball bat in one hand and a trumpet and a pair of drumsticks in the other, viewing with shining eyes the wagon and its cargo,

the gun and all the rest. From every cot necks were stretched, and grinning faces watched the show. In the excess of his joy the Kid let out a blast on the trumpet that fairly shook the building. As if it were a signal, the boys jumped out of bed and danced a breakdown about him in their shirt-tails, even Gimpy joining in.

"Holy Moses!" said Stretch, looking down, "if Santy Claus ain't been here an' forgot his hull kit, I'm blamed!"

THE SLIPPER-MAKER'S FAST

Isaac Josephs, slipper-maker, sat up on the fifth floor of his Allen Street tenement, in the gray of the morning, to finish the task he had set himself before Yom Kippur. Three days and three nights he had worked without sleep, almost without taking time to eat, to make ready the two dozen slippers that were to enable him to fast the fourth day and night for conscience' sake, and now they were nearly done. As he saw the end of his task near, he worked faster and faster while the tenement slept.

Three years he had slaved for the sweater, stinted and starved himself, before he had saved enough to send for his wife and children, awaiting his summons in the city by the Black Sea. Since they came they had slaved and starved together; for wages had become steadily less, work more grinding, and hours longer and later. Still, of that he thought little. They had known little else, there or here; they were together now. The past was dead; the future was their own, even in the Allen Street tenement, toiling night and day at starvation wages. To-morrow was the feast, their first Yom Kippur since they had come together again,—Esther, his wife, and Ruth and little Ben,—the feast when, priest and patriarch of his own house, he might forget his bondage and be free. Poor little Ben! The hand that smoothed the soft leather on the last took a tenderer, lingering touch as he glanced toward the stool where the child had sat watching him work till his eyes grew small. Brave little Ben, almost a baby yet, but so patient, so wise, and so strong!

The deep breathing of the sleeping children reached him from their crib. He smiled and listened, with the half-finished slipper in his hand. As he sat thus, a great drowsiness came upon him. He nodded once, twice; his hands sank into his lap, his head fell forward upon his chest. In the silence of the morning he slept, worn out with utter weariness.

He awoke with a guilty start to find the first rays of the dawn struggling through his window, and his task yet undone. With desperate energy he seized the unfinished slipper to resume his work. His unsteady hand upset the little lamp by his side, upon which his burnishing-iron was heating. The oil blazed up on the floor and ran toward the nearly finished pile of work. The cloth on the table caught fire. In a fever of terror and excitement, the slipper-maker caught it in his hands, wrung it, and tore at it to smother the flames. His hands were burned, but what of that? The slippers, the slippers! If they were burned, it was ruin. There would be no Yom Kippur, no feast of Atonement, no fast—rather, no end of it; starvation for him and his.

He beat the fire with his hands and trampled it with his feet as it burned and spread on the floor. His hair and his beard caught fire: With a despairing shriek he gave it up and fell before the precious slippers, barring, the way of the flames to them with his body.

The shriek woke his wife. She sprang out of bed, snatched up a blanket, and threw it upon the fire. It went out, was smothered under the blanket. The slipper-maker sat up, panting and grateful. His Yom Kippur was saved.

The tenement awoke to hear of the fire in the morning, when all Jew town was stirring with preparations for the feast. The slipper-maker's wife was setting the house to rights for the holiday then. Two half-naked children played about her knees, asking eager questions about it. Asked if her husband had often to work so hard, and what he made by it, she shrugged her shoulders and said, "The rent and a crust."

And yet all this labor and effort to enable him to fast one day according to the old dispensation, when all the rest of the days he fasted according to the new!

DEATH COMES TO CAT ALLEY

The dead-wagon stopped at the mouth of Cat Alley. Its coming made a commotion among the children in the block, and the Chief of Police looked out of his window across the street, his attention arrested by the noise. He saw a little pine coffin carried into the alley under the arm of the driver, a shoal of ragged children trailing behind. After a while the driver carried it out again, shoved it in the wagon, where there were other boxes like it, and, slamming the door, drove off.

A red-eyed woman watched it down the street until it disappeared around the corner. Then she wiped her eyes with her apron and went in.

It was only Mary Welsh's baby that was dead, but to her the alley, never cheerful on the brightest of days, seemed hopelessly desolate to-day. It was all she had. Her first baby died in teething.

Cat Alley is a back-yard illustration of the theory of evolution. The fittest survive, and the Welsh babies were not among them. It would be strange if they were. Mike, the father, works in a Crosby Street factory when he does work. It is necessary to put it that way, for, though he has not been discharged, he had only one day's work this week and none at all last week. He gets one dollar a day, and the one dollar he earned these last two weeks his wife had to draw to pay the doctor with when the baby was so sick. They have had nothing else coming in, and but for the wages of Mrs. Welsh's father, who lives with them, there would have been nothing in the house to eat.

The baby came three weeks ago, right in the hardest of the hard times. It was never strong enough to nurse, and the milk bought in Mulberry Street is not for babies to grow on who are not strong enough to stand anything. Little John never grew at all. He lay upon his pillow this morning as white and wan and tiny as the day he came into a world that didn't want him.

Yesterday, just before he died, he sat upon his grandmother's lap and laughed and crowed for the first time in his brief life, "just like he was talkin' to me," said the old woman, with a smile that struggled hard to keep down a sob. "I suppose it was a sort of inward cramp," she added—a mother's explanation of baby laugh in Cat Alley.

The mother laid out the little body on the only table in their room, in its only little white slip, and covered it with a piece of discarded lace curtain to keep off the flies. They had no ice, and no money to pay an undertaker for opening the little grave in Calvary, where their first baby lay. All night she sat by the improvised bier, her tears dropping silently.

When morning came and brought the woman with the broken arm from across the hall to sit by her, it was sadly evident that the burial of the child must be hastened. It was not well to look at the little face and the crossed baby hands, and even the mother saw it.

"Let the trench take him, in God's name; He has his soul," said the grandmother, crossing herself devoutly.

An undertaker had promised to put the baby in the grave in Calvary for twelve dollars and take two dollars a week until it was paid. But how can a man raise two dollars a week, with only one coming in in two weeks, and that gone to the doctor? With a sigh Mike Welsh went for the "lines" that must smooth its way to the trench in the Potter's Field, and then to Mr. Blake's for the dead-wagon. It was the hardest walk of his life.

And so it happened that the dead-wagon halted at Cat Alley and that little John took his first and last ride. A little cross and a number on the pine box, cut in the lid with a chisel, and his brief history was closed, with only the memory of the little life remaining to the Welshes to help them fight the battle alone.

In the middle of the night, when the dead-lamp burned dimly at the bottom of the alley, a policeman brought to Police Headquarters a wailing child, an outcast found in the area of a Lexington Avenue house by a citizen, who handed it over to the police. Until its cries were smothered in the police nursery upstairs with the ever ready bottle, they reached the bereaved mother in Cat Alley

and made her tears drop faster. As the dead-wagon drove away with its load in the morning, Matron Travers came out with the now sleeping waif in her arms. She, too, was bound for Mr. Blake's.

The two took their ride on the same boat—the living child, whom no one wanted, to Randall's Island, to be enlisted with its number in the army of the city's waifs, strong and able to fight its way; the dead, for whom a mother's heart yearns, to its place in the great ditch.

A PROPOSAL ON THE ELEVATED

The sleeper on the 3.35 a.m. elevated train from the Harlem bridge was awake for once. The sleeper is the last car in the train, and has its own set that snores nightly in the same seats, grunts with the fixed inhospitality of the commuter at the intrusion of a stranger, and is on terms with Conrad, the German conductor, who knows each one of his passengers and wakes him up at his station. The sleeper is unique. It is run for the benefit of those who ride in it, not for the company's. It not only puts them off properly; it waits for them, if they are not there. The conductor knows that they will come. They are men, mostly, with small homes beyond the bridge, whose work takes them down town to the markets, the Post-office, and the busy marts of the city long before cockcrow. The day begins in New York at all hours.

Usually the sleeper is all that its name implies, but this morning it was as far from it as could be. A party of young people, fresh from a neighboring hop, had come on board and filled the rear end of the car. Their feet tripped yet to the dance, and snatches of the latest waltz floated through the train between peals of laughter and little girlish shrieks. The regulars glared, discontented, in strange seats, unable to go to sleep. Only the railroad yardmen dropped off promptly as they came in. Theirs was the shortest ride, and they could least afford to lose time. Two old Irishmen, flanked by their dinner-pails, gravely discussed the Henry George campaign.

Across the passage sat a group of three apart—a young man, a girl, and a little elderly woman with lines of care and hard work in her patient face. She guarded carefully three umbrellas, a very old and faded one, and two that were new and of silk, which she held in her lap, though it had not rained for a month. He was a likely young fellow, tall and straight, with the thoughtful eye of a student. His dark hair fell nearly to his shoulders, and his coat had a foreign cut. The girl was a typical child of the city, slight and graceful of form, dressed in good taste, and with a bright, winning face. The two chatted confidentially together, forgetful of all else, while mamma, between them, nodded sleepily in her seat.

A sudden burst of white light flooded the car.

"Hey! Ninety-ninth Street!" called the conductor, and rattled the door. The railroad men tumbled out pell-mell, all but one. Conrad shook him, and he went out mechanically, blinking his eyes.

"Eighty-ninth next!" from the doorway.

The laughter at the rear end of the car had died out. The young people, in a quieter mood, were humming a popular love-song. Presently above the rest rose a clear tenor:—

> Oh, promise me that some day you and I
> Will take our love together to some sky
> Where we can be alone and faith renew—

The clatter of the train as it flew over a switch drowned the rest. When the last wheel had banged upon the frog, I heard the young student's voice, in the soft accents of southern Europe:—

"Wenn ich in Wien war—" He was telling her of his home and his people in the language of his childhood. I glanced across. She sat listening with kindling eyes. Mamma slumbered sweetly; her worn old hands clutched unconsciously the umbrellas in her lap. The two Irishmen, having settled the campaign, had dropped to sleep, too. In the crowded car the two were alone. His hand sought hers and met it halfway.

"Forty-seventh!" There was a clatter of tin cans below. The contingent of milkmen scrambled out of their seats and off for the depot. In the lull that followed their going, the tenor rose from the last seat:—

Those first sweet violets of early spring,
Which come in whispers, thrill us both, and sing
Of love unspeakable that is to be,
Oh, promise me! Oh, promise me!

The two young people faced each other. He had thrown his hat upon the seat beside him and held her hand fast, gesticulating with his free hand as he spoke rapidly, eloquently, eagerly of his prospects and his hopes. Her own toyed nervously with his coat-lapel, twisting and twirling a button as he went on. What he said might have been heard to the other end of the car, had there been anybody to listen. He was to live here always; his uncle would open a business in New York, of which he was to have charge, when he had learned to know the country and its people. It would not be long now, and then—and then—

"Twenty-third Street!"

There was a long stop after the levy for the ferries had left. The conductor went out on the platform and consulted with the ticket-chopper. He was scrutinizing his watch for the second time, when the faint jingle of an east-bound car was heard.

"Here she comes!" said the ticket-chopper. A shout, and a man bounded up the steps, three at a time. It was an engineer who, to make connection with his locomotive at Chatham Square, must catch that train.

"Hullo, Conrad! Nearly missed you," he said as he jumped on the car, breathless.

"All right, Jack." And the conductor jerked the bell-rope. "You made it, though." The train sped on.

Two lives, heretofore running apart, were hastening to a union. The lovers had seen nothing, heard nothing but each other. His eyes burned as hers met his and fell before them. His head bent lower until his face almost touched hers. His dark hair lay against her blond curls. The ostrich-feather on her hat swept his shoulder.

"Mögtest Du mich haben?" he entreated.

Above the grinding of the wheels as the train slowed up for the station a block ahead, pleaded the tenor:—

Oh, promise me that you will take my hand,
The most unworthy in this lonely land—

Did she speak? Her face was hidden, but the blond curls moved with a nod so slight that only a lover's eye could see it. He seized her disengaged hand. The conductor stuck his head into the car.

"Fourteenth Street!"

A squad of stout, florid men with butchers' aprons started for the door. The girl arose hastily.

"Mamma!" she called, "steh' auf! Es ist Fourteenth Street."

The little woman woke up, gathered the umbrellas in her arms, and bustled after the marketmen, her daughter leading the way. He sat as one dreaming.

"Ach!" he sighed, and ran his hand through his dark hair, "so rasch!"

And he went out after them.

LITTLE WILL'S MESSAGE

"It is that or starve, Captain. I can't get a job. God knows I've tried, but without a recommend, it's no use. I ain't no good at beggin'. And—and—there's the childer."

There was a desperate note in the man's voice that made the Captain turn and look sharply at him. A swarthy, strongly built man in a rough coat, and with that in his dark face which told that he had lived longer than his years, stood at the door of the Detective Office. His hand that gripped the door handle shook so that the knob rattled in his grasp, but not with fear. He was no stranger to that place. Black Bill's face had looked out from the Rogues' Gallery longer than most of those now there could remember. The Captain looked him over in silence.

"You had better not, Bill," he said. "You know what will come of it. When you go up again it will be the last time. And up you go, sure."

The man started to say something, but choked it down and went out without a word. The Captain got up and rang his bell.

"Bill, who was here just now, is off again," he said to the officer who came to the door. "He says it is steal or starve, and he can't get a job. I guess he is right. Who wants a thief in his pay? And how can I recommend him? And still I think he would keep straight if he had the chance. Tell Murphy to look after him and see what he is up to."

The Captain went out, tugging viciously at his gloves. He was in very bad humor. The policeman at the Mulberry Street door got hardly a nod for his cheery "Merry Christmas" as he passed.

"Wonder what's crossed him," he said, looking down the street after him.

The green lamps were lighted and shone upon the hurrying six o'clock crowds from the Broadway shops. In the great business buildings the iron shutters were pulled down and the lights put out, and in a little while the reporters' boys that carried slips from Headquarters to the newspaper offices across the street were the only tenants of the block. A stray policeman stopped now and then on the corner and tapped the lamp-post reflectively with his club as he looked down the deserted street and wondered, as his glance rested upon the Chief's darkened windows, how it felt to have six thousand dollars a year and every night off. In the Detective Office the Sergeant who had come in at roll-call stretched himself behind the desk and thought of home. The lights of a Christmas tree in the abutting Mott Street tenement shone through his window, and the laughter of children mingled with the tap of the toy drum. He pulled down the sash in order to hear better. As he did so, a strong draught swept his desk. The outer door slammed. Two detectives came in bringing a prisoner between them. A woman accompanied them.

The Sergeant pulled the blotter toward him mechanically and dipped his pen.

"What's the charge?" he asked.

"Picking pockets in Fourteenth Street. This lady is the complainant, Mrs. –"

The name was that of a well-known police magistrate. The Sergeant looked up and bowed. His glance took in the prisoner, and a look of recognition came into his face.

"What, Bill! So soon?" he said.

The prisoner was sullenly silent. He answered the questions put to him briefly, and was searched. The stolen pocket-book, a small paper package, and a crumpled letter were laid upon the desk. The Sergeant saw only the pocket-book.

"Looks bad," he said with wrinkled brow.

"We caught him at it," explained the officer. "Guess Bill has lost heart. He didn't seem to care. Didn't even try to get away."

The prisoner was taken to a cell. Silence fell once more upon the office. The Sergeant made a few red lines in the blotter and resumed his reveries. He was not in a mood for work. He hitched his chair nearer the window and looked across the yard. But the lights there were put out, the children's

laughter had died away. Out of sorts at he hardly knew what, he leaned back in his chair, with his hands under the back of his head. Here it was Christmas Eve, and he at the desk instead of being out with the old woman buying things for the children. He thought with a sudden pang of conscience of the sled he had promised to get for Johnnie and had forgotten. That was hard luck. And what would Katie say when—

He had got that far when his eye, roaming idly over the desk, rested upon the little package taken from the thief's pocket. Something about it seemed to move him with sudden interest. He sat up and reached for it. He felt it carefully all over. Then he undid the package slowly and drew forth a woolly sheep. It had a blue ribbon about its neck, with a tiny bell hung on it.

The Sergeant set the sheep upon the desk and looked at it fixedly for better than a minute. Having apparently studied out its mechanism, he pulled its head and it baa-ed. He pulled it once more, and nodded. Then he took up the crumpled letter and opened it.

This was what he read, scrawled in a child's uncertain hand:—

"Deer Sante Claas—Pease wont yer bring me a sjeep wat bas. Aggie had won wonst. An Kate wants a dollie offul. In the reere 718 19th Street by the gas house. Your friend Will."

The Sergeant read it over twice very carefully and glanced over the page at the sheep, as if taking stock and wondering why Kate's dollie was not there. Then he took the sheep and the letter and went over to the Captain's door. A gruff "Come in!" answered his knock. The Captain was pulling off his overcoat. He had just come in from his dinner.

"Captain," said the Sergeant, "we found this in the pocket of Black Bill who is locked up for picking Mrs. –'s pocket an hour ago. It is a clear case. He didn't even try to give them the slip," and he set the sheep upon the table and laid the letter beside it.

"Black Bill?" said the Captain, with something of a start; "the dickens, you say!" And he took up the letter and read it. He was not a very good penman, was little Will. The Captain had even a harder time of it than the Sergeant had had making out his message.

Three times he went over it, spelling out the words, and each time comparing it with the woolly exhibit that was part of the evidence, before he seemed to understand. Then it was in a voice that would have frightened little Will very much could he have heard it, and with a black look under his bushy eyebrows, that he bade the Sergeant "Fetch Bill up here!" One might almost have expected the little white lamb to have taken to its heels with fright at having raised such a storm, could it have run at all. But it showed no signs of fear. On the contrary it baa-ed quite lustily when the Sergeant should have been safely out of earshot. The hand of the Captain had accidentally rested upon the woolly head in putting down the letter. But the Sergeant was not out of earshot. He heard it and grinned.

An iron door in the basement clanged and there were steps in the passageway. The doorman brought in Bill. He stood by the door, sullenly submissive. The Captain raised his head. It was in the shade.

"So you are back, are you?" he said.

The thief nodded.

The Captain bent his brows upon him and said with sudden fierceness, "You couldn't keep honest a month, could you?"

"They wouldn't let me. Who wants a thief in his pay? And the children were starving."

It was said patiently enough, but it made the Captain wince all the same. They were his own words. But he did not give in so easily.

"Starving?" he repeated harshly. "And that's why you got this, I suppose," and he pushed the sheep from under the newspaper that had fallen upon it by accident and covered it up.

The thief looked at it and flushed to the temples. He tried to speak but could not. His face worked, and he seemed to be strangling. In the middle of his fight to master himself he saw the child's crumpled message on the desk. Taking a quick step across the room he snatched it up, wildly, fiercely.

"Captain," he gasped, and broke down utterly. The hardened thief wept like a woman.

The Captain rang his bell. He stood with his back to the prisoner when the doorman came in. "Take him down," he commanded. And the iron door clanged once more behind the prisoner.

Ten minutes later the reporters were discussing across the way the nature of "the case" which the night promised to develop. They had piped off the Captain and one of his trusted men leaving the building together, bound east. Could they have followed them all the way, they would have seen them get off the car at Nineteenth Street, and go toward the gas house, carefully scanning the numbers of the houses as they went. They found one at last before which they halted. The Captain searched in his pocket and drew forth the baby's letter to Santa Claus, and they examined the number under the gas lamp. Yes, that was right. The door was open, and they went right through to the rear.

Up in the third story three little noses were flattened against the window pane, and three childish mouths were breathing peep-holes through which to keep a lookout for the expected Santa Claus. It was cold, for there was no fire in the room, but in their fever of excitement the children didn't mind that. They were bestowing all their attention upon keeping the peep-holes open.

"Do you think he will come?" asked the oldest boy—there were two boys and a girl—of Kate.

"Yes, he will. I know he will come. Papa said so," said the child in a tone of conviction.

"I'se so hungry, and I want my sheep," said Baby Will.

"Wait and I'll tell you of the wolf," said his sister, and she took him on her lap. She had barely started when there were steps on the stairs and a tap on the door. Before the half-frightened children could answer it was pushed open. Two men stood on the threshold. One wore a big fur overcoat. The baby looked at him in wide-eyed wonder.

"Is you Santa Claus?" he asked.

"Yes, my little man, and are you Baby Will?" said a voice that was singularly different from the harsh one Baby Will's father had heard so recently in the Captain's office, and yet very like it.

"See. This is for you, I guess," and out of the big roomy pocket came the woolly sheep and baa-ed right off as if it were his own pasture in which he was at home. And well might any sheep be content nestling at a baby heart so brimful of happiness as little Will's was then, child of a thief though he was.

"Papa spoke for it, and he spoke for Kate, too, and I guess for everybody," said the bogus Santa Claus, "and it is all right. My sled will be here in a minute. Now we will just get to work and make ready for him. All help!"

The Sergeant behind the desk in the Detective Office might have had a fit had he been able to witness the goings-on in that rear tenement in the next hour; and then again he might not. There is no telling about those Sergeants. The way that poor flat laid itself out of a sudden was fairly staggering. It was not only that a fire was made and that the pantry filled up in the most extraordinary manner; but a real Christmas tree sprang up, out of the floor, as it were, and was found to be all besprinkled with gold and stars and cornucopias with sugarplums. From the top of it, which was not higher than Santa Claus could easily reach, because the ceiling was low, a marvellous doll, with real hair and with eyes that could open and shut, looked down with arms wide open to take Kate to its soft wax heart. Under the branches of the tree browsed every animal that went into and came out of Noah's Ark, and there were glorious games of Messenger Boy and Three Bad Bears, and honey-cakes and candy apples, and a little yellow-bird in a cage, and what not? It was glorious. And when the tea-kettle began to sing, skilfully manipulated by Santa Claus's assistant, who nominally was known in Mulberry Street as Detective Sergeant Murphy, it was just too lovely for anything. The baby's eyes grew wider and wider, and Kate's were shining with happiness, when in the midst of it all she suddenly stopped and said:—

"But where is papa? Why don't he come?"

Santa Claus gave a little start at the sudden question, but pulled himself together right away.

"Why, yes," he said, "he must have got lost. Now you are all right we will just go and see if we can find him. Mrs. McCarthy here next door will help you keep the kettle boiling and the lights

burning till we come back. Just let me hear that sheep baa once more. That's right! I bet we'll find papa." And out they went.

An hour later, while Mr. –, the Magistrate, and his good wife were viewing with mock dismay the array of little stockings at their hearth in their fine up-town house, and talking of the adventure of Mrs. – with the pickpocket, there came a ring at the door-bell and the Captain of the detectives was ushered in. What he told them I do not know, but this I do know, that when he went away the honorable Magistrate went with him, and his wife waved good-by to them from the stoop with wet eyes as they drove away in a carriage hastily ordered up from a livery stable. While they drove down town, the Magistrate's wife went up to the nursery and hugged her sleeping little ones, one after the other, and tear-drops fell upon their warm cheeks that had wiped out the guilt of more than one sinner before, and the children smiled in their sleep. They say among the simple-minded folk of far-away Denmark that then they see angels in their dreams.

The carriage stopped in Mulberry Street, in front of Police Headquarters, and there was great scurrying among the reporters, for now they were sure of their "case." But no "prominent citizen" came out, made free by the Magistrate, who opened court in the Captain's office. Only a rough-looking man with a flushed face, whom no one knew, and who stopped on the corner and looked back as one in a dream and then went east, the way the Captain and his man had gone on their expedition personating no less exalted a personage than Santa Claus himself.

That night there was Christmas, indeed, in the rear tenement "near the gas house," for papa had come home just in time to share in its cheer. And there was no one who did it with a better will, for the Christmas evening that began so badly was the luckiest night in his life. He had the promise of a job on the morrow in his pocket, along with something to keep the wolf from the door in the holidays. His hard days were over, and he was at last to have his chance to live an honest life. And it was the baby's letter to Santa Claus and the baa sheep that did it all, with the able assistance of the Captain and the Sergeant. Don't let us forget the Sergeant.

LOST CHILDREN

I am not thinking now of theological dogmas or moral distinctions. I am considering the matter from the plain every-day standpoint of the police office. It is not my fault that the one thing that is lost more persistently than any other in a large city is the very thing you would imagine to be safest of all in the keeping of its owner. Nor do I pretend to explain it. It is simply one of the contradictions of metropolitan life. In twenty years' acquaintance with the police office, I have seen money, diamonds, coffins, horses, and tubs of butter brought there and pass into the keeping of the property clerk as lost or strayed. I remember a whole front stoop, brownstone, with steps and iron railing all complete, being put up at auction, unclaimed. But these were mere representatives of a class which as a whole kept its place and the peace. The children did neither. One might have been tempted to apply the old inquiry about the pins to them but for another contradictory circumstance: rather more of them are found than lost.

The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children keeps the account of the surplus. It has now on its books half a score Jane Does and twice as many Richard Roes, of whom nothing more will ever be known than that they were found, which is on the whole, perhaps, best—for them certainly. The others, the lost, drift from the tenements and back, a host of thousands year by year. The two I am thinking of were of these, typical of the maelstrom.

Yette Lubinsky was three years old when she was lost from her Essex Street home, in that neighborhood where once the police commissioners thought seriously of having the children tagged with name and street number, to save trotting them back and forth between police station and Headquarters. She had gone from the tenement to the corner where her father kept a stand, to beg a penny, and nothing more was known of her. Weeks after, a neighbor identified one of her little frocks as the match of one worn by a child she had seen dragged off by a rough-looking man. But though Max Lubinsky, the pedler, and Yette's mother camped on the steps of Police Headquarters early and late, anxiously questioning every one who went in and out about their lost child, no other word was heard of her. By and by it came to be an old story, and the two were looked upon as among the fixtures of the place. Mulberry Street has other such.

They were poor and friendless in a strange land, the very language of which was jargon to them, as theirs was to us, timid in the crush, and they were shouldered out. It was not inhumanity; at least, it was not meant to be. It was the way of the city, with every one for himself; and they accepted it, uncomplaining. So they kept their vigil on the stone steps, in storm and fair weather, every night taking turns to watch all who passed. When it was a policeman with a little child, as it was many times between sunset and sunrise, the one on the watch would start up the minute they turned the corner, and run to meet them, eagerly scanning the little face, only to return, disappointed but not cast down, to the step upon which the other slept, head upon knees, waiting the summons to wake and watch.

Their mute sorrow appealed to me, then doing night duty in the newspaper office across the way, and I tried to help them in their search for the lost Yette. They accepted my help gratefully, trustfully, but without loud demonstration. Together we searched the police records, the hospitals, the morgue, and the long register of the river's dead. She was not there. Having made sure of this, we turned to the children's asylums. We had a description of Yette sent to each and every one, with the minutest particulars concerning her and her disappearance, but no word came back in response. A year passed, and we were compelled at last to give over the search. It seemed as if every means of finding out what had become of the child had been exhausted, and all alike had failed.

During the long search, I had occasion to go more than once to the Lubinskys' home. They lived up three flights, in one of the big barracks that give to the lower end of Essex Street the appearance of a deep black cañon with cliff-dwellers living in tiers all the way up, their watch-fires showing like so many dull red eyes through the night. The hall was pitch-dark, and the whole building redolent of

the slum; but in the stuffy little room where the pedler lived there was, in spite of it all, an atmosphere of home that set it sharply apart from the rest. One of these visits I will always remember. I had stumbled in, unthinking, upon their Sabbath-eve meal. The candles were lighted, and the children gathered about the table; at its head, the father, every trace of the timid, shrinking pedler of Mulberry Street laid aside with the week's toil, was invoking the Sabbath blessing upon his house and all it harbored. I saw him turn, with a quiver of the lip, to a vacant seat between him and the mother, and it was then that I noticed the baby's high chair, empty, but kept ever waiting for the little wanderer. I understood; and in the strength of domestic affection that burned with unquenched faith in the dark tenement after the many months of weary failure I read the history of this strange people that in every land and in every day has conquered even the slum with the hope of home.

It was not to be put to shame here, either. Yette returned, after all, and the way of it came near being stranger than all the rest. Two long years had passed, and the memory of her and hers had long since faded out of Mulberry Street, when, in the overhauling of one of the children's homes we thought we had canvassed thoroughly, the child turned up, as unaccountably as she had been lost. All that I ever learned about it was that she had been brought there, picked up by some one in the street, probably, and, after more or less inquiry that had failed to connect with the search at our end of the line, had been included in their flock on some formal commitment, and had stayed there. Not knowing her name,—she could not tell it herself, to be understood,—they had given her one of their own choosing; and thus disguised, she might have stayed there forever but for the fortunate chance that cast her up to the surface once more, and gave the clew to her identity at last. Even then her father had nearly as much trouble in proving his title to his child as he had had in looking for her, but in the end he made it good. The frock she had worn when she was lost proved the missing link. The mate of it was still carefully laid away in the tenement. So Yette returned to fill the empty chair at the Sabbath board, and the pedler's faith was justified.

My other chip from the maelstrom was a lad half grown. He dropped into my office as if out of the clouds, one long and busy day, when, tired and out of sorts, I sat wishing my papers and the world in general in Halifax. I had not heard the knock, and when I looked up, there stood my boy, a stout, square-shouldered lad, with heavy cowhide boots and dull, honest eyes—eyes that looked into mine as if with a question they were about to put, and then gave it up, gazing straight ahead, stolid, impassive. It struck me that I had seen that face before, and I found out immediately where. The officer of the Children's Aid Society who had brought him explained that Frands—that was his name —had been in the society's care five months and over. They had found him drifting in the streets, and, knowing whither that drift set, had taken him in charge and sent him to one of their lodging-houses, where he had been since, doing chores and plodding about in his dull way. That was where I had met him. Now they had decided that he should go to Florida, if he would, but first they would like to find out something about him. They had never been able to, beyond the fact that he was from Denmark. He had put his finger on the map in the reading-room, one day, and shown them where he came from: that was the extent of their information on that point. So they had sent him to me to talk to him in his own tongue and see what I could make of him.

I addressed him in the politest Danish I was master of, and for an instant I saw the listening, questioning look return; but it vanished almost at once, and he answered in monosyllables, if at all. Much of what I said passed him entirely by. He did not seem to understand. By slow stages I got out of him that his father was a farm-laborer; that he had come over to look for his cousin, who worked in Passaic, New Jersey, and had found him,—Heaven knows how!—but had lost him again. Then he had drifted to New York, where the society's officers had come upon him. He nodded when told that he was to be sent far away to the country, much as if I had spoken of some one he had never heard of. We had arrived at this point when I asked him the name of his native town.

The word he spoke came upon me with all the force of a sudden blow. I had played in the old village as a boy; all my childhood was bound up in its memories. For many years now I had not

heard its name—not since boyhood days—spoken as he spoke it. Perhaps it was because I was tired: the office faded away, desk, Headquarters across the street, boy, officer, business, and all. In their place were the brown heath I loved, the distant hills, the winding wagon track, the peat stacks, and the solitary sheep browsing on the barrows. Forgotten the thirty years, the seas that rolled between, the teeming city! I was at home again, a child. And there he stood, the boy, with it all in his dull, absent look. I read it now as plain as the day.

"Hua er et no? Ka do ett fostó hua a sejer?"

It plumped out of me in the broad Jutland dialect I had neither heard nor spoken in half a lifetime, and so astonished me that I nearly fell off my chair. Sheep, peat-stacks, cairn, and hills all vanished together, and in place of the sweet heather there was the table with the tiresome papers. I reached out yearningly after the heath; I had not seen it for such a long time,—how long it did seem! —and—but in the same breath it was all there again in the smile that lighted up Frands's broad face like a glint of sunlight from a leaden sky.

"Joesses, jou," he laughed, "no ka a da saa grou godt."[1]

It was the first honest Danish word he had heard since he came to this bewildering land. I read it in his face, no longer heavy or dull; saw it in the way he followed my speech—spelling the words, as it were, with his own lips, to lose no syllable; caught it in his glad smile as he went on telling me about his journey, his home, and his homesickness for the heath, with a breathless kind of haste, as if now that at last he had a chance, he were afraid it was all a dream, and that he would presently wake up and find it gone. Then the officer pulled my sleeve.

He had coughed once or twice, but neither of us had heard him. Now he held out a paper he had brought, with an apologetic gesture. It was an agreement Frands was to sign, if he was going to Florida. I glanced at it. Florida? Yes, to be sure; oh, yes, Florida. I spoke to the officer, and it was in the Jutland dialect. I tried again, with no better luck. I saw him looking at me queerly, as if he thought it was not quite right with me, either, and then I recovered myself, and got back to the office and to America; but it was an effort. One does not skip across thirty years and two oceans, at my age, so easily as that.

And then the dull look came back into Frands's eyes, and he nodded stolidly. Yes, he would go to Florida. The papers were made out, and off he went, after giving me a hearty hand-shake that warranted he would come out right when he became accustomed to the new country; but he took something with him which it hurt me to part with.

Frands is long since in Florida, growing up with the country, and little Yette is a young woman. So long ago was it that the current which sucked her under cast her up again, that there lives not in the whole street any one who can recall her loss. I tried to find one only the other day, but all the old people were dead or had moved away, and of the young, who were very anxious to help me, scarcely one was born at that time. But still the maelstrom drags down its victims; and far away lies my Danish heath under the gray October sky, hidden behind the seas.

[1] My exclamation on finding myself so suddenly translated back to Denmark was an impatient "Why, don't you understand me?" His answer was, "Lord, yes, now I do, indeed."

PAOLO'S AWAKENING

Paolo sat cross-legged on his bench, stitching away for dear life. He pursed his lips and screwed up his mouth into all sorts of odd shapes with the effort, for it was an effort. He was only eight, and you would scarcely have imagined him over six, as he sat there sewing like a real little tailor; only Paolo knew but one seam, and that a hard one. Yet he held the needle and felt the edge with it in quite a grown-up way, and pulled the thread just as far as his short arm would reach. His mother sat on a stool by the window, where she could help him when he got into a snarl,—as he did once in a while, in spite of all he could do,—or when the needle had to be threaded. Then she dropped her own sewing, and, patting him on the head, said he was a good boy.

Paolo felt very proud and big then, that he was able to help his mother, and he worked even more carefully and faithfully than before, so that the boss should find no fault. The shouts of the boys in the block, playing duck-on-a-rock down in the street, came in through the open window, and he laughed as he heard them. He did not envy them, though he liked well enough to romp with the others. His was a sunny temper, content with what came; besides, his supper was at stake, and Paolo had a good appetite. They were in sober earnest, working for dear life—Paolo and his mother.

"Pants" for the sweater in Stanton Street was what they were making; little knickerbockers for boys of Paolo's own age. "Twelve pants for ten cents," he said, counting on his fingers. The mother brought them once a week—a big bundle which she carried home on her head—to have the buttons put on, fourteen on each pair, the bottoms turned up, and a ribbon sewed fast to the back seam inside. That was called finishing. When work was brisk—and it was not always so since there had been such frequent strikes in Stanton Street—they could together make the rent money, and even more, as Paolo was learning and getting a stronger grip on the needle week by week. The rent was six dollars a month for a dingy basement room, in which it was twilight even on the brightest days, and a dark little cubbyhole where it was always midnight, and where there was just room for a bed of old boards, no more. In there slept Paolo with his uncle; his mother made her bed on the floor of the "kitchen," as they called it.

The three made the family. There used to be four; but one stormy night in winter Paolo's father had not come home. The uncle came alone, and the story he told made the poor home in the basement darker and drearier for many a day than it had yet been. The two men worked together for a padrone on the scows. They were in the crew that went out that day to the dumping-ground, far outside the harbor. It was a dangerous journey in a rough sea. The half-frozen Italians clung to the great heaps like so many frightened flies, when the waves rose and tossed the unwieldy scows about, bumping one against the other, though they were strung out in a long row behind the tug, quite a distance apart. One sea washed entirely over the last scow and nearly upset it. When it floated even again, two of the crew were missing, one of them Paolo's father. They had been washed away and lost, miles from shore. No one ever saw them again.

The widow's tears flowed for her dead husband, whom she could not even see laid in a grave which the priest had blessed. The good father spoke to her of the sea as a vast God's acre, over which the storms are forever chanting anthems in His praise to whom the secrets of its depths are revealed; but she thought of it only as the cruel destroyer that had robbed her of her husband, and her tears fell faster. Paolo cried, too: partly because his mother cried; partly, if the truth must be told, because he was not to have a ride to the cemetery in the splendid coach. Giuseppe Salvatore, in the corner house, had never ceased talking of the ride he had when his father died, the year before. Pietro and Jim went along, too, and rode all the way behind the hearse with black plumes. It was a sore subject with Paolo, for he was in school that day.

And then he and his mother dried their tears and went to work. Henceforth there was to be little else for them. The luxury of grief is not among the few luxuries which Mott Street tenements

afford. Paolo's life, after that, was lived mainly with the pants on his hard bench in the rear tenement. His routine of work was varied by the household duties, which he shared with his mother. There were the meals to get, few and plain as they were. Paolo was the cook, and not infrequently, when a building was being torn down in the neighborhood, he furnished the fuel as well. Those were his off days, when he put the needle away and foraged with the other children, dragging old beams and carrying burdens far beyond his years.

The truant officer never found his way to Paolo's tenement to discover that he could neither read nor write, and, what was more, would probably never learn. It would have been of little use, for the public schools thereabouts were crowded, and Paolo could not have got into one of them if he had tried. The teacher from the Industrial School, which he had attended for one brief season while his father was alive, called at long intervals, and brought him once a plant, which he set out in his mother's window-garden and nursed carefully ever after. The "garden" was contained within an old starch box, which had its place on the window-sill since the policeman had ordered the fire-escape to be cleared. It was a kitchen-garden with vegetables, and was almost all the green there was in the landscape. From one or two other windows in the yard there peeped tufts of green; but of trees there was none in sight—nothing but the bare clothes-poles with their pulley-lines stretching from every window.

Beside the cemetery plot in the next block there was not an open spot or breathing-place, certainly not a playground, within reach of that great teeming slum that harbored more than a hundred thousand persons, young and old. Even the graveyard was shut in by a high brick wall, so that a glimpse of the greensward over the old mounds was to be caught only through the spiked iron gates, the key to which was lost, or by standing on tiptoe and craning one's neck. The dead there were of more account, though they had been forgotten these many years, than the living children who gazed so wistfully upon the little paradise through the barred gates, and were chased by the policeman when he came that way. Something like this thought was in Paolo's mind when he stood at sunset and peered in at the golden rays falling athwart the green, but he did not know it. Paolo was not a philosopher, but he loved beauty and beautiful things, and was conscious of a great hunger which there was nothing in his narrow world to satisfy.

Certainly not in the tenement. It was old and rickety and wretched, in keeping with the slum of which it formed a part. The whitewash was peeling from the walls, the stairs were patched, and the door-step long since worn entirely away. It was hard to be decent in such a place, but the widow did the best she could. Her rooms were as neat as the general dilapidation would permit. On the shelf where the old clock stood, flanked by the best crockery, most of it cracked and yellow with age, there was red and green paper cut in scallops very nicely. Garlic and onions hung in strings over the stove, and the red peppers that grew in the starch-box at the window gave quite a cheerful appearance to the room. In the corner, under a cheap print of the Virgin Mary with the Child, a small night-light in a blue glass was always kept burning. It was a kind of illumination in honor of the Mother of God, through which the widow's devout nature found expression. Paolo always looked upon it as a very solemn show. When he said his prayers, the sweet, patient eyes in the picture seemed to watch him with a mild look that made him turn over and go to sleep with a sigh of contentment. He felt then that he had not been altogether bad, and that he was quite safe in their keeping.

Yet Paolo's life was not wholly without its bright spots. Far from it. There were the occasional trips to the dump with Uncle Pasquale's dinner, where there was always sport to be had in chasing the rats that overran the place, fighting for the scraps and bones the trimmers had rescued from the scows. There were so many of them, and so bold were they, that an old Italian who could no longer dig, was employed to sit on a bale of rags and throw things at them, lest they carry off the whole establishment. When he hit one, the rest squealed and scampered away; but they were back again in a minute, and the old man had his hands full pretty nearly all the time. Paolo thought that his was a glorious job, as any boy might, and hoped that he would soon be old, too, and as important. And then the men at the cage—a great wire crate into which the rags from the ash barrels were stuffed, to

be plunged into the river, where the tide ran through them and carried some of the loose dirt away. That was called washing the rags. To Paolo it was the most exciting thing in the world. What if some day the crate should bring up a fish, a real fish, from the river? When he thought of it he wished that he might be sitting forever on that string-piece, fishing with the rag-cage, particularly when he was tired of stitching and turning over, a whole long day.

Besides, there were the real holidays, when there was a marriage, a christening, or a funeral in the tenement, particularly when a baby died whose father belonged to one of the many benefit societies. A brass band was the proper thing then, and the whole block took a vacation to follow the music and the white hearse out of their ward into the next. But the chief of all the holidays came once a year, when the feast of St. Rocco—the patron saint of the village where Paolo's parents had lived—was celebrated. Then a really beautiful altar was erected at one end of the yard, with lights and pictures on it. The rear fire-escapes in the whole row were decked with sheets, and made into handsome balconies,—reserved seats, as it were,—on which the tenants sat and enjoyed it.

A band in gorgeous uniforms played three whole days in the yard, and the men in their holiday clothes stepped up, bowed, and crossed themselves, and laid their gifts on the plate which St. Rocco's namesake, the saloon-keeper in the block, who had got up the celebration, had put there for them. In the evening they set off great strings of fire-crackers in the street in the saint's honor, until the police interfered once and forbade that. Those were great days for Paolo always.

But the fun Paolo loved best of all was when he could get in a corner by himself, with no one to disturb him, and build castles and things out of some abandoned clay or mortar, or wet sand if there was nothing better. The plastic material took strange shapes of beauty under his hands. It was as if life had been somehow breathed into it by his touch, and it ordered itself as none of the other boys could make it. His fingers were tipped with genius, but he did not know it, for his work was only for the hour. He destroyed it as soon as it was made, to try for something better. What he had made never satisfied him—one of the surest proofs that he was capable of great things, had he only known it. But, as I said, he did not.

The teacher from the Industrial School came upon him one day, sitting in the corner by himself, and breathing life into the mud. She stood and watched him awhile, unseen, getting interested, almost excited, as he worked on. As for Paolo, he was solving the problem that had eluded him so long, and had eyes or thought for nothing else. As his fingers ran over the soft clay, the needle, the hard bench, the pants, even the sweater himself, vanished out of his sight, out of his life, and he thought only of the beautiful things he was fashioning to express the longing in his soul, which nothing mortal could shape. Then, suddenly, seeing and despairing, he dashed it to pieces, and came back to earth and to the tenement.

But not to the pants and the sweater. What the teacher had seen that day had set her to thinking, and her visit resulted in a great change for Paolo. She called at night and had a long talk with his mother and uncle through the medium of the priest, who interpreted when they got to a hard place. Uncle Pasquale took but little part in the conversation. He sat by and nodded most of the time, assured by the presence of the priest that it was all right. The widow cried a good deal, and went more than once to take a look at the boy, lying snugly tucked in his bed in the inner room, quite unconscious of the weighty matters that were being decided concerning him. She came back the last time drying her eyes, and laid both her hands in the hand of the teacher. She nodded twice and smiled through her tears, and the bargain was made. Paolo's slavery was at an end.

His friend came the next day and took him away, dressed up in his best clothes, to a large school where there were many children, not of his own people, and where he was received kindly. There dawned that day a new life for Paolo, for in the afternoon trays of modelling-clay were brought in, and the children were told to mould in it objects that were set before them. Paolo's teacher stood by, and nodded approvingly as his little fingers played so deftly with the clay, his face all lighted up with joy at this strange kind of a school-lesson.

After that he had a new and faithful friend, and, as he worked away, putting his whole young soul into the tasks that filled it with radiant hope, other friends, rich and powerful, found him out in his slum. They brought better-paying work for his mother than sewing pants for the sweater, and Uncle Pasquale abandoned the scows to become a porter in a big shipping-house on the West Side. The little family moved out of the old home into a better tenement, though not far away. Paolo's loyal heart clung to the neighborhood where he had played and dreamed as a child, and he wanted it to share in his good fortune, now that it had come. As the days passed, the neighbors who had known him as little Paolo came to speak of him as one who some day would be a great artist and make them all proud. He laughed at that, and said that the first bust he would hew in marble should be that of his patient, faithful mother; and with that he gave her a little hug, and danced out of the room, leaving her to look after him with glistening eyes, brimming over with happiness.

But Paolo's dream was to have another awakening. The years passed and brought their changes. In the manly youth who came forward as his name was called in the academy, and stood modestly at the desk to receive his diploma, few would have recognized the little ragamuffin who had dragged bundles of fire-wood to the rookery in the alley, and carried Uncle Pasquale's dinner-pail to the dump. But the audience gathered to witness the commencement exercises knew it all, and greeted him with a hearty welcome that recalled his early struggles and his hard-won success. It was Paolo's day of triumph. The class honors and the medal were his. The bust that had won both stood in the hall crowned with laurel—an Italian peasant woman, with sweet, gentle face, in which there lingered the memories of the patient eyes that had lulled the child to sleep in the old days in the alley. His teacher spoke to him, spoke of him, with pride in voice and glance; spoke tenderly of his old mother of the tenement, of his faithful work, of the loyal manhood that ever is the soul and badge of true genius. As he bade him welcome to the fellowship of artists who in him honored the best and noblest in their own aspirations, the emotion of the audience found voice once more. Paolo, flushed, his eyes filled with happy tears, stumbled out, he knew not how, with the coveted parchment in his hand.

Home to his mother! It was the one thought in his mind as he walked toward the big bridge to cross to the city of his home—to tell her of his joy, of his success. Soon she would no longer be poor. The day of hardship was over. He could work now and earn money, much money, and the world would know and honor Paolo's mother as it had honored him. As he walked through the foggy winter day toward the river, where delayed throngs jostled one another at the bridge entrance, he thought with grateful heart of the friends who had smoothed the way for him. Ah, not for long the fog and slush! The medal carried with it a travelling stipend, and soon the sunlight of his native land for him and her. He should hear the surf wash on the shingly beach and in the deep grottos of which she had sung to him when a child. Had he not promised her this? And had they not many a time laughed for very joy at the prospect, the two together?

He picked his way up the crowded stairs, carefully guarding the precious roll. The crush was even greater than usual. There had been delay—something wrong with the cable; but a train was just waiting, and he hurried on board with the rest, little heeding what became of him so long as the diploma was safe. The train rolled out on the bridge, with Paolo wedged in the crowd on the platform of the last car, holding the paper high over his head, where it was sheltered safe from the fog and the rain and the crush.

Another train backed up, received its load of cross humanity, and vanished in the mist. The damp, gray curtain had barely closed behind it, and the impatient throng was fretting at a further delay, when consternation spread in the bridge-house. Word had come up from the track that something had happened. Trains were stalled all along the route. While the dread and uncertainty grew, a messenger ran up, out of breath. There had been a collision. The last train had run into the one preceding it, in the fog. One was killed, others were injured. Doctors and ambulances were wanted.

They came with the police, and by and by the partly wrecked train was hauled up to the platform. When the wounded had been taken to the hospital, they bore from the train the body of a youth,

clutching yet in his hand a torn, blood-stained paper, tied about with a purple ribbon. It was Paolo. The awakening had come. Brighter skies than those of sunny Italy had dawned upon him in the gloom and terror of the great crash. Paolo was at home, waiting for his mother.

THE LITTLE DOLLAR'S CHRISTMAS JOURNEY

"It is too bad," said Mrs. Lee, and she put down the magazine in which she had been reading of the poor children in the tenements of the great city that know little of Christmas joys; "no Christmas tree! One of them shall have one, at any rate. I think this will buy it, and it is so handy to send. Nobody would know that there was money in the letter." And she enclosed a coupon in a letter to a professor, a friend in the city, who, she knew, would have no trouble in finding the child, and had it mailed at once. Mrs. Lee was a widow whose not too great income was derived from the interest on some four per cent government bonds which represented the savings of her husband's life of toil, that was none the less hard because it was spent in a counting-room and not with shovel and spade. The coupon looked for all the world like a dollar bill, except that it was so small that a baby's hand could easily cover it. The United States, the printing on it said, would pay on demand to the bearer one dollar; and there was a number on it, just as on a full-grown dollar, that was the number of the bond from which it had been cut.

The letter travelled all night, and was tossed and sorted and bunched at the end of its journey in the great gray beehive that never sleeps, day or night, and where half the tears and joys of the land, including this account of the little dollar, are checked off unceasingly as first-class matter or second or third, as the case may be. In the morning it was laid, none the worse for its journey, at the professor's breakfast plate. The professor was a kindly man, and he smiled as he read it. "To procure one small Christmas tree for a poor tenement," was its errand.

"Little dollar," he said, "I think I know where you are needed." And he made a note in his book. There were other notes there that made him smile again as he saw them. They had names set opposite them. One about a Noah's ark was marked "Vivi." That was the baby; and there was one about a doll's carriage that had the words "Katie, sure," set over against it. The professor eyed the list in mock dismay.

"How ever will I do it?" he sighed, as he put on his hat.

"Well, you will have to get Santa Claus to help you, John," said his wife, buttoning his greatcoat about him. "And, mercy! the duckses' babies! don't forget them, whatever you do. The baby has been talking about nothing else since he saw them at the store, the old duck and the two ducklings on wheels. You know them, John?"

But the professor was gone, repeating to himself as he went down the garden walk, "The duckses' babies, indeed!" He chuckled as he said it, why I cannot tell. He was very particular about his grammar, was the professor, ordinarily. Perhaps it was because it was Christmas eve.

Down town went the professor; but instead of going with the crowd that was setting toward Santa Claus's headquarters, in the big Broadway store, he turned off into a quieter street, leading west. It took him to a narrow thoroughfare, with five-story tenements frowning on either side, where the people he met were not so well dressed as those he had left behind, and did not seem to be in such a hurry of joyful anticipation of the holiday. Into one of the tenements he went, and, groping his way through a pitch-dark hall, came to a door way back, the last one to the left, at which he knocked. An expectant voice said, "Come in," and the professor pushed open the door.

The room was very small, very stuffy, and very dark, so dark that a smoking kerosene lamp that burned on a table next the stove hardly lighted it at all, though it was broad day. A big, unshaven man, who sat on the bed, rose when he saw the visitor, and stood uncomfortably shifting his feet and avoiding the professor's eye. The latter's glance was serious, though not unkind, as he asked the woman with the baby if he had found no work yet.

"No," she said, anxiously coming to the rescue, "not yet; he was waitin' for a recommend." But Johnnie had earned two dollars running errands, and, now there was a big fall of snow, his father might get a job of shovelling. The woman's face was worried, yet there was a cheerful note in her

voice that somehow made the place seem less discouraging than it was. The baby she nursed was not much larger than a middle-sized doll. Its little face looked thin and wan. It had been very sick, she explained, but the doctor said it was mending now. That was good, said the professor, and patted one of the bigger children on the head.

There were six of them, of all sizes, from Johnnie, who could run errands, down. They were busy fixing up a Christmas tree that half filled the room, though it was of the very smallest. Yet, it was a real Christmas tree, left over from the Sunday-school stock, and it was dressed up at that. Pictures from the colored supplement of a Sunday newspaper hung and stood on every branch, and three pieces of colored glass, suspended on threads that shone in the smoky lamplight, lent color and real beauty to the show. The children were greatly tickled.

"John put it up," said the mother, by way of explanation, as the professor eyed it approvingly. "There ain't nothing to eat on it. If there was, it wouldn't be there a minute. The childer be always a-searchin' in it."

"But there must be, or else it isn't a real Christmas tree," said the professor, and brought out the little dollar. "This is a dollar which a friend gave me for the children's Christmas, and she sends her love with it. Now, you buy them some things and a few candles, Mrs. Ferguson, and then a good supper for the rest of the family. Good night, and a Merry Christmas to you. I think myself the baby is getting better." It had just opened its eyes and laughed at the tree.

The professor was not very far on his way toward keeping his appointment with Santa Claus before Mrs. Ferguson was at the grocery laying in her dinner. A dollar goes a long way when it is the only one in the house; and when she had everything, including two cents' worth of flitter-gold, four apples, and five candles for the tree, the grocer footed up her bill on the bag that held her potatoes —ninety-eight cents. Mrs. Ferguson gave him the little dollar.

"What's this?" said the grocer, his fat smile turning cold as he laid a restraining hand on the full basket. "That ain't no good."

"It's a dollar, ain't it?" said the woman, in alarm. "It's all right. I know the man that give it to me."

"It ain't all right in this store," said the grocer, sternly. "Put them things back. I want none o' that."

The woman's eyes filled with tears as she slowly took the lid off the basket and lifted out the precious bag of potatoes. They were waiting for that dinner at home. The children were even then camping on the door-step to take her in to the tree in triumph. And now—

For the second time a restraining hand was laid upon her basket; but this time it was not the grocer's. A gentleman who had come in to order a Christmas turkey had overheard the conversation, and had seen the strange bill.

"It is all right," he said to the grocer. "Give it to me. Here is a dollar bill for it of the kind you know. If all your groceries were as honest as this bill, Mr. Schmidt, it would be a pleasure to trade with you. Don't be afraid to trust Uncle Sam where you see his promise to pay."

The gentleman held the door open for Mrs. Ferguson, and heard the shout of the delegation awaiting her on the stoop as he went down the street.

"I wonder where that came from, now," he mused. "Coupons in Bedford Street! I suppose somebody sent it to the woman for a Christmas gift. Hello! Here are old Thomas and Snowflake. Now, wouldn't it surprise her old stomach if I gave her a Christmas gift of oats? If only the shock doesn't kill her! Thomas! Oh, Thomas!"

The old man thus hailed stopped and awaited the gentleman's coming. He was a cartman who did odd jobs through the ward, so picking up a living for himself and the white horse, which the boys had dubbed Snowflake in a spirit of fun. They were a well-matched old pair, Thomas and his horse. One was not more decrepit than the other.

There was a tradition along the docks, where Thomas found a job now and then, and Snowflake an occasional straw to lunch on, that they were of an age, but this was denied by Thomas.

"See here," said the gentleman, as he caught up with them; "I want Snowflake to keep Christmas, Thomas. Take this and buy him a bag of oats. And give it to him carefully, do you hear? —not all at once, Thomas. He isn't used to it."

"Gee whizz!" said the old man, rubbing his eyes with his cap, as his friend passed out of sight, "oats fer Christmas! G'lang, Snowflake; yer in luck."

The feed-man put on his spectacles and looked Thomas over at the strange order. Then he scanned the little dollar, first on one side, then on the other.

"Never seed one like him," he said. "'Pears to me he is mighty short. Wait till I send round to the hockshop. He'll know, if anybody."

The man at the pawnshop did not need a second look. "Why, of course," he said, and handed a dollar bill over the counter. "Old Thomas, did you say? Well, I am blamed if the old man ain't got a stocking after all. They're a sly pair, he and Snowflake."

Business was brisk that day at the pawnshop. The door-bell tinkled early and late, and the stock on the shelves grew. Bundle was added to bundle. It had been a hard winter so far. Among the callers in the early afternoon was a young girl in a gingham dress and without other covering, who stood timidly at the counter and asked for three dollars on a watch, a keepsake evidently, which she was loath to part with. Perhaps it was the last glimpse of brighter days. The pawnbroker was doubtful; it was not worth so much. She pleaded hard, while he compared the number of the movement with a list sent in from Police Headquarters.

"Two," he said decisively at last, snapping the case shut—"two or nothing." The girl handed over the watch with a troubled sigh. He made out a ticket and gave it to her with a handful of silver change.

Was it the sigh and her evident distress, or was it the little dollar? As she turned to go, he called her back.

"Here, it is Christmas!" he said. "I'll run the risk." And he added the coupon to the little heap.

The girl looked at it and at him questioningly.

"It is all right," he said; "you can take it; I'm running short of change. Bring it back if they won't take it. I'm good for it." Uncle Sam had achieved a backer.

In Grand Street the holiday crowds jammed every store in their eager hunt for bargains. In one of them, at the knit-goods counter, stood the girl from the pawnshop, picking out a thick, warm shawl. She hesitated between a gray and a maroon-colored one, and held them up to the light.

"For you?" asked the salesgirl, thinking to aid her. She glanced at her thin dress and shivering form as she said it.

"No," said the girl; "for mother; she is poorly and needs it." She chose the gray, and gave the salesgirl her handful of money.

The girl gave back the coupon.

"They don't go," she said; "give me another, please."

"But I haven't got another," said the girl, looking apprehensively at the shawl. "The—Mr. Feeney said it was all right. Take it to the desk, please, and ask."

The salesgirl took the bill and the shawl, and went to the desk. She came back, almost immediately, with the storekeeper, who looked sharply at the customer and noted the number of the coupon.

"It is all right," he said, satisfied apparently by the inspection; "a little unusual, only. We don't see many of them. Can I help you, miss?" And he attended her to the door.

In the street there was even more of a Christmas show going on than in the stores. Pedlers of toys, of mottoes, of candles, and of knickknacks of every description stood in rows along the curb, and were driving a lively trade. Their push-carts were decorated with fir branches—even whole Christmas trees. One held a whole cargo of Santa Clauses in a bower of green, each one with a cedar-bush in his folded arms, as a soldier carries his gun. The lights were blazing out in the stores, and the

hucksters' torches were flaring at the corners. There was Christmas in the very air and Christmas in the storekeeper's till. It had been a very busy day. He thought of it with a satisfied nod as he stood a moment breathing the brisk air of the winter day, absently fingering the coupon the girl had paid for the shawl. A thin voice at his elbow said: "Merry Christmas, Mr. Stein! Here's yer paper."

It was the newsboy who left the evening papers at the door every night. The storekeeper knew him, and something about the struggle they had at home to keep the roof over their heads. Mike was a kind of protégé of his. He had helped to get him his route.

"Wait a bit, Mike," he said. "You'll be wanting your Christmas from me. Here's a dollar. It's just like yourself: it is small, but it is all right. You take it home and have a good time."

Was it the message with which it had been sent forth from far away in the country, or what was it? Whatever it was, it was just impossible for the little dollar to lie still in the pocket while there was want to be relieved, mouths to be filled, or Christmas lights to be lit. It just couldn't, and it didn't.

Mike stopped around the corner of Allen Street, and gave three whoops expressive of his approval of Mr. Stein; having done which, he sidled up to the first lighted window out of range to examine his gift. His enthusiasm changed to open-mouthed astonishment as he saw the little dollar. His jaw fell. Mike was not much of a scholar, and could not make out the inscription on the coupon; but he had heard of shinplasters as something they "had in the war," and he took this to be some sort of a ten-cent piece. The policeman on the block might tell. Just now he and Mike were hunk. They had made up a little difference they'd had, and if any one would know, the cop surely would. And off he went in search of him.

Mr. McCarthy pulled off his gloves, put his club under his arm, and studied the little dollar with contracted brow. He shook his head as he handed it back, and rendered the opinion that it was "some dom swindle that's ag'in' the law." He advised Mike to take it back to Mr. Stein, and added, as he prodded him in an entirely friendly manner in the ribs with his locust, that if it had been the week before he might have "run him in" for having the thing in his possession. As it happened, Mr. Stein was busy and not to be seen, and Mike went home between hope and fear, with his doubtful prize.

There was a crowd at the door of the tenement, and Mike saw, before he had reached it, running, that it clustered about an ambulance that was backed up to the sidewalk. Just as he pushed his way through the throng it drove off, its clanging gong scattering the people right and left. A little girl sat weeping on the top step of the stoop. To her Mike turned for information.

"Susie, what's up?" he asked, confronting her with his armful of papers. "Who's got hurted?"

"It's papa," sobbed the girl. "He ain't hurted. He's sick, and he was took that bad he had to go, an' to-morrer is Christmas, an'—oh, Mike!"

It is not the fashion of Essex Street to slop over. Mike didn't. He just set his mouth to a whistle and took a turn down the hall to think. Susie was his chum. There were seven in her flat; in his only four, including two that made wages. He came back from his trip with his mind made up.

"Suse," he said, "come on in. You take this, Suse, see! an' let the kids have their Christmas. Mr. Stein give it to me. It's a little one, but if it ain't all right I'll take it back and get one that is good. Go on, now, Suse, you hear?" And he was gone.

There was a Christmas tree that night in Susie's flat, with candles and apples and shining gold, but the little dollar did not pay for it. That rested securely in the purse of the charity visitor who had come that afternoon, just at the right time, as it proved. She had heard the story of Mike and his sacrifice, and had herself given the children a one-dollar bill for the coupon. They had their Christmas, and a joyful one, too, for the lady went up to the hospital and brought back word that Susie's father would be all right with rest and care, which he was now getting. Mike came in and helped them "sack" the tree when the lady was gone. He gave three more whoops for Mr. Stein, three for the lady, and three for the hospital doctor to even things up. Essex Street was all right that night.

"Do you know, professor," said that learned man's wife, when, after supper, he had settled down in his easy-chair to admire the Noah's ark and the duckses' babies and the rest, all of which had

arrived safely by express ahead of him and were waiting to be detailed to their appropriate stockings while the children slept—"do you know, I heard such a story of a little newsboy to-day. It was at the meeting of our district charity committee this evening. Miss Linder, our visitor, came right from the house." And she told the story of Mike and Susie.

"And I just got the little dollar bill to keep. Here it is." She took the coupon out of her purse and passed it to her husband.

"Eh! what?" said the professor, adjusting his spectacles and reading the number. "If here isn't my little dollar come back to me! Why, where have you been, little one? I left you in Bedford Street this morning, and here you come by way of Essex. Well, I declare!" And he told his wife how he had received it in a letter in the morning.

"John," she said, with a sudden impulse,—she didn't know, and neither did he, that it was the charm of the little dollar that was working again,—"John, I guess it is a sin to stop it. Jones's children won't have any Christmas tree, because they can't afford it. He told me so this morning when he fixed the furnace. And the baby is sick. Let us give them the little dollar. He is here in the kitchen now."

And they did; and the Joneses, and I don't know how many others, had a Merry Christmas because of the blessed little dollar that carried Christmas cheer and good luck wherever it went. For all I know, it may be going yet. Certainly it is a sin to stop it, and if any one has locked it up without knowing that he locked up the Christmas dollar, let him start it right out again. He can tell it easily enough. If he just looks at the number, that's the one.

THE KID

He was an every-day tough, bull-necked, square-jawed, red of face, and with his hair cropped short in the fashion that rules at Sing Sing and is admired of Battle Row. Any one could have told it at a glance. The bruised and wrathful face of the policeman who brought him to Mulberry Street, to be "stood up" before the detectives in the hope that there might be something against him to aggravate the offence of beating an officer with his own club, bore witness to it. It told a familiar story. The prisoner's gang had started a fight in the street, probably with a scheme of ultimate robbery in view, and the police had come upon it unexpectedly. The rest had got away with an assortment of promiscuous bruises. The "Kid" stood his ground, and went down with two "cops" on top of him after a valiant battle, in which he had performed the feat that entitled him to honorable mention henceforth in the felonious annals of the gang. There was no surrender in his sullen look as he stood before the desk, his hard face disfigured further by a streak of half-dried blood, reminiscent of the night's encounter. The fight had gone against him—that was all right. There was a time for getting square. Till then he was man enough to take his medicine, let them do their worst.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.