Paine Albert Bigelow

The Van Dwellers: A Strenuous Quest for a Home

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Содержание

Albert Bigelow Paine
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I.
The First Home in the Metropolis

We had never lived in New York. This fact will develop anyway, as I proceed, but somehow it seems fairer to everybody to state it in the first sentence and have it over with.

Still, we had heard of flats in a vague way, and as we drew near the Metropolis the Little Woman bought papers of the train boy and began to read advertisements under the head of "Flats and Apartments to Let."

I remember that we wondered then what was the difference. Now, having tried both, we are wiser. The difference ranges from three hundred dollars a year up. There are also minor details, such as palms in the vestibule, exposed plumbing, and uniformed hall service – perhaps an elevator, but these things are immaterial. The price is the difference.

We bought papers, as I have said. It was the beginning of our downfall, and the first step was easy – even alluring. We compared prices and descriptions and put down addresses. The descriptions were all that could be desired and the prices absurdly modest. We had heard that living in the city was expensive; now we put down the street and number of "four large light rooms and improvements, $18.00," and were properly indignant at those who had libeled the landlords of Gotham.

Next morning we stumbled up four dim flights of stairs, groped through a black passage-way and sidled out into a succession of gloomy closets, wondering what they were for. Our conductor stopped and turned.

"This is it," he announced. "All nice light rooms, and improvements."

It was our first meeting with a flat. Also, with a janitor. The Little Woman was first to speak.

"Ah, yes, would you mind telling us – we're from the West, you know – just which are the – the improvements, and which the rooms?"

This was lost on the janitor. He merely thought us stupid and regarded us with pitying disgust as he indicated a rusty little range, and disheartening water arrangements in one corner. There may have been stationary tubs, too, bells, and a dumb waiter, but without the knowledge of these things which we acquired later they escaped notice. What we *could* see was that there was no provision for heat that we could discover, and no sunshine.

We referred to these things, also to the fact that the only entrance to our parlor would be through the kitchen, while the only entrance to our kitchen would be almost certainly over either a coal-box, an ironing board, or the rusty little stove, any method of which would require a certain skill, as well as care in the matter of one's clothes.

But these objections seemed unreasonable, no doubt, for the janitor, who was of Yorkshire extraction, became taciturn and remarked briefly that the halls were warmed and that nobody before had ever required more heat than they got from these and the range, while as for the sun, he couldn't change that if he wanted to, leaving us to infer that if he only wanted to he could remodel almost everything else about the premises in short order.

We went away in the belief that he was a base pretender, "clad in a little brief authority." We had not awakened as yet to the fulness of janitorial tyranny and power.

We went farther uptown. We reasoned that rentals would be more reasonable and apartments less contracted up there.

Ah, me! As I close my eyes now and recall, as in a kaleidoscope, the perfect wilderness of flats we have passed through since then, it seems strange that some dim foreboding of it all did not steal in to rob our hearts of the careless joys of anticipation.

But I digress. We took the elevated and looked out the windows as we sped along. The whirling streets, with their endless procession of front steps, bewildered us.

By and by we were in a vast district, where all the houses were five-storied, flat-roofed, and seemed built mainly to hold windows. This was Flatland – the very heart of it – that boundless territory to the northward of Central Park, where nightly the millions sleep.

Here and there were large signs on side walls and on boards along the roof, with which we were now on a level as the train whirled us along. These quoted the number of rooms, and prices, and some of them were almost irresistible. "6 All Light Rooms, $22.00," caught us at length, and we got off to investigate.

They were better than those downtown. There was a possibility of heat and you did not get to the parlor by climbing over the kitchen furniture. Still, the apartment as a whole lacked much that we had set our hearts on, while it contained some things that we were willing to do without.

It contained, also, certain novelties. Among these were the stationary washtubs in the kitchen; the dumb-waiter, and a speaking-tube connection with the basement.

The janitor at this place was a somber Teutonic female, soiled as to dress, and of the common Dutch-slipper variety.

We were really attracted by the next apartment, where we discovered for the first time the small button in the wall that, when pressed, opens the street door below. This was quite jolly, and we played with it some minutes, while the colored janitor grinned at our artlessness, and said good things about the place. Our hearts went out to this person, and we would gladly have cast our lot with him.

Then he told us the price, and we passed on.

I have a confused recollection of the other flats and apartments we examined on that first day of our career, or "progress," as the recent Mr. Hogarth would put it. Our minds had not then become trained to that perfection of mentality which enables the skilled flat-hunter to carry for days visual ground-plans, elevations, and improvements, of any number of "desirable apartments," and be ready to transcribe the same in black and white at a moment's notice.

I recall one tunnel and one roof garden. Also one first floor with bake-shop attachment. The latter suggested a business enterprise for the Little Woman, while the Precious Ones, who were with us at this stage, seemed delighted at my proposition of "keeping store."

Many places we did not examine. Of these the janitors merely popped out their heads – frowsy heads, most of them – and gave the number of rooms and the price in a breath of defiance and mixed ale. At length I was the only one able to continue the search.

I left the others at a friendly drug store, and wandered off alone. Being quite untrammeled now I went as if by instinct two blocks west and turned. A park was there – a park set up on edge, as it were, with steps leading to a battlement at the top. This was attractive, and I followed along opposite, looking at the houses. Presently I came to a new one. They were just finishing it, and sweeping the shavings from the ground-floor flat – a gaudy little place – the only one in the house untaken.

It was not very light, and it was not very large, while the price was more than we had expected to pay. But it was clean and new, and the landlord, who was himself on the premises, offered a month's rent free to the first tenant.

I ran all the way back to the Little Woman, and urged her to limp as hastily as possible, fearing it might be gone before she could get there. When I realized that the landlord had held it for me in the face of several applicants (this was his own statement), I was ready to fall on his neck, and paid a deposit hastily to secure the premises.

Then we wandered about looking at things, trying the dumb waiter, the speaking tube, and the push-button, leading to what the Precious Ones promptly named the "locker-locker" door, owing to a clicking sound in the lock when the door sprang open.

We were in a generous frame of mind, and walked from room to room praising the excellence of everything, including a little gingerbread mantel in the dining-room, in which the fireplace had been set crooked, – from being done in the dark, perhaps, – the concrete backyard, with its clothesline pole, the decorated ceilings, the precipitous park opposite that was presently to shut off each day at two p. m. our western, and only, sunlight; even the air-shaft that came down to us like a well from above, and the tiny kitchen, which in the gathering evening was too dark to reveal all its attractions.

As for the Precious Ones, they fairly raced through our new possession, shrieking their delight.

We had a home in the great city at last.

II.
Metropolitan Beginnings

We set out gaily and early, next morning, to buy our things.

We had brought nothing with us that could not be packed into our trunks, except my fishing rod, some inherited bedding and pictures which the Little Woman declined to part with, and two jaded and overworked dolls belonging to the Precious Ones. Manifestly this was not enough to begin housekeeping on, even in a flat of contracted floor-space and limitless improvements.

In fact the dolls only had arrived. They had come as passengers. The other things were still trundling along somewhere between Oshkosh and Hoboken, by slow freight.

We had some idea of where we wanted to go when we set forth, but a storehouse with varied and almost irresistible windows enticed us and we went no farther. It was a mighty department store and we were informed that we need not pass its doors again until we had selected everything we needed from a can-opener to a grand piano. We didn't, and the can-opener became ours.

Also other articles. We enjoyed buying things, and even to this day I recall with pleasure our first great revel in a department store.

For the most part we united our judgments and acted jointly. But at times we were enticed apart by fascinating novelties and selected recklessly, without consultation.

As for the Precious Ones, they galloped about, demanding that we should buy everything in sight, with a total disregard of our requirements or resources.

It was wonderful though how cheap everything seemed, and how much we seemed to need, even for a beginning. It was also wonderful how those insidious figures told in the final settlement.

Let it be understood, I cherish no resentment toward the salesmen. Reflecting now on the matter, I am, on the whole, grateful. They found out where we were from, and where we were going to live, and they sold us accordingly.

I think we interested them, and that they rather liked us. If not, I am sure they would have sold us worse things and more of them. They could have done so, easily. Hence my gratitude to the salesmen; but the man at the transfer desk remains unforgiven.

I am satisfied, now, that he was an unscrupulous person, a perjured, case-hardened creature whom it is every man's duty to destroy. But at the time he seemed the very embodiment of good intentions.

He assured us heartily, as he gave us our change, that we should have immediate delivery. We had explained at some length that this was important, and why. He waved us off with the assurance that we need give ourselves no uneasiness in the matter – that, in all probability, the matting we had purchased as a floor basis would be there before we were.

He knew that this would start us post-haste for our apartment, which it did. We even ran, waving and shouting, after a particular car when another just like it was less than a half block behind.

We breathed more easily when we arrived at our new address and found that we were in good season. When five minutes more had passed, however, and still no signs of our matting, a vague uneasiness began to manifest itself.

It was early and there was plenty of time, of course; but there was something about the countless delivery wagons that passed and re-passed without stopping which impressed us with the littleness of our importance in this great whirl of traffic, and the ease with which a transfer clerk's promise, easily and cheerfully made, might be as easily and as cheerfully forgotten.

I said presently that I would go around the corner and order coal for the range, ice for the refrigerator, and groceries for us all. I added that the things from down town would surely be there on my return, and that any way I wanted to learn where the nearest markets were. Had I known it, I need

not have taken this trouble. Our names in the mail-box just outside the door would have summoned the numerous emissaries of trade, as if by magic.

It did so, in fact, for the Little Woman put the name in while I was gone, and on my return I found her besieged by no less than three butchers and grocerymen, while two rival milkmen were explaining with diagrams the comparative richness of their respective cans and bottles. The articles I had but just purchased were even then being sent up on the dumb waiter, but our furnishings from below were still unheard from.

A horrible fear that I had given the wrong address began to grow upon us. The Little Woman was calm, but regarded me accusingly. She said she didn't see how it could have happened, when in every accent of her voice I could detect memories of other things I had done in this line – things which, at the time, had seemed equally impossible.

She said she hadn't been paying attention when I gave the number or she would have known. Of course, she said, the transfer clerk couldn't make a mistake putting it down – he was too accustomed to such things, and of course I must have given it to him correctly – only, it did seem strange —

We began debating feverishly as to the advisability of my setting out at once on a trip down town to see about it. We concluded to telephone.

I hastened around to the drug store not far away and "helloed" and repeated and fumed and swore in agony for half an hour, but I came back in high spirits. The address was correct and the delivery wagons were out. I expected to find them at the door when I got back, but found only the Little Woman, sitting on the doorstep, still waiting.

We told each other that after all it must necessarily take some little time to get up this far, but that the matting would certainly be along presently, now, and that it would take but a short time to lay it.

Then we would have a good start, and even if everything didn't come to-night it would be jolly to put the new mattresses down on the nice clean matting, and to get dinner the best way we could – like camping out. Then we walked back and forth in the semi-light of our empty little place and said how nice it was, and where we should set the furniture and hang the pictures: and stepped off the size of the rooms that all put together were not so big as had been our one big sitting-room in the West.

As for the Precious Ones, they were wildly happy. They had never had a real playhouse before, big enough to live in, and this was quite in accordance with their ideals. They were "visiting" and "keeping store" and "cooking," and quarreling, and having a perfectly beautiful time with their two disreputable dolls, utterly regardless of the shadow of foreboding and desolation that grew ever thicker as the hours passed, while the sun slipped down behind the steep stone-battlemented park opposite, and brought no matting, no furniture, no anything that would make our little nest habitable for the swiftly coming night.

But when it became too dark for them to see to play, they came clamorously out to where we stood on the doorstep, still waiting, and demanded in one breath that we tell them immediately when the things were coming, where they were to get supper, how we were to sleep, and if they couldn't have a light.

I was glad that I could give them something. I said that it was pretty early for a light, but that they should have it. I went in and opened a gas burner, and held a match to it. There was no result. I said there was air in the pipes. I lit another match, and held it till it burned my fingers. There was air in the pipes, I suppose, but there was no gas. I hurried down to inform the janitor.

She was a stern-featured Hibernian, with a superior bearing. I learned later that she had seen better days. In fact, I have yet to find the janitor that *hasn't* seen better days, or the tenant, either, for that matter, but this is another digression. She regarded me with indifference when I told her there was no gas. When I told her that we *wanted* gas, she inspected me as if this was something unusual and interesting in a tenant's requirements. Finally she said: —

"Well, and when did yez order it turned on?"

"Why," I said, "I haven't ordered it at all. I thought – "

"Yez thought you could get it of me, did yez?"

I admitted that this seemed reasonable, but in view of the fact of the water being turned on, I had really given the matter of gas no deliberate consideration.

I think she rather pitied my stupendous ignorance. At least she became more gentle than she had seemed at the start, or than she ever was afterwards.

She explained at some length that I must go first to the gas office, leave a deposit to secure them, in case of my sudden and absent-minded departure from the neighborhood, and ask that a man be sent around to put in a meter, and turn on the gas in our apartment. With good luck some result might be obtained by the following evening.

I stumbled miserably up the dark stairs, and dismally explained, while the Precious Ones became more clamorous for food and light, as the shades of night gathered. I said I would go and get some candles, so in case the things came – not necessarily the matting – we didn't really need the matting first, anyway – it would get scuffed and injured if it were put down first – it was the other things we needed – things to eat and go to bed with! —

When I came back there was a wild excitement around our entrance. A delivery wagon had driven up in great haste, and by the light of the street lamp I recognized on it the sign of our department store. A hunted-looking driver had leaped out and was hastily running over his book. Yes, it was our name – our things had come at last – better late than never! The driver was diving back into his wagon and presently hauled out something long and round and wrapped up.

"Here you are," he said triumphantly. "Sign for it, please."

"But," we gasped, "where's the rest of the things? There's ever so much more."

"Don't know, lady. This is all I've got. Sign please, it's getting late."

"But – "

He was gone. We carried in our solitary package and opened it by the feeble flickering of a paraffine dip.

It was a Japanese umbrella-holder!

The Precious Ones and their wretched dolls held a war dance around it and admired the funny men on the sides. To us it was an Oriental mockery.

Sadly we gathered up our bags, and each taking by the hand a hungry little creature who clasped a forlorn doll to a weary little bosom, we set forth to seek food and shelter in the thronging but pitiless city.

III.
Learning by Experience

Day by day, and piece by piece, our purchases appeared. Now and then a delivery wagon would drive up in hot haste and deliver a stew-pan, or perhaps a mouse trap. At last, and on the third day, a mattress.

Of course, I had been down and protested, ere this. The cheerful liar at the transfer desk had been grieved, astonished, thunderstruck at my tale. He would investigate, and somebody would be discharged, at once. This thought soothed me. It was blood that I wanted. Just plain blood, and plenty of it. I know now that it was the transfer-man's blood, that I needed, but for the moment I was appeased and believed in him.

Our matting, promised within two hours from the moment of purchase, was the last thing to arrive. This on the fourth day – or was it the fifth? I was too mad by this time to remember dates. What I do recall is that we laid it ourselves. We had not, as yet, paid for the laying, and we said that rather than give that shameless firm another dollar we would lay that matting if it killed us.

Morally it did. I have never been quite the same man since that terrible experience. The Little Woman helped stretch, and held the lamp, while I pounded my thumb and swore. She said she had never realized until that night how well and satisfactorily I could swear. It seemed to comfort her and she abetted it.

I know now that the stripes on matting never match. We didn't know it then, and we tried to make them. We pulled and hauled, and I got down on my stomach, with one ear against the wall, and burned the other one on the lamp chimney which the Little Woman, in her anxiety to help, held too close. When I criticised her inclination to overdo matters, she observed that I would probably be able to pull the matting along more easily if I wouldn't lie down on the piece I was trying to pull. Then we both said some things that I suppose we shall regret to our dying day. It was a terrible night. When morning came, grim and ghastly, life seemed a failure, and I could feel that I had grown old.

But with breakfast and coffee and sunshine came renewed hope.

We were settled at last, and our little place looked clean and more like a playhouse than ever.

Our acquaintance with the janitor was not, as yet, definite. I had met her once or twice informally, it is true, but as yet we could not be said to have reached any basis of understanding. As to her appearance, she was brawny and Irish, with a forbidding countenance. She had a husband whom we never saw – he being employed outside – but whose personality, nevertheless, became a factor in our subsequent relations.

Somehow, we instinctively avoided the people below stairs, as cats do canines, though we had no traditions concerning janitors, and we are naturally the most friendly and democratic people in the world.

Matters went on very well for a time. We congratulated ourselves every morning on how nice and handy everything was, now that we were once settled, and laughed over our recent difficulties. The Precious Ones were in their glory. They had appropriated the little four-by-six closet back of the kitchen – it had been shown to us as a servant's room – and presently we heard them playing "dumb waiter," "janitor," "locker-locker door," "laying matting," and other new and entertaining games incidental to a new life and conditions. The weather remained warm for a time, and it was all novel and interesting. We added almost daily to our household effects, and agreed that we had been lucky in securing so pleasant and so snug a nest.

But one morning when we awoke it was cold. It was early October, but there was a keen frosty feeling in the air that sent us shivering to the kitchen range, wondering if steam would be coming along presently. It did not come, and after breakfast I went down to interview our janitor on the subject.

I could see that she was not surprised at my errand. The incident of the gas supply had prepared her for any further eccentricity on my part. She merely waited with mild interest to hear what I really could do when I tried. Then she remarked tersely: —

"Yez get steam on the fifteenth."

"Quite so," I assented, "but it's cold to-day. We may not want it on the fifteenth. We do want it now."

These facts did not seem to impress her.

"Yez get steam on the fifteenth," she repeated, with even more decision, and I could tell from her manner that the interview was closed.

I went back to where the Little Woman was getting breakfast (she had laughed at the idea of a servant in our dainty little nest) and during the morning she and the Precious Ones hugged the kitchen range. In the afternoon the sun looked in at our parlor windows and made the room cheerful for an hour. Then it went out behind the precipitous hillside park opposite, and with the chill shadow that crept up over our windows came a foreboding that was bad for the romance and humor of the situation. It had been like a spiritless Arctic day.

In the evening we crept to the kitchen range; and we hibernated there, more or less, while the cold spell lasted. It was warm by the fifteenth, but on that day, in the hours of early dawn, we were awakened by a Wagnerian overture in the steam radiators. It became an anvil chorus ere long and there was no more sleep. By breakfast time we had all the things open that we could get open to let in fresh air and we were shouting to each other above the din and smell of the new pipes. We made allowance, of course, for the fact that things *were* new, and we said we were glad there would be enough heat in cold weather, anyway, by which you will see how really innocent we were in those days.

It grew cold in earnest by November first. And then, all at once, the gold-painted radiators, as if they had shown what they could do and were satisfied, seemed to lose enthusiasm. Now and then in the night, when we didn't want it, they would remember and start a little movement Fromm the Gotterdammerung, but by morning they seemed discouraged again and during the day they were of fitful and unresponsive temperature.

At last I went once more to the janitor, though with some hesitation, I confess. I don't know why. I am not naturally timid, and usually demand and obtain the rights of ordinary citizenship. Besides, I was ignorant then of janitorial tyranny as the accepted code. It must have been instinct. I said: —

"What's the matter with our heat up-stairs?"

She answered: —

"An' it's what's the matter with yer heat, is it? Well, thin, an' what *is* the matter with yer heat up-stairs?"

She said this, and also looked at me, as if she thought our heat might be afflicted with the mumps or measles or have a hare lip, and as if I was to blame for it.

"The matter is that we haven't got any," I said, getting somewhat awakened.

She looked at me fully a minute this time.

"Yez haven't got any! Yez haven't got any heat! An' here comes the madam from the top floor yesterday, a bilin' over, an' sayin that they're sick with *too much* heat. What air yez, then, sallymandhers?"

"But yesterday isn't to-day," I urged, "and I'm not the woman on the top floor. We're just the people on the first floor and we're cold. We want heat, not comparisons."

I wonder now how I was ever bold enough to say these things. It was my ignorance, of course. I would not dream of speaking thus disrespectfully to a janitor to-day. I had a dim idea at the time that the landlord had something to do with his own premises, and that if heat were not forthcoming I could consult him and get action in the matter. I know better than that, now, and my enlightenment on this point was not long delayed.

It was about twelve o'clock that night, I think, that we were aroused by a heart-breaking, furniture-smashing disturbance. At first I thought murder was being done on our doorstep. Then I realized that it was below us. I sat up in bed, my hair prickling. The Little Woman, in the next room with the Precious Ones, called to me in a voice that was full of emotion. I answered, "Sh!"

Then we both sat still in the dark while our veins grew icy. Somebody below was begging and pleading for mercy, while somebody else was commanding quiet in a voice that meant bloodshed as an alternative. At intervals there was a fierce struggle, mingled with destruction and hair-lifting language.

Was the janitor murdering her husband? Or could it be that it was the other way, and that tardy justice had overtaken the janitor – that, at the hands of her husband or some outraged tenant, she was meeting a well-merited doom? Remembering her presence and muscular proportions I could not hope that this was possible.

The Little Woman whispered tremblingly that we ought to do something. I whispered back that I was quite willing she should, if she wanted to, but that for my own part I had quit interfering in Hibernian domestic difficulties some years since. In the morning I would complain to the landlord of our service. I would stand it no longer.

Meantime, it was not yet morning, and the racket below went on. The very quantity of it was reassuring. There was too much of it for real murder. The Precious Ones presently woke up and cried. None of us got to sleep again until well-nigh morning, even after the commotion below had degenerated into occasional moans, and final silence.

Before breakfast I summoned up all my remaining courage and went down there. The janitor herself came to the door. She was uninjured, so far as I could discover. I was pretty mad, and the fact that I was afraid of her made me madder.

"What do you mean?" I demanded, "by making such a horrible racket down here in the middle of the night?"

She regarded me with an amazed look, as if I had been dreaming.

"I want to know," I repeated, "what was all that noise down here last night?"

She smiled grimly.

"Oh, an' is *that* it? Yez want to know what was the *ni'se*, do yez? Well, thin, it was none o' yer business, *that's* what it was. Now go on wid yez, an' tend to yer *own* business, if yez have any. D'y' mind?"

With the information that I was going at once to the landlord, I turned and hurried up the stairs to avoid violence. She promptly followed me.

"So yez'll be after telling the landlord, will yez? Well, thin, yez can just tell the landlord, an' yez can just sind him to me. You'll sind Tim Reilly to me. Maybe yez don't know that Tim Reilly once carried bricks fer my old daddy, an' many's the time I've given him a bite an' a sup at our back door. Oh, yes, sind him to me. Sind Tim Reilly to me, an' I'll see, when me ol' man comes home late wid a bit of liquor in his head, if it's not for me to conthrol 'im after our own fashions, widout the inquisitin' of people who better be mindin' of their own n'ise. Kep' yez awake, eh? Well, thin, see that yez never keep anybody else awake, an' sind Tim Reilly to me!"

She was gone. We realized then that she had seen better days. So had we. Later, when I passed her on the front steps, she nodded in her usual expressionless, uncompromising manner.

I did not go to the landlord. It would be useless, we said. The helplessness of our position was becoming daily more evident.

And with the realization of this we began to discover other defects. We found that the house faced really almost north instead of west, and that the sun now went behind the precipice opposite nearly as soon as it touched the tops of our windows, while the dining-room and kitchen were wretchedly dark all day long.

Then, too, the crooked fireplace in the former was a disfigurement, the rooms were closets, or cells, the paper abominable, the wardrobe damp, the drawers swollen or exasperating muftis, the whole apartment the flimsiest sort of a cheap, showy, contract structure, such as no self-respecting people should occupy.

We said we would move. We recited our wrongs to each other in detail and began consulting Sunday papers immediately.

IV.
Our First Move

It was the Little Woman who selected our next habitation. Education accumulates rapidly in the Metropolis, and I could see that she already possessed more definite views on "flats and apartments" than she had acquired on many another subject familiar to her from childhood.

Politics, for instance, do not exist for the Little Woman. Presidents come and go, torchlight processions bloom and fade and leave not so much as a wind-riffle on the sands of memory. The stock market, too, was at this time but a name to her. Both of us have acquired knowledge since in this direction, but that is another story. Shares might rise and fall in those early days, and men clutch at each other's throats as ruin dragged them down. The Little Woman saw but a page of figures in the evening paper and perhaps regarded them as a sort of necessary form – somewhat in the nature of the congressional reports which nobody ever reads. Yet all her life she had been amid these vital issues, and now, behold, after two short months she had acquired more information on New York apartment life than she would ever have on both the others put together. She knew now what we needed and she would find it. I was willing that this should be so. There were other demands on my time, and besides, I had not then contracted the flat-disease in its subsequent virulent form.

She said, and I agreed with her, that it was a mistake to be so far from the business center. That the time, car fare, and nerve tissue wasted between Park Place and Harlem were of more moment than a few dollars' difference in the monthly rent.

We regarded this conclusion somewhat in the light of a discovery, and wondered why people of experience had not made it before. Ah, me! we have made many discoveries since that time. Discoveries as old as they are always new. The first friendly ray of March sunlight; the first green leaf in the park; the first summer glow of June; the first dead leaf and keen blast of autumn; these, too, have wakened within us each year a new understanding of our needs and of the ideal habitation; these, too, have set us to discovering as often as they come around, as men shall still discover so long as seasons of snow and blossom pass, and the heart of youth seeks change. But here I am digressing again, when I should be getting on with my story.

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