

Raymond Evelyn

A Sunny Little Lass



Evelyn Raymond
A Sunny Little Lass

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=23164435

A Sunny Little Lass:

Содержание

CHAPTER I	4
CHAPTER II	14
CHAPTER III	27
CHAPTER IV	34
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	37

Raymond Evelyn

A Sunny Little Lass

CHAPTER I

The One Room House

It was in “the littlest house in Ne’ York” that Glory lived, with grandpa and Bo’sn, the dog, so she, and its owner, often boasted; and whether this were actually true or not, it certainly was so small that no other sort of tenant than the blind captain could have bestowed himself, his grandchild, and their few belongings in it.

A piece-of-pie shaped room, built to utilize a scant, triangular space between two big warehouses, only a few feet wide at the front and no width at all at the rear. Its ceiling was also its roof and from it dangled whatever could be hung thus, while the remaining bits of furniture swung from hooks in the walls. Whenever out of use, even the little gas-stove was set upon a shelf in the inner angle, thereby giving floor space sufficient for two camp-stools and a three-cornered scrap of a table at which they ate and worked, with Bo’sn curled beneath.

This mite of a house stood at the crook of Elbow Lane, down by the approaches to the big bridge over East River, in a street so

narrow that the sun never could shine into it; yet held so strong an odor of salt water and a near-by fish-market, that the old sailor half fancied himself still afloat. He couldn't see the dirt and rubbish of the Lane, nor the pinched faces of the other dwellers in it, for a few tenements were still left standing among the crowding warehouses, and these were filled with people. Glory, who acted as eyes for the old man, never told him of unpleasant things, and, indeed, scarcely saw them herself. To her, everything was beautiful and everybody kind, and in their own tiny home, at least, everything was scrupulously clean and shipshape.

When they had hung their hammocks back upon the wall, for such were the only beds they had room for, and had had their breakfast of porridge, the captain would ask: "Decks scrubbed well, mate?"

"Aye, aye, sir!" came the cheery answer, and Glory's hands, fresh from the suds, would touch the questioner's cheek.

"Brasses polished, hawsers coiled, rations dealt?"

"Aye, aye, cap'n!" again called the child.

"Eight bells! Every man to his post!" ordered the master, and from the ceiling a bell struck out the half-hours in the only way the sailor would permit time to be told aboard his "ship." Then Glory whisked out her needle and thread, found grandpa his knife and bit of wood, and the pair fell to their tasks. His was the carving of picture frames, so delicately and deftly that one could hardly believe him sightless; hers the mending of old garments for her neighbors, and her labor was almost as

capable as his. It had earned for her the nickname of "Take-a-Stitch," for, in the Lane, people were better known by their employments than their surnames. Grandpa was "Cap'n Carver" when at his morning work, but after midday, "Captain Singer," since then, led by his dog Bo'sn, he sang upon the streets to earn his livelihood. In the later hours the little girl, also, wore another title—"Goober Glory"—because she was one of the children employed by Antonio Salvatore, the peanut man, to sell his wares on commission.

But grandpa, Glory, and Bo'sn had the long delightful mornings at home and together; and this day, as usual, their talk turned upon the dream of their lives—"Sailors' Snug Harbor."

"Now, grandpa, talk. Tell how 'tis. Do it fast an' picturey-like, 'less I never can guess how to make this piece do. It's such a little patch an' such a awful big hole! Posy Jane gets carelesser an' carelesser all the time. This very last week that ever was she tore this jacket again. An' I told her, I said: 'Jane, if you don't look out you'll never wear this coat all next winter nohow.' An' she up an' laughed, just like she didn't mind a thing like that. An' she paid me ten whole centses, she did. But I love her. Jane's so good to everybody, to every single body. Ain't she, grandpa?"

"Aye, aye, deary. I cal'late she done it a purpose. She makes her money easy, Jane does. Just sets there on the bridge-end and sells second-hand flowers to whoever'll buy. If she had to walk the streets - "

Glory was so surprised by this last sentence that she snapped

her thread off in the wrong place and wasted a whole needleful. Until yesterday, she had never heard her grandfather speak in any but the most contented spirit about his lot in life. Then he had twice lamented that he “didn’t know whatever was to become o’ two poor creatur’s like them,” and now, again, this gay morning, he was complaining—almost complaining. Glory didn’t feel, in the least, like a “poor creatur’.” She felt as “chirpy as a sparrow bird,” over in City Hall park; and, if the sun didn’t shine in the Lane, she knew it was shining in the street beyond, so what mattered?

Vaguely disturbed, the child laid her hand on his arm and asked, “Be you sick, grandpa?”

He answered promptly and testily, “Sick? No, nor never was in my life. Nothin’ but blind an’ that’s a trifle compared to sickness. What you askin’ for? Didn’t I eat my breakfast clean up?”

“Ye-es, but—but afterward you—you kicked Bo’sn, an’ sayin’ that about ‘walkin’ the street’ just a singin’; why, I thought you liked it. I know the folks like to hear you. You do roll out that about the ‘briny wave’ just grand. I wish you’d sing it to Bo’sn an’ me right now, grandpa, dear.”

Wholly mollified and ashamed of his own ill-temper, the captain tried the familiar tune but it died in his throat. Music was far beyond him just then, yet he stroked the child’s head tenderly, and said, “Some other time, mate, some other time. I’m a little hoarse, maybe, or somethin’.”

“Well, then, never mind. Let’s talk ‘Snug Harbor.’ You begin.

You tell an' I'll put in what I'm mind to; or I'll say what I guess it's like an' you set me straight if I get crooked. 'Cause you've seen it, grandpa, an' I never have. Not once; not yet. Bime-by – Oh, shall I begin, shall I, grandpa?"

The sailor sighed fit to shake the whole small tenement and nodded in consent; so, observing nothing of his reluctance to their once favorite subject, Glory launched forth:

“Sailors' Snug Harbor' is the most beautifulest spot in the whole world! It's all flowery an' grassy an' treesy. It's got fountains an' birds an' orchestry-music forever an' ever. 'Tain't never cloudy there, nor rainy, nor freezy, nor snowy, nor nothin' mean. Eh, grandpa? Am I straight or crooked?"

The captain, roused as from a reverie, replied absently, “It's a beautiful place, mate; I know that. Nobody wants for nothin' there, an' once a man casts anchor there he's in safe haven for the rest of his days. Oh, I ain't denyin' none of its comforts, but I wish the whole concern'd burn to the ground or sink in the bay. I wish the man first thought of it had died before he did.”

In his anger, the blind man clasped his knife till its blade cut his hand and Glory cried out in dismay. But he would not have her bathe the wound and resumed his carving in silence. The little girl waited awhile, once more fitting the small patch into the big hole of Posy Jane's jacket; then she went on as if nothing had occurred:

“When we go there to live, me an' you, we'll have a room as big an' nice as this an' you won't have to do a hand's turn for yourself.

You an' Bo'sn'll just set round in rockin'-chairs—I've seen 'em in the stores—with welwet cushionings on your laps—I mean you two a settin' on the cushionings, a dressed up to beat. Maybe, they'll let you order the whole crew, yourself, into white ducks for muster at six bells, or somethin'.

“An’,” Glory continued, “there’ll be me a wearin’ a white frock, all new an’ never mended, an’ my hair growed long an’ lovely, an’ me just as purty as I wish I was, an’ as everybody has to be that lives to the ‘Harbor.’ An’ bime-by, of a Sunday, maybe, when they can spare the time, Posy Jane an’ Billy Buttons, an’ Nick, the Parson, ’ll come walkin’ up to the beautiful gate, an’ the captain what keeps it’ll write their names in a book an’ say, ‘Walk right in, ladies an’ gentlemens, walk right in. You’ll find Captain Simon Beck an’ Miss Glorietta Beck’—’cause I’m goin’ to put that long tail to my plain ‘Glory’ when I go to live there, grandpa.

“Lemme see. Where was I?” the little girl went on. “Oh, yes. The Elbow folks had just come, an’ was showed in. They was told, ‘Walk right in. You’ll find your friends settin’ in the front parlor on them welwet cushionings readin’ stories out o’ books an’ chewin’ candy all day long.’ An’ then they’ll scurce know us, Billy an’ them, an’ not till I laugh an’ show my teeth an’ you get up an’ salute will they suspicion us. An’ you’ll have on gold specs an’ dress-uniform an’ that’ll make you look just like you could see same’s other folks. Why, grandpa, darlin’, I’ve just thought, just this very minute that ever was, maybe, to the ‘Harbor’ you won’t be blind any more; for true, maybe not. In such a splendid

place, with doctors settin' round doin' nothin', an' hospitals an' all, likely they'll put somethin' in your eyes will make you see again. O grandpa – If!"

The old man listened silently.

"An' when—when do you think would be the soonest we might go? 'Twon't cost much to take me an' you an' Bo'sn on the boat to Staten Island. I know the way. Onct I went clear down to the ferry where they start from just a purpose to see, an' we could 'most any time. Will we go 'fore next winter, grandpa? An' yet I hate, I do hate, to leave this dear Lane. We live so lovely in our hull house an' the folks'd miss us so an' we'd miss the folks. Anyway, I should. You wouldn't, course, havin' so many other old sailors all around you. An' – Why, here's that same man again!"

Even in Elbow Lane, where the shadows lie all day long, other and darker shadows may fall; and such a shade now touched Glory's shoulder as she pictured in words the charm of that blessed asylum to which the captain and she would one day repair. He had always fixed the time to be "when he got too old and worthless to earn his living." But that morning she had swiftly reasoned that since he had grown cross—a new thing in her experience—he must also have suddenly become aged and that the day of their departure might be near at hand.

The shadow of the stranger pausing at their door cut short her rhapsody and sent her, the table, and Bo'sn, promptly out of doors, because when any of the sailor's old cronies called to see him, there wasn't room in "the littlest house" for all. So, from

the narrow sidewalk beyond the door, the child listened to the talk within, not much of it being loud enough for her to hear, and fancied, from grandpa's short, sharp replies to his guest's questions, that he was crosser, therefore, more ill, than ever.

Bo'sn, too, sat on his haunches beside her, closely attentive and, at times, uttering a low, protesting growl. Both child and dog had taken a dislike to this unknown, who was so unlike the usual visitors to the Lane.

Glory sometimes wandered as far as Fifth Avenue, with her peanut basket, and now confided to Bo'sn:

"He's just like them dressed-up folks on th' avenue, what goes by with their noses in th' air, same's if they couldn't abide the smell o' goobers, whilst all the time they're just longing to eat 'em. Big shiny hat, clothes 'most as shiny, canes an' fixin's, an' gloves, doggie; gloves this hot day, when a body just wants to keep their hands under the spigot, to cool 'em.

"An'," continued Glory, "he ain't like the rest, Cap'n Gray, an' Cap'n Wiggins, what makes grandpa laugh till he cries, swoppin' yarns. This one 'most makes him cry without the laughin' an' – Why, Bo'sn, Bo'sn!"

In the midst of her own chatter to the terrier, Glory had overheard a sentence of the "shiny gentleman" which sent her to her feet, and the table, work, and stool into the gutter, while her rosy face paled and her wide mouth opened still more widely. The stranger was saying:

"Of course, they'll never take in the child. You can go to

the ‘Harbor’ to-day, if you will, and you ought. She—oh, there are plenty of Homes and Orphanages where they will give her shelter. She’d be far better off than she is here, in this slum, with only a blind old man to look after her. You come of good stock, Beck, and, with a proper chance, the little girl might make a nice woman. Here—whew, I really can’t endure the stench of this alley any longer. We’ll make it this afternoon, captain. At three o’clock I’ll send a man to take you over, and I’ll get my sister, who knows about such things, to find a place for your grandchild. Eh? I didn’t quite catch your words.”

Grandpa was murmuring something under his breath about: “Slum! I knew it was small but ‘slum’—my little Glory—why, why —”

Colonel Bonnicastle interrupted without ceremony. He had put himself out to do an old employee a service and was vexed that his efforts were so ungratefully received. However, he was a man who always had his way and intended to do so now; so he remarked, as if the captain had not objected to so sudden a removal, “The man will be here at three precisely. Have whatever traps you value put together ready. You’ll not know yourself in your new quarters. Good-morning.”

With that the visitor turned to depart but Bo’sn darted between his feet, causing him either to step about in a peculiar fashion or crush the dog; and, with equal want of courtesy, Glory pushed him aside to fling herself on grandpa’s neck, and to shriek to the guest, “Go ’way! Go ’way! Don’t you come back to Elbow Lane!

I hate you—oh, I do hate you!”

The great man was glad to go, nor did he notice her rudeness. His carriage was waiting in the street outside the alley, and even his sister Laura, who spent her days working to help the poor and who had sent him here, could expect no more of him than he had done. Neither his visit of yesterday nor to-day seemed appreciated by that old captain who had once so faithfully commanded the colonel's own ship.

Miss Laura had chanced to hear of the seaman's blindness and poverty, and promptly tried to help him by having him placed in "Sailors' Snug Harbor," of which her brother was a trustee. Nobody had told her about Glory, nor that the "Harbor" was the subject oftenest discussed within the "littlest house."

But other old sailors had told the captain of it, and pictured its delights, and once a crony had even taken him to visit it. After that, to him and his grandchild, the asylum had seemed like a wonderful fairyland where life was one happy holiday. When at their work, they talked of this safe "Harbor" and the little girl's imagination endowed the place with marvelous beauties. In all their dreaming they had still been together, without thought of possible separation, till Colonel Bonnicastle's sentence fell with a shock upon their ears, "*They will never take in the child.*"

CHAPTER II

After the Colonel's Visit

“Don’t you go an’ leave me, grandpa. Grandpa, don’t you dast to go!” wailed Glory, her arms clasped so tightly about the captain’s neck that they choked him. When he loosened them, he drew her to his knee and laid her curly head against his cheek, answering, in a broken voice, “Leave you, deary? Not while I live. Not while you will stay with the old blind man, who can’t even see to what sort of a home he has brought his pet.”

“Why, to the nicest home ever was. Can’t be a nicer nowhere, not any single where. Not even on that big avenue where such shiny people as him live. Why, we’ve got a hull house to ourselves, haven’t we?”

“Child, stop. Tell me exact, as you never told before. Is Elbow Lane a ‘slum’?”

“Deed I don’t know, ’cause I never heard tell of a ‘slum’ ’fore. It’s the cutest little street ever was. Why, you can ’most reach acrost from one side to the other. Me an’ Billy has often tried. It’s got the loveliest crook in it, right here where we be; an’ one side runs out one way an’ t’other toward the river. Why, grandpa, Posy Jane says onct–onct, ’fore anybody here was livin’, the Lane was a cow-path an’ the cows was drove down it to the river to drink. Maybe she’s lyin’. ’Seems if she must be, ’cause now there

ain't no cows nor nothin' but milk-carts an' cans in corner stores, an' buildin's where onct she says was grass—grass, grandpa, do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear, mate. But the folks, the neighbors. A slum, deary, I guess a slum is only where wicked people live. I don't know, really, for we had no such places on the broad high sea. Are our folks in the Lane wicked, daughter?"

"Grandpa!" she cried, indignantly. "When there's such a good, good woman, Jane's sister Meg-Laundress, what washes for us just 'cause I mend her things. An' tailor-Jake who showed me to do a buttonhole an' him all doubled up with coughin'; an' Billy Buttons who gives us a paper sometimes, only neither of us can read it; an' Nick, the parson, who helps me sort my goobers; an' Posy Jane, that's a kind o' mother to everybody goin'. Don't the hull kerboodle of 'em treat you like you was a prince in a storybook, as I've heard Billy tell about? Huh! Nice folks? I should think they was. Couldn't be any nicer in the hull city. Couldn't, for sure, an' I say so, I, Glory Beck."

"And all very poor, mate, terrible, desperate poor; an' ragged an' dirty an' swearers, an' not fit for my pet to mix with. Never go to church nor Sunday-school, nor – Eh, little mate?" persisted the old man, determined to get at the facts of the case at last.

Glory was troubled. In what words could she best defend her friends and convince her strangely anxious guardian that Elbow folks were wholly what they should be? Since she could remember she had known no other people, and if all were not

good as she had fancied them, at least all were good to her. With all her honest loyal heart she loved them, and saw virtues in them which others, maybe, would not have seen. With a gesture of perplexity, she tossed her head and clasped her hands, demanding:

“An’ what’s poor? Why, I’ve heard you say that we’re poor, too, lots o’ times. But is any of us beggars? No, siree. Is any of us thieves? No, Grandpa Beck, not a one. An’ if some is ragged or dirty, that’s ’cause they don’t have clothes an’ spigots handy, an’ some’s afraid o’ takin’ cold, like the tailor man. Some of us lives two er three families in a room, but—but that’s them. Me an’ you don’t. We have a hull house. Why, me an’ you is sort of rich, seems if, and – It’s that big shiny-hatted man makes you talk so queer, grandpa darlin’, an’ I hate him. I wish he’d stayed to his house an’ not come near the Lane.”

“No, no, mate, hate nobody, nobody. He meant it kind. He didn’t know how kindness might hurt us, deary. He is Colonel Bonnicastle, who owned the ship I mastered, an’ many another that sails the sea this day. He’s got a lot to do with the ‘Harbor’ an’ never dreamed how’t we’d known about it long ago. A good ship it was an’ many a voyage she made, with me layin’ dollars away out of my wage, till the sudden blindness struck me an’ I crept down here where nobody knew me to get over it. That’s a long while since, deary, and the dollars have gone, I always hopin’ to get sight again and believin’ I’d done a fine thing for my orphan grandchild, keepin’ so snug a place over her head. So far, I’ve

paid the rent reg'lar, and we've had our rations, too. Now, mate, fetch me the bag and count what's in it."

The little canvas bag which Glory took from the tiny wall-cupboard seemed very light and empty, and when she had untied the string and held it upside down not a coin fell from it. The old man listened for the clink of silver but there was none to hear and he sighed deeply as he asked, "Empty, Glory?"

"Empty, grandpa. Never mind, we'll soon put somethin' back in it. You must get your throat cleared and go out early an' sing your loudest. I'll get Toni to let me have a fifty-bagger, an' I'll sell every single one. You might make as much as a hull quarter, you might, an' me—I'll have a nickel. A nickel buys lots o' meal, an' we can do without milk on our porridge quite a spell. That way we can put by somethin' toward the rent, an' we'll be all right.

"Maybe," little Glory went on, "that old colonel don't have all to say 'bout the 'Harbor.' Maybe he don't like little girls an' that's why. I'll get Cap'n Gray to find out an' tell. He likes 'em. He always gives me a cent to put in the bag—if he has one. He's poor, too, though, but he's got a daughter growed up 'at keeps him. When I get growed I'll earn. Why, darlin' grandpa, I'll earn such a lot we can have everything we want. I will so and I'll give you all I get. If—if so be, we don't go to the 'Harbor' after all."

The captain stroked his darling's head and felt himself cheered by her hopefulness. Though they were penniless just now, they would not be for long if both set their minds to money getting; and, as for going to "Snug Harbor" without Glory, he would never

do that, never.

“Well, well, mate, we’re our own masters still; and, when the colonel sends his man for me, I’ll tell him ‘no,’ so plain he’ll understand. ’Less I may be off on my rounds, singin’ to beat a premer donner. Hark! mess-time already. There goes eight bells. What’s for us, cook?”

As he spoke, the little bell, which hung from the ceiling, struck eight tinkling notes and Glory’s face clouded. There was nothing in the tiny cupboard on the wall save a remnant of porridge from breakfast, that had cooled and stiffened, and the empty money-bag.

“O grandpa! So soon? Why, I ought to have finished Jane’s jacket and took it to her. She’d have paid me an’ I’d ha’ got the loveliest chop from the store ’round the corner. But now, you dear, you’ll just have to eat what is an’ make the best of it. Next time it’ll be better an’ here’s your plate.”

Humming a tune and making a great flourish of plate and spoon, she placed the porridge before the captain and watched his face anxiously, her heart sinking as she saw the distaste apparent at his first mouthful. He was such a hungry old dear always, and so was she hungry, though she didn’t find it convenient to eat upon all such occasions. When there happened to be enough food for but one, she was almost glad of the sailor’s blindness. If he smelled one chop cooking on the little stove, how should he guess there weren’t two? And if she made a great clatter with knife and plate, how could he imagine she was not eating?

Up till now, Glory could always console herself with dreams of the “Snug Harbor” and the feasts some day to be enjoyed there. Alas! The colonel’s words had changed all that. For her there would be no “Harbor,” ever; but for him, her beloved grandpa, it was still possible. A great fear suddenly possessed her. What if the captain should get so very, very hungry, that he would be tempted beyond resistance, and forsake her after all! She felt the suspicion unworthy, yet it had come, and as the blind man pushed his plate aside, unable to swallow the unpalatable porridge, she resolved upon her first debt. Laying her hand on his she begged, “Wait a minute, grandpa! I forgot—I mean I didn’t get the milk. I’ll run round an’ be back with it in a jiffy!”

“Got the pay, mate?” he called after her, but, if she heard him, she, for once, withheld an answer.

“O Mister Grocer!” she cried, darting into the dairy shop, like a stray blue and golden butterfly, “could you possibly lend me a cent’s worth o’ milk for grandpa’s dinner? I’ll pay you to-night, when I get home from peddlin’, if I can. If I can’t then, why the next time – ”

“Say no more, Take-a-Stitch, I’ve a whole can turnin’ sour on me an’ you’re welcome to a pint on’t if you’ll take it. My respects to the captain, and here’s good luck to the Queen of Elbow Lane!”

Glory swept him a curtsy, flashed a radiant smile upon him and was tempted to hug him; but she refrained from this, not knowing how such a caress might be received. Then she thanked

and thanked him till he bade her stop, and with her tin cup in her hand sped homeward again, crying:

“Here am I, grandpa! More milk ’an you can shake a stick at, with the store-man’s respeckses an’ all. A hull pint! Think o’ that! An’ only just a teeny, tiny mite sour. Isn’t he the nicest one to give it to us just for nothin’? An’ he’s another sort of Elbow folks, though he’s off a bit around the block. Oh, this is just the loveliest world there is! An’ who’d want to go to that old ‘Snug Harbor’ an’ leave such dear, dear people, I sh’d like to know? Not me nor you, Cap’n Simon Beck, an’ you know it!”

Glory sat down and watched her grandsire make the best dinner he could upon cold porridge and sour milk, her face radiant with pleasure that she had been able so well to supply him, and almost forgetting that horrid, all-gone feeling in her own small stomach. Never mind, a peanut or so might come her way, if Toni Salvatore, the little Italian with the long name, should happen to be in a good humor and fling them to her, for well he knew that of the stock he trusted to her, not a single goober would be extracted for her personal enjoyment; and this was why he oftener bestowed upon her a tiny bag of the dainties than upon any other of his small sales people.

The captain finished his meal and did not distress his darling by admitting that it was still distasteful, then rose, slung his basket of frames over his shoulder, took Bo’sn’s leading-string, and passed out to his afternoon’s peddling and singing. But, though he had kissed her good-bye, Glory dashed after him, begging still

another and another caress, and feeling the greatest reluctance to letting him go, yet equally unwilling to have him stay.

“If he stays here that man will come and maybe get him, whether or no; an’ if he goes, the shiny colonel may meet him outside and take him anyhow. If only he’d sing alongside o’ my peddlin’ route! But he won’t. He never will. He hates to hear me holler. He says ‘little maids shouldn’t do it’; only I have to, to buy my sewin’ things with; an’ – My, I clean forgot Posy Jane’s jacket! I must hurry an’ finish it, then off to peanuttin’,” pondered the child, and watched the blind man making his way, so surely and safely, around the corner into the next street, with Bo’sn walking proudly ahead, what tail he had pointing skyward and his one good ear pricked forward, intent and listening.

The old captain in the faded uniform he still wore, and the faithful little terrier, who guided his sightless master through the dangers of the city streets with almost a human intelligence were to Goober Glory the two dearest objects in the world, and for them she would do anything and everything.

“Funny how just them few words that shiny man said has changed our hull feelin’s ’bout the ‘Harbor.’ Only this mornin’, ’fore he come, we was a-plannin’ how lovely ’twas; an’ now–now I just hate it! I’m glad they’s water ’twixt us an’ that old Staten Island, an’ I’m glad we haven’t ferry money nor nothin’,” cried the little girl, aloud, shaking a small fist defiantly southward toward the land of her lost dreams. Then, singing to make herself forget how hungry she was, she hurried into the littlest house and–shall

it be told?—caught up her grandpa's plate and licked the crumbs from it, then inverted the tin cup and let the few drops still left in it trickle slowly down her throat; and such was Glory's dinner.

Afterward she took out needle and thread and heigho! How the neat stitches fairly flew into place, although to make the small patch fill the big hole, there had to be a little pucker here and there. Never mind, a pucker more or less wouldn't trouble happy-go-lucky Jane, who believed little Glory to be the very cleverest child in the whole world and a perfect marvel of neatness; for, in that particular, she had been well trained. The old sea captain would allow no dirt anywhere, being as well able to discover its presence by his touch as he had once been by sight; and, oddly enough, he was as deft with his needle as with his knife.

So, the jacket finished, Glory hurried away up the steep stairs to the great bridge-end, received from the friendly flower-seller unstinted praise and a ripe banana and felt her last anxiety vanish.

"A hull banana just for myself an' not for pay, dear, dear Jane? Oh, how good you are! But you listen to me, 'cause I want to tell you somethin'. Me an' grandpa ain't never goin' to that old 'Snug Harbor,' never, nohow. We wouldn't be hired to. So there."

"Why—why, Take-a-Stitch! Why, be I hearin' or dreamin', I should like to know. Not go there, when I thought you could scarce wait for the time to come? What's up?"

"A shiny rich man from the avenue where such as him lives and what owns the ship grandpa used to master, an' a lot more like it has so much to do with the 'Harbor' 'at he can get anybody

in it or out of it just as he pleases. He's been twice to see grandpa an' made him all solemn an' poor-feelin', like he ain't used to bein'. Why, he's even been cross, truly cross, if you'll believe it!"

"Can't, hardly. Old cap'n's the jolliest soul ashore, I believe," said Jane.

"An' if grandpa maybe goes alone, 'cause they don't take little girls, nohow, then that colonel'd have me sent off to one o' them Homeses or 'Sylums for childern that hasn't got no real pas nor mas. Huh, needn't tell me. I've seen 'em, time an' again, walkin' in processions, with Sisters of Charity in wide white flappin' caps all the time scoldin' them poor little girls for laughin' too loud or gettin' off the line or somethin' like that. An' them with long-tailed frocks an' choky kind of aperns an' big sunbonnets, lookin' right at my basket o' peanuts an' never tastin' a single one. Oh, jest catch me! I'll be a newspaper boy, first, but—but, Jane dear, do you s'pose anything—any single thing, such as bein' terrible hungry, or not gettin' paid for frames or singin'—could that make my grandpa go and leave me?"

For at her own breathless vivid picture of the orphanage children, as she had seen them, the doubt concerning the captain's future actions returned to torment her afresh.

"He might be sick, honey, or somethin' like that, but not o' free will. Old Simon Beck'll never forsake the 'light o' his eyes,' as I've heard him call you, time an' again."

"Don't you fret, child," continued Posy Jane. "Ain't you the 'Queen of Elbow Lane'? Ain't all of us, round about, fond of

you an' proud of you, same's if you was a real queen, indeed? Who'd look after Mis' McGinty's seven babies, when she goes a scrubbin' the station floors, if you wasn't here? Who'd help the tailor with his job when the fits of coughin' get so bad? 'Twas only a spell ago he was showin' me how't you'd sewed in the linin' to a coat he was too sick to finish an' a praisin' the stitches beautiful. What'd the boys do without you to sew their rags up decent an' tend to their hurt fingers an' share your dinner with 'em when—when you have one an' they don't?

“An' you so masterful like,” went on the flower-seller, “a makin' everybody do as you say, whether or no. If it's a scrap in a tenement, is my Glory afraid? not a mite. In she walks, walks she, as bold as bold, an' lays her hand on this one's shoulder an' that one's arm an' makes 'em quit fightin'. Many's the job you've saved the police, Glory Beck, an' that very officer yonder was sayin' only yesterday how't he'd rather have you on his beat than another cop, no matter how smart he might be. He says, says he, ‘That little girl can do more to keep the peace in the Lane 'an the best man on the force,’ says he. ‘It's prime wonderful how she manages it.’ An' I up an' tells him nothin' wonderful 'bout it at all.’ It's 'cause everybody loves you, little Glory, an' is ashamed not to be just as good as they know you think they be.

“Don't you fret, child,” Jane went on, “Elbow folks won't let you go, nor'll the cap'n leave you, and if bad come to worst them asylums are fine. The Sisters is all good an' sweet, givin' their lives to them 'at needs. Don't you get notions, Glory Beck, an'

judge folks 'fore you know 'em. If them orphans gets scolded now an' then it does 'em good. They ought to be. So'd you ought, if you don't get off to your peddlin'. It's long past your time. Here's a nickel for the jacket an' you put it safe by 'fore you start out. May as well let me pin one o' these carnations on you, too. They ain't sellin' so fast an' 'twould look purty on your blue frock. Blue an' white an' yeller—frock an' flower an' curly head—they compare right good.”

Ere Jane's long gossip was ended, her favorite's fears were wholly banished. With a hug for thanks and farewell, Glory was off and away, and the tired eyes of the toilers in the Lane brightened as she flitted past their dingy windows, waving a hand to this one and that and smiling upon all. To put her earnings away in the canvas bag and catch up her flat, well-mended basket, took but a minute, and, singing as she went, the busy child sped around to that block where Antonio had his stand.

That day the trade in goobers had been slack and other of his small employees had found the peanut-man a trifle cross; but, when Glory's shining head and merry face came into view, his own face cleared and he gave her a friendly welcome.

“A fifty-bagger this time, dear Toni! I've got to get a heap of money after this for grandpa!”

“Alla-right, I fill him,” returned the vender; and, having carefully packed the fifty small packets in the shallow basket, he helped her to poise it on her head, as he had long since taught her his own countrywomen did. This was a fine thing for the growing

child and gave her a firm erectness not common to young wage-earners. She was very proud of this accomplishment, as was her teacher, Antonio, and had more than once outstripped Billy Buttons in a race, still supporting her burden.

“Sell every bag, little one, and come back to me. I, Antonio Salvatore have secret, mystery. That will I tell when basket empty. Secret bring us both to riches, indeed!”

Crafty Antonio! Well he knew that the little girl’s curiosity was great, and had led her into more than one scrape, and that his promise to impart a secret would make her more eager to sell her stock than the small money payment she would earn by doing so.

Glory clasped her hands and opened her brown eyes more widely, entreating, “Now, Toni, dear Tonio, tell first and sell afterward. Please, please.”

“No, not so, little one. Sell first, then I tell. If you sell not –” Antonio shrugged his shoulders in a way that meant no sale, no secret. So, already much belated, Goober Glory—as she had now become—was forced to depart to her task, though she turned about once or twice to wave farewell to her employer and to smile upon him, but she meant to make the greatest haste, for, of all delightful things, a secret was best.

CHAPTER III

In Elbow Lane

“Pea-nuts! Cent-a-b-a-a-g!”

This cry shrilled, almost yelled from the sidewalk upon which she was descending from her carriage so startled Miss Bonnicastle that she tripped and fell. In falling, she landed plump in a basket of the nuts and scattered them broadcast.

“Look out there! What you doin’?” indignantly demanded Glory, while a crowd of street urchins gathered to enjoy a feast.

“Help me up, little girl; never mind the nuts,” begged the lady, extending her gloved hand.

“You don’t mind ’em, ’course. They ain’t yours!” retorted the dismayed child, yet seizing the hand with such vigor that she split the glove and brought its owner to an upright position with more precision than grace. Then, paying no further heed to the stranger, she began a boy-to-boy assault upon the purloiners of her wares; and this, in turn, started such an uproar of shrieks and gibes and laughter that poor Miss Laura’s nerves gave way entirely. Clutching Glory’s shoulder, she commanded, “Stop it, little girl, stop it, right away! You deafen me.”

The effect was instant. In astonished silence, the lads ceased struggling and stared at this unknown lady who had dared lay hands on the little “Queen of Elbow Lane.” Wild and rough

though they were, they rarely interfered with the child, and there was more amazement than anger in Glory's own gaze as it swept Miss Bonnicastle from head to foot. The keen scrutiny made the lady a trifle uncomfortable and, realizing that she had done an unusual thing, she hastened to apologize, saying, "Beg pardon, little girl, I should not have done that, only the noise was so frightful and –"

"Ho, that?" interrupted the peanut vender, with fine scorn. "Guess you ain't used to Elbow boys. That was nothin'. They was only funnin', they was. If they'd been fightin' reg'lar—my, s'pose you'd a fell down again, s'pose."

Wasting no further time upon the stranger, Glory picked up the basket and examined it, her expression becoming very downcast; and, seeing this, the boy who had been fiercest in the scramble stepped closer and asked, "Is it clean smashed, Glory?"

"Clean," she answered, sadly.

"How much'll he dock yer?" asked another lad, taking the damaged article into his own hands. "Pshaw, hadn't no handle, nohow. Half the bottom was tore an' patched with a rag. One side's all lopped over, too. Say, if he docks yer a cent, he's a mean old Dago!"

"Well, ain't he a Dago, Billy Buttons? An' I put in that patch myself. I sewed it a hour, with strings out the garbage boxes, a hull hour. Hi, there! you leave them goobers be!" cried the girl, swooping down upon the few youngsters who had returned to pilfer the scattered nuts and, at once, the two larger boys came

to her aid.

“We’ll help yer, Glory. An’ me an’ Nick’ll give ye a nickel a-piece, fer new bags, won’t we, Nick?” comforted Billy. But, receiving no reply from his partner in the news trade, he looked up to learn the reason. Nick was busily picking up nuts and replacing them in such bags as remained unbroken but he wasn’t eager to part with his money. Nickels were not plentiful after one’s food was paid for, and though lodgings cost nothing, being any odd corner of floor or pavement adjoining the press-rooms whence he obtained his papers, there were other things he craved. It would have been easy to promise but there was a code in Elbow Lane which enforced the keeping of promises. If one broke one’s word one’s head was, also, promptly broken. There was danger of this even now and there, because Billy’s foot came swiftly up to encourage his mate’s generosity.

However, the kick was dexterously intercepted by Glory; Master Buttons was thrown upon his back, and Nick escaped both hurt and promise. With a burst of laughter all three fell to work gathering up the nuts and the small peddler’s face was as gay as ever, as she cried:

“Say, boys, ’tain’t nigh so bad. Ain’t more’n half of ’em busted. I guess the grocer-man’ll trust me to that many—he’s real good-natured to-day. His jumper’s tore, too, so maybe he’ll let me work it out.” Then, perceiving a peculiar action on the part of the too helpful Billy, she sternly demanded, “What you doin’ there, puttin’ in them shells that’s been all chewed?”

“Huh! That’s all right. I jams ’em down in the bottom. They don’t show an’ fills up faster’n th’ others. Gotter make yer losin’s good, hain’t yer?”

“Yes, Billy Buttons, I have, but I ain’t goin’ to make ’em cheatin’ anybody. What’d grandpa think or say to that? Now you can just empty out every single goober shell you’ve put in an’ fill up square. I’ll save them shells by theirselves, so’s to have ’em ready next time you yourself want to buy off me.”

The beautiful justice of this promise so impressed the newsboy that he turned a somersault, whereby more peanuts were crushed and he earned a fresh reproof.

Miss Bonnicastle had remained an amused observer of the whole scene, though the actors in it had apparently forgotten her presence. To remind them of this, she inquired, “Children, will you please tell me how much your peanuts were worth?”

“Cent a bag!” promptly returned Glory, selecting the best looking packet and holding it toward this possible customer.

“All of them, I mean. I wish to pay you for all of them,” explained the lady, opening her purse.

Too surprised to speak for herself, Nick answered for the vender, “They was fifty bags, that’s fifty cents, an’ five fer commish. If it’d been a hunderd, ’twould ha’ been a dime. Glory, she’s the best seller Toni Salvatore’s got, an’ he often chucks her in a bag fer herself, besides. Fifty-five’d be fair, eh, Take-a-Stitch?”

Glancing at Glory’s sunny face, Miss Laura did not wonder at

the child's success. Almost anybody would buy from her for the sake of bringing forth one of those flashing smiles, but the girl had now found her own voice and indignantly cried:

“Oh, parson, if you ain't the cheat, I never! Chargin' money for goobers what's smashed! Think you'll get a lot for yourself, don't you? Well, you won't an' you needn't look to, so there.”

Thus having rebuked her too zealous champion Glory explained to Miss Bonnicastle that “they couldn't be more'n twenty-five good bags left. They belongs to Antonio Salvatore, the peanut man. I was goin' to buy needles an' thread with part, needin' needles most, but no matter. Better luck next time. Do you really want a bag, lady?”

Again the tiny packet was extended persuasively, the small peddler being most anxious to make a sale although her honesty forbade her accepting payment for goods unsold.

But Miss Laura scarcely saw the paper bag, for she was looking with so much interest upon the child's own face. Such a gay, helpful, hopeful small face it was! Beneath a tangle of yellow curls, the brown eyes looked forth so trustfully, and the wide mouth parted in almost continual laughter over white and well-kept teeth. Then the white carnation pinned to the faded, but clean, blue frock, gave a touch of daintiness. Altogether, this seemed a charming little person to be found in such a locality, where, commonly, the people were poor and ill-fed, and looked sad rather than glad. The lady's surprise was expressed in her question, “Little girl, where do you live? How came you in this

neighborhood?”

“Why—I belong here, ’course. Me an’ grandpa live in the littlest house in Ne’ York. Me an’ him we live together, all by our two selves, an’ we have the nicest times there is. But—but, did you want a bag?” she finished, pleadingly. Time was passing and she was too busy to waste more. She wondered, too, why anybody so rich as to ride in a carriage should tarry thus long in Elbow Lane, though, sometimes, people did get astray and turn into the Lane on their way to cross the big bridge.

“Yes, little Glory, as I heard them call you, I meant just what I said. I wish to buy all your stock as well as pay for a new basket. Will you please invite your friends to share the feast with you? I’m sorry I caused you so much trouble and here, the little boy suggested fifty-five cents, suppose we make it a dollar? Will that be wholly satisfactory?”

The face of Take-a-Stitch was again a study in its perplexity. The temptation to take the proffered money was great, but a sense of justice was even greater. After a pause, she said with complete decision, “It must be this way; you give me the fifty cents for Toni Salvatore—that’ll be hisn. You take the goobers an’ give ’em to who you want. I won’t take no pay for the basket, ’cause I can mend it again; nor for myself, ’cause I hain’t earned it. I hain’t hollered scarce any to sell such a lot. That’s fair. Will I put ’em in your carriage, lady?”

“No, no! Oh, dear! No, indeed. Call your mates and divide among them as you choose. Then—I wonder why my man doesn’t

come back. The coachman can't leave the horses, and the footman seems to have lost himself looking for a number it should be easy to find."

The children had gathered about Glory who was now beaming with delight at the chance to bestow a treat upon her mates as well as enjoy one herself. Indeed, her hunger made her begin to crack the goobers with her strong white teeth and to swallow the kernels, skins and all. But again Miss Bonnicastle touched her shoulder, though this time most gently, asking:

"If this is Elbow Lane, and you live in or near it, can you show me the way to the house of Captain Simon Beck, an old blind man?"

Glory gasped and dropped her basket. All the rosy color forsook her face and fear usurped its gaiety. For a time, she stared at the handsome old lady in terror, then demanded, brokenly, "Be-you-from-'Snug Harbor'?"

It was now the stranger's turn to stare. Wondering why the child had asked such a question and seemed so startled, she answered, "In a way, both yes and no. I am interested in 'Snug Harbor,' and have come to find an old, blind sea captain whom my brother employed, in order to take him, myself, to that comfortable home. Why do you ask?"

Then Glory fled, but she turned once to shake a warning fist toward Nick and Billy, who instantly understood her silent message and glared defiantly upon the lady who had just given them an unexpected feast.

CHAPTER IV

Beside Old Trinity

“Why, what is the matter? Why did she run away?” asked the astonished stranger.

Billy giggled and punched Nick who was now apportioning the peanuts among the children he had whistled to his side, but neither lad replied.

This vexed Miss Bonnicastle who had come to the Lane in small hope of influencing the old captain to do as her brother had wished him to do and to remove, at once, to the comfortable “Harbor” across the bay. She had undertaken the task at her brother’s request; and also at his desire, had driven thither in the carriage, in order to carry the blind man away with her, without the difficulty of getting him in and out of street cars and ferry boat. It would greatly simplify matters if he would just step into the vehicle at his own humble door and step out of it again at the entrance to his new home.

But the Lane had proved even narrower and dirtier than she had expected. She was afraid that having once driven into it the coachman would not be able to drive out again, and the odors of river and market, which the blind seaman found so delightful, made her ill. She had deprived herself of her accustomed afternoon nap; she had sprained her ankle in falling; her footman

had been gone much longer than she expected, searching for the captain's house; and though she had been amused by the little scene among the alley children which had been abruptly ended by Glory's flight, she was now extremely anxious to finish her errand and be gone.

In order to rest her aching ankle, she stepped back into the carriage and from thence called to Billy, at the same time holding up to view a quarter dollar.

Master Buttons did not hesitate. He was glad that Nick happened to be looking another way and did not see the shining coin which he meant to have for himself, if he could get it without disloyalty to Glory. Hurrying forward, he pulled off his ragged cap and inquired, "Did you want me, ma'am?"

"Yes, little boy. What is your name?"

"Billy."

"What else? Your surname?" continued the questioner.

"Eh? What? Oh—I guess 'Buttons,' 'cause onct I was a messenger boy. That's what gimme these clo'es, but I quit."

He began to fear there was no money in this job, after all, for the hand which had displayed the silver piece now rested in the lady's lap; and, watching the peanut feasters, he felt himself defrauded of his own rightful share. He stood first upon one bare foot then upon the other, and, with affectation of great haste, pulled a damaged little watch from his blouse and examined it critically. The watch had been found in a refuse heap, and even in its best days had been incapable of keeping time, yet its

possession by Billy Buttons made him the envy of his mates.

He did not see the amused smile with which the lady regarded him, and though disappointed by her next question it was, after all, the very one he had anticipated.

“Billy Buttons, will you earn a quarter by showing me the way to where Captain Beck lives? that is, if you know it.”

“Oh, I knows it all right, but I can’t show it.”

“Can’t? Why not? Is it too far?”

Billy thought he had never heard anybody ask so many questions in so short a time and was on the point of saying so, impertinently, yet found it not worth while. Instead, he remarked, “I ain’t sayin’ if it’s fur er near, but I guess I better be goin’ down to th’ office now an’ see if they’s a extry out. Might be a fire, er murder, er somethin’ doin’.”

With that courtesy which even the gamins of the streets unconsciously acquire from their betters, Billy pulled off his cap again and moved away. But he was not to escape so easily. Miss Laura’s hand clasped his soiled sleeve and forth came another question, “Billy, is that little girl your sister?”

“Hey? No such luck fer Buttons. She ain’t nobody’s sister, she ain’t. She just belongs to the hull Lane, Glory does. Huh! Take-a-Stitch my sister? Wished she was. She’s only cap’n – Shucks!” Having so nearly betrayed himself, Billy broke from the restraining hand and disappeared.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.