

recognised in her a being different from the women who had rested in the square when he first entered, and who had now mysteriously disappeared; different, too, from the women with whom he had occasionally companioned in his zig-zag career, whose presence had not interested him, whose absence had left no regret.

She did not notice him. She sat leaning a little forward, her hands clasped over one knee, and her face turned toward the street with an expression on it of vexation and dissatisfaction. He watched her, furtively turning his head, and finally his whole body to obtain a better view, but his regard was unobtrusive, unfelt.

He had an overmastering desire to do something for her; some modest act of kindness, as he would have given half his apple to a crying child, or helped a blind man across the street.

Finally, stiffened, she relaxed her position and leaned back against the bench, but her eyes still sought the street with a fixed, unseeing stare, and the faint scowl still wrinkled the narrow line of forehead beneath the curled mass of brownish hair.

He slipped his arm out of his ragged coat and, leaning still farther forward, said:

"You'd better take this, it'll soften your back."

She looked at him doubtfully. She knew but two attitudes to assume to young men, one when she repelled their unwelcome advances, the other when she scoffed and jested with them in the hybrid language of the tenement districts.

His eyes met hers, fearlessly, frankly. Without defining her sensations, she felt a welcome easing of anxiety, an unexpected security. She had wondered what the tall policeman would say when he made his rounds, now, some way, she did not care.

She took the coat and looked at it, as she had looked at him a second before. It was not inviting with its rags and odour of stale tobacco, but he was gazing at her wistfully, so she folded it, laid it against the iron bench and leaned back on it.

"It's grand. I didn't know how rough them edges were."

His face was transfigured with gladness at her appreciation, and, half-embarrassed, he puffed vigorously at the extinguished pipe.

They were silent a long time; a silence which drew them together in a tie of mutual loneliness. Finally the burden of irritation and disaster broke through unaccustomed restraint.

"It's that Liz. I wish she was dead."

"Liz?"
"Yes. She's the woman dad picked up on the street and married. Put 'er ahead of me an' the kids."

He moved nearer, and a fallen sleeve offering the opportunity, re-arranged her improvised cushion, but without a word.

His mute sympathy impelled confidence.

"I hates 'er and she hates me. It's alters the same thing, from mornin' till night, and half the night through. I'm sick of it, an' I get sicker all the time, an' every time I see 'er. Fight, an' fight, an' fight."

Another pause. The tall policeman passed along; stopped a moment to look in the limpid depths of the fountain, glanced at them nonchalantly and went on.

"It used to be somethin' like. The rooms were clean, an' the kids allers had their faces washed, an' minded me, and Sundays we went out in the Park together, an' evenin's talked; then she came an' everything's been at sixes. Yellow-haired —"

The expletive was below her breath. The picture she drew was no strange one. Many a time in his wanderings he had been thrown in contact with a lawless unrestraint of speech and action, leading to recurrent conflicts of domestic unhappiness.

He pitied her, and she felt his pity. The fierce anger died out of her voice, and the tears falling from her eyes trickled in slow drops down the face on which a childish uncertainty of expression was mingled with the faint lines that denoted a bliter experience of life.

He hated to see her cry. He wished he dared. He did dare, and drawing nearer put his arm about her tentatively, awkwardly.

She started to draw away, then stopped, still encircled. She knew intu-

tively that the embrace had in it no element at which she need cavil.

The tears fell faster urged by his friendly nearness.

She had taken off her blue-banded sailor hat and laid it on the grass at her feet.

Thus denuded the act was simplified, and he drew her head to his shoulder with his roughened hand. Through the thin cotton shirt he could feel the warm tears on his muscular shoulder. In that twisted position, which he would not change for fear of disturbing her, he felt happier than he ever remembered feeling before as if something he had not known he lacked had come to him and an unconscious incompleteness had been rounded out.

Finally the sobs came slower, less hysterically. Between them she said timidly, with no trace of the exaggerated passion of irritation which had marked her former confidence:

"To-night she drove me out. Said there was jes' one too many in that there place. The kids laughed. She sets 'em on me now, and they likes to hear us jaw. I didn't know any place to go to, so I walked an' walked, an' walked till I got dead beat an' then I saw the green an' the fountain looked cool an' —"

The sobs broke out again, and again he soothed her with mute touches of a calloused hand.

"There, there; I've seen her kind. I know 'em. She sha'n't fight yer again — never, no more."

In a few moments she was sound asleep, overcome by physical and mental exhaustion.

He sat still enfolding her with his strong arm, her babyish face with its wavering expression, where the damp paths of past tears still showed, with its delicate pallor and its halo of tiny curls, against his willing shoulder. He touched her cheek now and then with his forefinger, it was so soft and warm, and he thought longer, more continuously than he had ever thought before, piecing together past experiences, recalling half forgotten scenes; trying to solve problems, which avoided when first presented, were now demanding a long delayed retribution. Realizing for the first time that life meant something more than the day's food and the night's lodgings; that he was beginning all over again; that all the foolish, unthinking days which he had hitherto lived had led but to that green spot of verdure in the midst of dusty streets, and from there dated a new, undreamed-of, intoxicating existence.

She moved uneasily, cramped by the unaccustomed position, and opened her eyes.

"I've been asleep. I was beat out," and then apologizing: "Did I hurt yer?"

"Hurt me? No; I liked it."
He rose from the bench and having moved his arms back and forth in a brisk effort to restore circulation, inspected himself and drew her to his side.

She made no protest.

"You didn't tell me yer name."
"It's Gracie." She spoke proudly. She liked her name. It was significant of the hopes she had never realized, a little above the sordid details of her life. "What's yours?"

It was the first time he had ever wanted a particular name. He had been satisfied with the various cognomens bestowed on him from time to time; they had answered a temporary need, and had been thrown aside carelessly, like a coat or hat when a new one was required. Impenetrance, the fundamental note of his life, was shown in no way more distinctly than in this transformation of names.

Memories of certain police-court experiences returning, he said awkwardly:

"They call me John Smith, some times."

The harsh monosyllables fitted in with the inharmonious appearance, and she made no comment.

Silence had reigned in the streets for a long time, only an occasional wanderer breaking the monotony of perspective, only an occasional clanging car recalling the nearness of inquiet life.

There was a renewed freshness in the air, harbinger of the coming day. In a little while the rumbling carts laden with produce would be heard; in a few moments flecks of daylight replace the vignettes of black lines on the asphalted walks of the Square and colour effects excite the far horizon.

"Gracie?"

"Yes."

Their hands were locked together,

and the words were emphasized by friendly pressures.

"Be you a good girl?"

"Good?" She hesitated. "Well, to'lerable, I s'pose."

"To'lerable." He repeated the qualifying adjective, disappointment plainly discernible.

"Yes. I can't keep from sayin' things to Liz and about 'er an' I don't go to church. I went to the Mission, but I got tired. They don't want such as me. I ain't had enough or good enough. I guess they got tired, too."

"I didn't mean that —" He hesitated. "I meant —" He wanted to put it delicately, but did not know how. "I mean —" He floundered again amid the betrayal of speech, "do you know many — young fellers?"

She drew away from him indignantly.

"Oh, I see what yer mean. I dunno as I blame yer. It's natural. I s'pose you couldn't help feelin' so arter night. How'd yer know I want allers so?"

She pushed away his seeking arm.

"No; I wan't that, I s'war," and he brought his clasped hand against his knee. "I only thought I wouldn't be surprised the way yer set on. I'd like yer jes' the same, only, someway, I hoped yer hadn't."

"Yer needn't be afraid. I've had troubles enough without them."

And, after an impressive pause: "I've seen enough of it, too."

She referred thus enigmatically to some of her girlhood companions who had disappeared into the streets.

"What'll yer do now?"

"Do?"

"Yes; now she's turn yer out?"

"Oh, she'll be 'round to the factory tomorrow. I know 'er. It's wage day, an' she'll wheedle an' coax till she gets it all away again. Oh, I'm sick of it. I wish I was dead — or somethin'.

There don't seem to be nuthin' in life but work an' fights."

"Gracie?"

"What?"

He stammered; then paused, then stammered again.

"You ain't got nothin' nor nobody that cares for yer. Neither hev I. Couldn't we get married?"

"Married!"

"Yes; an' live tergether by ourselves like others do. You could stay there an' not be driv out, and I'd stay still an' not be movin' round the way I hev. I'm tired of it, an' you're tired of fightin'. Couldn't we, Gracie?"

She did not answer, and he continued:

"I can work. I can do lots of things; but I never cared to afore — that is, for long."

"What things?"

She asked the question to give herself time to think, to overcome the bewildering surprise engulfing her.

"Oh, carpentering an' such like. I'm a good workman when I try. See!" He showed her some loose coins in his pocket. "We could begin on that."

She was silent a long time, and he waited breathlessly, in tense excitement.

At length:

"Won't yer, Gracie, please?"

The tone was intense, wistful, sincere.


He held her closer to him, and at length the normal expression of indecision on her babyish face weakened into consent.

With faces transfigured by a momentary happiness, unexpected, inexplicable, lips sought lips in a first kiss destitute of passion, replete with sentiment, the outward sign of an inward convocation of souls.

Like the traveller in the desert, terrified by the vastness of surrounding solitude who calls aloud for a companion, these two waifs, flung together by a chance encounter, drowning in the engulfing waves of life's sea of troubles, were holding out to each other pitying hands; starving in the midst of plenty, they were seeking nothing from the overlaid, but sharing freely with each other their miserable pittance of crumbs; lacking all the world holds dear, choked by the weeds of ignorance, of poverty, of hopelessness, they were giving that which neither riches, nor honour, nor power can bring its possessor, and so,

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