

'I am only twelve at the time, but I go to work in a factory—not your factory but one away off the other side of the river. I have to walk long, long distance in the cold, dark morning, and walk back again at night, but I am happy for I earn money to help at home.

'We get along pretty well for almost three years. Then, just a year ago, the factory I work for shut down. Times are hard, there is no more work for us; we must go. We do so. We try at first one place, then another, to find work. It is the same story everywhere.

'Then mother gets that dreadful cold. The laundry where she work is always so very hot. She come out at night into the cold air; her coat is thin, for she cannot buy a warm one, and she get a dreadful chill one night as she come home. She cough all the time after that. It shake her nearly all to pieces; but she kept on going to the laundry till one day she fall beside the mangle. They bring her home and we put her to bed, and she never leave it again.

'What to do then we know not. One, two, three days pass; at last there is a day when grandmother and I eat nothing. We give the last scraps of bread to the children and spend the last two pennies on milk for mother. There is nothing left for us. We not sleep that night; we sit by the empty stove and we think all night. Grandmother is praying all the time; she is, ah, so good, that grandmother!

'Next morning is cold, very cold; we have no fire and no food. I have been everywhere to look for work and find nothing, but I put on my hat to go out and try once more. Grandmother ask me what I do. I tell her I go to look for work. She say, "No, child, you stay here with your mother to-day; it is my turn now."

'She is old; she is blind, and I fear to have her go out alone, but she is firm and will go. She take her stick and she go out. She come back with bread for the children and a little money to buy coal. I not ask her where she get it; I know; she beg it on the street. Every day she go out like that, and when she bring back food and money she not say one word and I not ask her where she get it; I know.

'She keep us from starving for a few weeks, and then, at last, I find work in your factory. For a time I am almost happy again, for now grandmother need beg no more; my pay will keep us in food and fire. Even mother is better for a little while, and I think perhaps she will get well and we all be happy once again. But mother is soon very, very sick, and I see her dying day by day, and can do nothing to help her.

'Then, that day last week, a party of ladies come to visit the factory. Then wife of the superintendent is with them. She very handsome, very rich; she beautifully dressed. She stop near my table to take off her coat. The room is warm and the fur coat heavy. She lay her purse down on my table while she remove the garment: one of the ladies call to her and she go away, leaving the purse behind her on my table.

'Mother is very sick that morning; she not sleep all night, but cough, cough, cough. There is the purse before me. No one is looking; I pick it up and open it. It is filled with money, the money that may save my mother's life. That lady will never miss it. I slip the purse inside my dress and go on with my work. I can hardly keep from screaming with joy, I am so happy to think I have the money which is going to save my mother's life. The ladies go away and I feel I am safe; she has forget about her purse. I want to rush away home at once, but I must stay at work so no one will suspect.

'Presently the superintendent he come in and he talk to you, and you look very grave. Then he say one of the ladies have left her purse on a table in this room. Will the girls be kind enough to stop work and search for it? He will give five dollars reward to the one who finds it. We all search, but no purse is found, and he go away again. Pretty soon he come back and the lady with him. She look around for a few moments, then she walk straight over to my table.

'The superintendent ask me if I have seen the purse, and I say no. I suppose he know by my face that I am lying, for he tell you to take me to the dressing-room and search. Then I know there is no hope for me; if you search you find the purse, so I take it out and hand it to him. He talk to me about my wickedness, but I not answer him. He discharge me, but I not say one word. My mother she will die now, she will surely die; and grandmother she will have to go out begging once again.

'I come home and I tell them I am discharged. I not tell them why, for they very good and stealing is a sin. They be so shocked and sorry. I sit beside my mother, despair in my heart, and I watch her dying, dying, dying.

'Her pain is all over now; she leave me last night and she never come back again. I watch with her in there when you come. I watch with her when you go; then I must tell that she is gone, that she is dead, and they come and take her away,' and she threw herself on the floor by the door of her mother's room in a perfect agony of grief.

In a moment the kind-hearted woman was on her knees beside the heart-broken girl, whom she gathered into her motherly arms, murmuring words of comfort all the while. Gradually the dreadful sobbing subsided, and after a time the girl was once more standing before that door she so jealously guarded. Seeing that she was her own calm self again, the forewoman said gently:

'My poor child, again I say that I wish you had told me a week ago. So much suffering would have been saved. However, this is no time for vain regrets; it is the time for action. I must leave you at once, Julie, but I will be back, and will, I hope, bring you good news. In the meantime do you say nothing to anyone about your mother. You will believe that I will help you? You will do as I say?'

'You very good,' replied Julie simply, laying her hand in that of the forewoman; 'when you want me you find me there,' and she pointed to the door behind which her mother's silent form was resting.

Two days later the forewoman, seated at her desk, was covertly watching an excited group of girls on the other side of the room who were discussing some matter of evident importance. Without doubt, something was wrong. The forewoman rather surmised what the trouble was, and smiled behind the shelter of a newspaper. She knew these girls, and was quite sure that the difficulty, whatever it was, would be brought to her for settlement. As she had said to Julie, she loved her girls, and they in turn loved and trusted her.

In this instance she had not long to wait. Presently the girls cast aside napkins and lunch boxes and moved toward the corner of the room where their forewoman was waiting. She watched their approach in smiling silence. Slightly in advance of the others came a small, impetuous figure, a painfully thin, cross-eyed girl of fifteen, whose abundant crop of freckles had earned for her the sobriquet of 'Speckles.' She had answered to that name for so long now that she had almost forgotten she ever owned any other. She was a general favorite in spite of her rather sharp little tongue. Rushing up to the forewoman's desk, she said excitedly:

'Miss Merton, it can't be true that you are going to let that horrid Julie Benoit come back again. You surely wouldn't take her back, would you, Miss Merton?'

'Yes, it is perfectly true,' replied the forewoman calmly. Julie will return to us next Monday, and I hope all my girls will do everything they can to make her feel that we are glad to have her back.'

'But we're not glad,' cried one girl.

'Why, it's impossible after what she did,' added another.

During the outburst the forewoman sat watching the indignant faces before her. Then she said very gravely:

'Girls, I think we all misjudged Julie, and really almost owe her an apology. I have asked her pardon, and though I do not expect you to receive her back with kindness—'

'Misjudged her! Apology!' gasped 'Speckles.' 'She took that money, didn't she?'

'Yes.'

'And a person who takes money that belongs to someone else is a thief, isn't she?'

'Yes, certainly.'

'Well, then, I say a thief is a thief, and I don't see where any misjudging comes in,' and 'Speckles' looked defiantly from one to another.

A tall blonde, whose thoughtful grey eyes had been studying the forewoman's face, laid her hand on the excited girl's arm, remarking gently:

'Let's not judge too hastily, "Speckles," dear. I think Miss Merton has something to tell us. For my part I used to pity Julie, she seemed so sickly and so terribly alone. She was with us, but she was not one of us.'

'You are right, Louise, I have a little story to tell you—the story of Julie Benoit,' and she told them Julie's story as she had heard it from Julie herself. In conclusion, she added: 'When I left that poor child beside her dead mother, I went at once to the superintendent and told him the whole story. You girls know how kind he is; more than one of you have had personal experience of his charity. He called in his wife, and together they planned to bury Julie's mother as a Catholic should be buried, they to stand all the expense.'

'I wish you could have seen her face when I went back to those two dreadful rooms in the alley where she lives and told her what the superintendent and his wife had said.

'It was a very different Julie that I left that night; oh! very different from the girl who met me with such