

A poverty-stricken room it was, illuminated only by the dull light which penetrated through a window high up in one corner of the wall. It enabled Margaret, however, to distinguish a figure stretched on a rude bed in the centre of the floor.

The young girl caught her breath quickly; it was her first sight of Death; but even her inexperienced eye saw that the Dread Visitant would not long delay his coming. The face was emaciated beyond conception, the eyes deep-sunken, while the breath came in gasps from between the parted lips.

'This is Mrs. Gregson, is it not?' Margaret asked gently. 'I heard through Dr. Farrington that you were alone to-day, and came to see if you would not let me stay with you. May I?'

'Who are you?' asked the woman, gazing with mingled wonder and awe into the sweet face above her. 'Of course you may stay, and I will be—so grateful. Somehow, I have been so frightened—it was so lonely, and I seemed to see—my whole life—'

She ended with a sigh.

'My name is Margaret Clifton,' the girl answered; 'and I am so glad you will let me stay. No wonder you were frightened; it is dreary by one's self, but I am going to bring this chair to the bedside—' suiting the action to the word—'and you must promise me to get some rest.'

Margaret started with an instinctive shudder. The woman observed it, and smiled a little bitterly:

'You think it impossible that anyone could doubt—God, do you not? Are you a Catholic?'

'Yes.'

'So am I—or, rather, so was I,' the woman continued feebly. 'No, it will not hurt me to talk,' she added, as Margaret attempted to speak. 'I cannot live much longer, and my sleep has strengthened me.' Then, after a pause, 'I was once—a Catholic,' she repeated; 'listen:

'I married when I was twenty years old, and went to live with my husband on his farm in Maine. We had a comfortable home, and two children—a boy and a girl. Ten years after my marriage they died, within a week of each other, and that only started my troubles. My husband was never the same—afterwards; he couldn't bear the house without the children, and so he spent his evenings—at the tavern, until he gambled and drank away every cent we had, farm and all, and we had to give up—our home. That brought him to his senses. He reformed, and we raised enough money—to take us out west. He got a position as overseer on a sheep ranch, but one month later—he was brought home to me dead—killed instantly by the fall of a huge derrick. Then I decided that God—had forgotten me, and I made up my mind—to forget—Him. That was eight years ago, and I have never been—inside a church—since.'



NGAPORO, WANGANUI RIVER.

Talking cheerfully, Margaret moved about the room, the woman's eyes following her gratefully.

A few moments later the girl came back to the bedside. 'Drink this,' she said, holding a glass to the dying woman's lips. 'Do, dear,' she urged, 'it will do you so much good,' and, with a visible effort, the woman swallowed the stimulant.

'Thank you,' she said; 'it has made me better already; I think I can sleep now'; and, the words still on her lips, Martha Gregson closed her eyes exhaustedly.

Three hours passed away. The woman still lay in a sort of a stupor, and Margaret kept her post at the bedside, her thoughts centred on the figure before her. The woman was evidently superior to her surroundings; what was her life-story? Had she been baptised? Could she possibly be a Catholic? Margaret could only speculate. The room grew gradually darker; the snow had ceased falling, but lay banked high upon the narrow window ledge, sending its chilled breath through the apertures into the silent room. Slowly the cold penetrated the heavy wraps the young girl wore, and, shivering, she rose and quietly lit a candle. As she again resumed her watch, however, she found that her patient had aroused, and was gazing at her fixedly. She smiled faintly when Margaret bent over the bedside.

'You have been so good to me,' she said feebly; 'you have made me believe in God—and man, again.'

Margaret sat in silence. The words were not eloquent—the poor woman had given but the merest details; but the dimly lighted room, the poverty of the surroundings, the long pauses when the dying woman gasped for breath—all lent the story a realistic force the more appealing because so indefinable. Margaret's heart beat in unison with the unhappy woman's before her, and, in that moment, she learned the great lesson of charity—to make allowances for the sins of others.

Margaret leaned forward. 'But you are sorry!' she exclaimed impulsively.

'Sorry? Yes? It has haunted me—day and night. But it is of no use—when I had my chance, I rejected it; and it is too late now.'

'Don't say that!' Margaret cried. 'The thief asked forgiveness on the cross, don't you remember?' and for a few minutes the young girl spoke words of consolation and hope. 'And now you will see a priest?' she finished eagerly.

'Oh, if I could!' was the whispered reply; 'then I would feel that God has forgiven me—but I will be dead—before one can be gotten.'

Margaret thought anxiously for a few minutes. 'Is the church very far away?' she asked finally.

'About—three squares,' came the answer faintly. Margaret saw the increasing pallor of the face on the pillow, and it decided her. It was the case of a soul's salvation.