

world. The owner of the admired hose took her honors humbly. 'Grattan bought them for me to wear at the Bishop's reception to-night, but Muriel Murphy said 'she guessed they were only mercerized,' so I wore them to let you all see.' She was busy placing a spray of flowers in the hands of the statue, and then the dreadful thing happened. There was a sharp scraping as Annie's foot slipped, and a sudden cry of horror as a great piece of Annie Egan's right stocking remained clinging to one of the sharp points of the rockery.

Maggie Ryan turned accusingly on Polly O'Reilly. 'I'd like to know,' she said scornfully, 'where the ripple caused by that hole is going to end?'

Annie's mouth trembled. Such a short-lived glory! How was she to tell the little Mother, and Grattan. A dozen voices cooed consolation. A dozen hands were outstretched to caress her. Blindly she made her way through them, and soberly took her way down the path that zig-zagged in the most unaccountable fashion. At length, gaining the shelter of the convent wall, she ran, a quivering, sobbing fragment of humanity. Down the trellised walk she sped, and the glory of the spring sunshine and the fragrance of the budding earth held no joy for her. At length she reached her own corner of the wilderness and flung herself face downwards on the grass; and the old apple tree, whose sap still quickened into bloom beneath the warming sun, but whose boughs would never again blush with the rosy fruit, sighed with her, and sighing shed its petals on the brown curly head, and presently, lulled by the tender breeze that whispered through the grasses, Annie Egan fell asleep.

An hour later she woke suddenly to find Rev. Mother and the Bishop looking down at her. Forgetful of her troubles, Annie sprang to her feet, then remembering, flopped back to earth.

'Annie!—Rev. Mother's voice was surprised, horrified—'aren't you going to ask his Lordship's blessing?'

Annie's reply was a look of dumb misery. How silent the earth had grown—not even a grasshopper chirped. Annie swallowed the lump in her throat, and the noise sounded to her 'like the cannon must have sounded to the Six Hundred.' (She described it all afterwards to Polly O'Reilly.) She looked from one to the other desperately, then, driven to bay—'I've torn my stocking, my silk stocking, and if I stand up, Mother, his Lordship will see.'

The Bishop's grey eyes twinkled, but his ears were quick to catch the note of sorrow, and he sat down on the grass by Annie Egan. Bit by bit the story was unfolded. How Grattan had bought the stockings with the money he had earned by working overtime; how her mother had embroidered them; how Muriel Murphy had said she 'guessed they'd only be mercerized,' and how Annie Egan had in her pride worn them to confound Muriel Murphy, and how her pride had been her downfall.

Her listener suddenly thought of the little sister whose grave he had not long since visited in far-away Ireland—the grave that was forever green in his memory. He rose slowly. 'Rev. Mother,' he said, 'I have just twenty minutes to spare, and if you will allow me, I'll take Annie for a spin in my new car.'

'Come along, Annie'—he turned to the child—'I'll walk in front of you down the path, and when we get to the gate I'll promise to shut my eyes tight.'

Annie glowed at him. 'You're just a saint?' she breathed.

Rev. Mother had known and played with the little sister in that long, long ago, and her heart was big with understanding. 'You pair off children!' she laughed gently.

From the instant the doors of Jonathan Wardern and Son's Colossal Stores had opened that morning, there had been a constant stream of spring shoppers through its departments. Smiling shopwalkers directed the ladies to the different counters, where smiling shop-girls ministered to their needs. If the smiles were as artificial as the arches of cherry blossom and wistaria—

well, your bargain-hunter hasn't a discerning eye for the quality of smiles.

'The decorations look so real, one almost expects to see the blue sky above. After all, there is nothing quite like the spring sunshine, is there?' gushed one lady to the girl who was serving her with silk stockings; and the girl, who had commenced work at eight o'clock that morning and had had twenty minutes for lunch in the tea rooms on the premises, smilingly agreed. Then as the customer departed and Kitty Howard was placing the stockings back in their folders, a great bitterness swept over her. The warm spring sunshine, and the joy of life! She looked at the tired, dispirited girls around her. 'Our birthright has been stolen from us,' she thought grimly, 'and even the mess of pottage has run short.' She would take the way of escape that offered. She was weary to death of the awful drabness of her days—the weary round of work for a mere existence. If she had had proper care when she was ill her voice would not have deserted her. She thought bitterly of all the money she had wasted on its cultivation, of those years on the Continent that only made her present life the harder by contrast. She had thought to climb to the stars, and behold, she was an underpaid, overworked assistant in a department store. Suddenly she shook with longing for the greenness of the park, her park. The trees would be beautiful just now. She remembered how beautiful they had looked from her sitting-room window in the spring of last year when she had returned to the city with seventy pounds and a determination to become an opera singer. She had sung little songs to them. She remembered the young man—to whom she had been briefly introduced after Mass one Sunday at the Cathedral—who used to pass on the other side of the street every morning, on his way to business, and how one day, feeling sorry for him, she had sung a little song brimful of the gladness of youth and life; and her voice had carried her message to him. Through the open window it had floated, soaring through the blue and gold of the morning, stilling the trees opposite to a tremulous silence, and surprising a lark high above into a yet more wonderful outburst of melody. How glad their street had sounded. A few minutes later, going to her window, she had discovered the young man standing opposite. As she appeared he raised his hat, smiled his thanks, and went his way. Every morning, as she practised, he passed that way, and every morning she interrupted her exercises to sing some song for him. Each morning she went to the window, feeling like some gracious prima donna, and each morning he smiled his thanks and went his way. Down into the city her imagination followed him into some dreadful block of buildings where he, no doubt, was busy all day long adding up columns and columns of figures. She who was going to be so wonderful pitied him, and in the largeness of her heart had poured out her gift to make his lot less sad.

Then had come the illness, and her voice had left her. She moved to a back street and sold her piano. Then she started to look for employment. Places had not been hard to get. At the time she had marvelled that so little experience was needed for the different positions. After a while she wondered less, and as she was forced to leave place after place the horror that was worse than poor food and shabby clothes ate into her soul. For three months now she had worked at Wardern's, and until the advent of the Hon. Jimmy Farnival a fortnight ago she had felt safe. The Hon. Jimmy was a young old man, slack of mouth, and offensively familiar of eye. He was the largest shareholder in the firm; he directed its management—he was, in short, Wardern and Sons. He had become aware of her one day when she had been borrowed from her own department, by the head of the showroom, to act as hat model. In a square of yellow sunlight she had stood—a slender pink and gold beauty—trying on river hats for the approval of the Hon. Mrs. Jimmy, whose eyes looked, Kitty thought, 'as if they had been through a refrigerator.' The Honorable saw, admired, desired her. He had the feeling of turning a corner in a windy garden expecting nothing but cold, un-

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