



Me

A Book of Remembrance

(Begun in April)

IX

NEXT morning 'Mandy went back with me to my room. There was no one in it. For a moment the thought came to me that perhaps I had suffered from a nightmare. My clothes, everything, I found exactly as I had left them. I went over to the door opening from my room into the laboratory, and then I knew that I had not erred: the door was unlocked. I saw 'Mandy watching me, and I think she guessed the truth, for she said: "You need n't be 'fraid no more, chile. I goin' to sleep with you every night now."

"No, 'Mandy," I said; "I can't stay here now. I've got to get away somehow."

"Dat 's all right, chile," she said. "Jus' you tek you li'l' bag and slip out right now. No one 's stirring in dis house yet. You won't be missed till after you sure am gone."

I was sitting on the side of the bed, feverishly turning the matter over in my mind.

"I wish I could do that," I said, "but I have no place to go, and I have no money."

'Mandy comforted me as best she could, and told me to wait till after breakfast, when I'd feel better; then I could talk to the doctor about it, and perhaps he'd give me some money; and if he would n't, said the colored girl, shrewdly, "you tell him you goin' ask his wife."

I felt I could not do that. I would have to find some other solution. One thing was certain, however, I could no more stay here than I could in Jamaica.

There are times in my life when I have been whipped and scorched, and nothing has healed me save to get away quickly from the place where I have suffered. I felt like that in Jamaica. I felt like that now. There came another time in my life when I uprooted my whole being from a place I loved, and yet where it would have killed me to remain.

The doctor met me in the lower hall as I came down-stairs. His manner was affable and formal, and he said he would take me to his wife. I found myself unable to look him in the face, for I felt his glance would be hateful.

Mrs. Manning was in bed, propped up with pillows. At first glance she seemed an old woman. Her pale, parched face lay like a shadow among her pillows, and her fine, silvery hair was like an exquisite aureole. She had dark, restless, seeking eyes, and her expression was peevish, like that of a complaining child. As I came in, she raised herself to her elbow, and looked curiously at me and then at the doctor, who said:

"This is Miss Ascough, dear. She is to be my new secretary."

She put out a thin little hand, which I took impetuously in my own, and, I know not why, I suddenly wanted to cry again. There was something in her glance that hurt me. I had for her that same overwhelming pity that I had felt for Miss Foster in Jamaica—a pity such as one involuntarily feels toward one who is doomed. She murmured something, and I said, "Thank you," though I did not understand what she had said. Then the

doctor shook up her pillows and settled her back very carefully among them, and he kissed her, and she clung to him. I realized that, incredible as it seemed, here where I had expected it least there was love.

After breakfast, which I had with the doctor, who read the morning paper throughout the meal, waited on by 'Mandy, he took me down to his offices, two large adjoining rooms on the ground floor, in one wing of the house. One room was used as a reception-room, the other as the doctor's own. Showing me through the offices, he had indicated the desk at which I was to sit in the reception-room before I summoned the courage to tell him I had decided to go. When I faltered this out, he turned clear around, and although an exclamation of astonishment escaped him, I knew that he was acting. I felt sure that he had been waiting for me to say something about the previous night.

"You certainly cannot realize what you are saying, Miss Ascough. Why should you leave a position before trying it?"

I looked steadily in his face now, and I was no longer afraid of him. I was only an ignorant girl of seventeen, and he was a man of the world past forty. I was friendless, had no money, and was in a strange country. He was a man of power, and, I suppose, even wealth. This was the city where he was respected and known. Nevertheless, I said to him:

"If I work for a man, I expect to be paid for my actual labor. That's a contract between us. After that, I have my personal rights, and no man can step over these without my consent."

They were pretty big words for a young girl, and I am proud of them even now. I can see myself as I faced that man defiantly, though I knew I had barely enough money in my purse upstairs to buy a few meals.

"I do not understand you," said the doctor, pulling at his beard. "I shall be obliged if you will make yourself clearer."

"I will, then," I said. "Last night you came into my room."

For a long time he did not say a word, but appeared to be considering the matter.

"I beg your pardon for that," he said at last, "but I think my explanation will satisfy you. I did not know that that room was the one my wife had assigned to you. I had been accustomed to occupy it myself when engaged at night upon laboratory work. I was as mortified as you when I discovered my unfortunate mistake last night, and I very much regret the distress it gave you."

No explanation could have been clearer than that, but looking at the man, I felt a deep-rooted conviction that he lied.

"Come now," he said cheerfully, "suppose we dismiss this painful subject. Let us both forget it." He held out his hand, with one of his "fatherly" smiles. I reluctantly let him take mine, and I did not know what to do or say. He took out his watch and looked at it.

"I have a number of calls to make before my noon hour," he said, "but I think I can spare an hour to explain your duties to you."

They were simple enough, and in other circumstances I should have liked such a position. I was to receive the patients, send out bills, and answer the correspondence, which was light. I had one other duty, and that he asked me to do now. There was something wrong with his eyes, and it was a strain upon them for him to read. So, part of my work was to read to him an hour in the morning and one or two in the evening.

There was a long couch in the inner office, and after he had selected a book and brought it to me, he lay down on the couch, with a green shade over his eyes, and bade me proceed. The book was Rousseau's "Confessions."

In ordinary circumstances the book would have held my interest at once, but now I read it without the slightest sense of understanding, and the powerful sentences came forth from my lips, but passed through heedless ears. I had read only two chapters when he said that that would do for to-day. He asked me to bring from the top of his desk a glass in

which was some fluid and an eye-dropper. He requested me to put two drops in each of his eyes.

As he was lying on his back on the couch, I had to lean over him to do this. I was so nervous that the glass shook in my hand. Judge of my horror when, in squeezing the little rubber bulb, the glass part fell off and dropped down upon his face.

I burst out crying, and before I knew it, he was sitting up on the couch and comforting me, with his arms about my waist. I freed myself and stood up. He said:

"There, there, you are a bit hysterical this morning. You 'll feel better later."

He began moving about the office, collecting some things, and putting them into a little black bag. Toby knocked, and called that the buggy was ready. As the doctor was drawing on his gloves he said:

"Now, Miss Ascough, suppose you make an effort to—er accustom yourself to things as they are here. I 'm really not such a bad sort as you imagine, and I will try to make you very comfortable and happy if you will let me."

I did not answer him. I sat there twisting my handkerchief in my hands, and feeling dully that I was truly the most miserable girl in the world. As the doctor was going out, he said:

"Do cheer up! Things are not nearly as bad as they seem."

Maybe they were not, but, nevertheless, the stubborn obsession persisted in my mind that I must somehow get away from that place. How I was going to do that without money or friends, I did not know. And if I did leave this place, where could I go?

I thought of writing home, and then, even in my distress, I thought of papa, absent-minded, impractical dreamer. Could I make him understand the situation I was in without telling him my actual experience? I felt a reluctance to tell my father or mother that. It 's a fact that a young girl will often talk with strangers about things that she will hesi-

tate to confide to her own parents. My parents were of the sort difficult to approach in such a matter. You see, I was one of many, and my father and mother were in a way even more helpless than their children. It was almost pathetic the way in which they looked to us, as we grew up, to take care of ourselves and them. Besides, it would take two days for a letter to reach my home, and another two days for the reply to reach me, and where could my poor father raise the money for my fare? No, I would not add to their distresses.

I went up to my room, after the doctor was gone, and I aimlessly counted my money. I had less than three dollars. I was putting it back into my bag, with the papers, trinkets, cards, and the other queer things that congregate in a girl's pocket-book, when Mr. Hamilton's card turned up on my lap.

I began to think of him. I sat there on the side of my bed in a sort of dreaming trance, recalling to my mind that charmed little journey in the company of this man. Every word he had said to me, the musing expression of his face, and his curious, grudging smile—I thought of all this. It was queer how in the midst of my trouble I could occupy my mind like this with thoughts of a stranger. I remembered that Dr. Manning had said he was a notorious man. I did not believe that. I thought of that kindly look of interest in his tired face when he had asked me if I wanted to go to school, and then electrically recurred to me his last words on the train when he had given to me his card,—that if I ever needed help, would I come to him?

I needed help now. I needed it more than any girl ever needed it before. Of that I felt truly convinced. This doctor was a villain. There was something bad and covetous about his very glance. I had felt that in Jamaica. It was impossible for me to remain alone with him in his house; for I should be virtually alone, since his wife was a paralytic.

Hurriedly I packed my things, shoving everything back into my suitcase, and then

I put on my hat. In the doctor's office I found the telephone-book. I looked up the name of Hamilton. Yes, it was there. It seemed to me a miraculous thing that he really was there in that telephone-book and that he actually was in this city.

I called the number, and somebody, answering, asked whom I wished to speak to, and I said Mr. Roger Avery Hamilton.

"Who is it wants him?" I was asked.

"Just a friend," I replied.

"You will have to give your name. Mr. Hamilton is in a conference, and if it is not important, he cannot speak to you just now."

"It is important," I said. "He would want to speak to me, I know."

There was a long pause, and central asked me if I was through, and I said frantically:

"No, no; don't ring off."

Then a moment later I heard his voice, and even over the telephone it thrilled me so that I could have wept with relief and joy.

"Yes?"

"Mr. Hamilton, this is Miss Ascough."

"Miss Ascough?"

"Yes; I met you on the train coming from Boston."

"Oh, yes, the little girl with the dog," he said.

His voice, more than his words, warmed me with the thought that he had not forgotten me, and was even pleased to hear from me again.

"You said if I ever needed help—"

I broke off there, and he said slowly:

"I—see. Where are you?"

I told him.

"Can you leave there right away?"

I said I could, but that I did not know my way about the city.

He asked me to meet him in half an hour at the St. R—— Hotel, and directed me explicitly what car to take to get there, telling me to write it down. I was to have 'Mandy put me on this car, and I must be sure to tell the conductor to let me off at this hotel. The car stopped in front of it.

I wrote a note to Dr. Manning before going. I said I was sorry to leave in this way, but despite what he had said, I could not trust him. I added that I was so unhappy I had decided the best thing for me to do was to go at once. I left the note with 'Mandy, whom I kissed good-by, something I had never dreamed I could do, kiss a black girl! All the way on the car I was desperately afraid the conductor would not let me off at the right place, and I asked him so often that finally, in exasperation, he refused to answer me. When we at last reached there, he wrathfully shouted the name of the hotel into the car, though he did not need to cry, "Step lively!"



X

MR. HAMILTON was waiting for me outside the hotel. He gave my bag to a boy, who produced it later, and then took me to a corner of the drawing-room. Almost at once he said:

"I expected to hear from you, but not so soon."

"You were expecting?" I said. "Why?"

"Well," he said rather reluctantly, "I had a hunch you would not stay there long. Just what happened?"

I told him.

He kept tapping with his fingers on the table beside him and looking at me curiously. When I was through, he said:

"Well, we 're a pretty bad lot, are n't we?"

I said earnestly:

"You 're not!" which remark made him laugh in a rather mirthless sort of way, and he said:

"You don't know me, my child." Then, as if to change the subject: "But now, what do you want to do? Where do you want to go?"

"I 'd like to go to some big city in America," I said. "I think, if I got a chance, I'd succeed as a poet or author."

"Oh, that 's your idea, is it?" he asked half good-humoredly, half rather cynically. I nodded.

"Well, what big city have you decided upon?"

"I don't know. You see, I know very little about the States."

"How about New York or Chicago?"

"Which is the nearest to you?" I asked timidly.

He laughed outright at that.

"Oh, so you expect to see *me*, do you?"

"I *want* to," I said. "You *will* come to see me, won't you?"

"We 'll see about it," he said slowly.

"Then it 's Chicago? I have interests there." I nodded.

"And now," he went on, "how much money do you need?"

That question hurt me more than I suppose he would believe. Certainly I would have to have money to go to Chicago, but I hated to think of taking any from him. I felt like a beggar. Young, poor, ignorant as I was, even then I had an acute feeling of reluctance to permit any sordid considerations to come between this man and me. I was so long in answering him that he said lightly:

"Well how many thousands or millions of shekels do you suppose it will take to support a little poetess in Chicago?"

I said:

"You don't have to support poetesses if they are the right sort. All I want is enough money to carry me to Chicago. I 'll get work of some kind then."

"Well, let 's see," he said. "I 'll get you your ticket, and then you 'd better have, say, a hundred dollars to start with."

"No! no!" I cried out. "I could n't use a whole hundred dollars."

"What?"

"I never had that much money in my life," I said. "I should n't know what to do with it."

He laughed shortly.

"You 'll know all right," he said, "soon after you get to Chicago." Then he added almost bitterly, "You 'll be writing to me for more within a week."

"Oh, Mr. Hamilton, I won't do that! I 'll never take any more from you—honestly I won't."

"Nonsense!" he returned lightly. "And now come along. You have time for a bite of luncheon before your train leaves."

He ordered very carefully a meal for us, and took some time to decide whether I should have something to drink or not. He kept tapping the pencil on the waiter's pad and looking at me speculatively, and at last he said:

"No, I guess not this time."

So I got nothing to drink.

It was a fine luncheon, and for the first time I had soft-shell crabs; also for the first time I tasted, and liked, olives. Mr. Hamilton seemed to take a grim sort of pleasure in watching me eat. I don't know why, I 'm sure, unless it was because I frankly did not know what most of the dishes were, and I was helplessly ignorant as to which was the right fork or knife to use for this or that dish. I think I ate my salad with my oyster-fork, and I am sure I used my meat-knife for my butter. All these intricate things have always bothered me, and they do still.

I suppose my eyes were still considerably swollen from the crying I had done, and, besides, I had slept very little after that awakening. Mr. Hamilton made me tell him all over again, and in minute detail, just what happened, and when I told him how I cried the rest of the night in 'Mandy's arms, he said:

"Yes, I can see you did," which made me say quickly, I was so anxious to look my best before him:

"I look a fright, I know."

Whereupon he slowly looked at me and said, with a suggestion of a smile:

"You look pretty good to me," and that compensated for everything.

He gave me the hundred dollars while we were in the dining-room, and advised me, with a slight smile, to hide it in "the usual place."

I asked innocently where that was.

"No one told you *that* yet?" he asked teasingly, and when I shook my head, he laughed and said:

"What a baby you are! Why, put it in your stocking, child."

I turned fiery red, not so much from modesty, but from mortification at my ignorance and his being forced to tell me. What is more, I *had* kept money there before, and I remember the girl on the boat going to Jamaica had, too; but I did not suppose men knew girls did such things.

On the way to the station, as he sat beside me in the carriage, I tried to thank him, and told him how much I appreciated what he was doing for me. I said that I supposed he had done good things like this for lots of other unfortunate girls like me (oh, I hoped that he had not!), and that I never could forget it.

He said lightly:

"Oh, yes you will. They all do, you know."

From this I inferred that there were "other girls," and that depressed me so that I was tongue-tied for the rest of the journey.

We found, despite the hotel's telephoning, that it was impossible for me to get a lower berth. I am sure I did n't care whether I had a lower or upper. So, as he said he wanted me to have a comfortable journey, he had taken the little drawing-room for me. I did n't know what that meant till I got on the train. Then I saw I was virtually to have a little car all to myself. The grandeur of this rather oppressed me; I do not know why. Nevertheless, it was an added proof of his kindness, and I stammered my thanks. He had come on the train with me, and was sitting in the seat opposite me, just as if he, too, were going. The nearer it approached the time for the train to leave, the sadder I felt. Perhaps, I thought, I should never see him again. Perhaps he looked upon me simply as a poor little beggar whom he had befriended.

It may be that some of my reflections were mirrored on my face, for he suddenly asked me what I was thinking about, and I told him.

"Nonsense!" he said. He had a way of dismissing things with "Nonsense!"

He got up and walked up and down the little aisle a moment, pulling at his lower lip in a way he had, and watching me all the time. I was huddled up on the seat, not exactly crying, but almost. Presently he said:

"Just as if it mattered whether you ever saw me again or not. After you've been in Chicago awhile, you'll only think of me, perhaps, as a convenient old chap—a sort of bank to whom you can always apply for—" he paused before saying the word, and then brought it out hard—"money."

"Please don't think that of me!" I cried.

"I don't think it of you in particular, but of every one," he said. "Women are all alike. For that matter, men, too. Money is their god—money, *dirty* money! That's what men, and women, exist for. They marry for money. They live for it. Good God! they die for it! You can have a man's wife or anything else, but touch his money, his dirty money—" He threw out his hands expressively. He had been talking disjointedly, and as if the subject was one that fascinated him, and yet that he hated. "You see," he said, "I know what I am talking about, because that's about all any one has ever wanted of me—my money."

I made a little sound of protest. I was not crying, badly as I felt, but my face was burning, and I felt inexpressibly about that money of his that I, too, had taken. He went on in the jerking, bitter way he had been speaking:

"Just now you think that such things do not count. That's because you are so young. You'll change quickly enough; I predict that. I can read your fate in your young face. You love pretty things, and were made to have them. Why not? Some one is going to give them to you, just as Dr. Manning—and, for that matter, I myself—would have given them to you here in Richmond. I don't doubt in Chicago there will be many men who will jump at the chance."

He made a queer, shrugging gesture with his shoulders, and then swung

around, looked at me hard, and as if almost he measured me. Then his face slightly softened, and he said:

"Don't look so cut up. I'm only judging you by the rest of your sex."

I said:

"I'm going to prove to you that I'm different. You will see."

He sat down opposite me again, and took one of my hands in his.

"How will you prove it, child?" he said.

"I'll never take another cent from you," I said, "and I'll give you back every dollar of this hundred you have lent me now."

"Nonsense!" he said, and flushed, as if he regretted what he had been saying.

"Anyway," I went on, "you're mistaken about me. I don't care so much about those things—pretty clothes and things like that. I like lots of other things better. *You*, for instance. I—I—like *you* better than all the money in the world."

"Nonsense!" he said again.

He still had my hand in his, and he had turned it over, and was looking at it. Presently he said:

"It's a sweet, pretty little hand, but it badly needs to be manicured."

"What's that?" I asked, and he laughed and set my hands back in my lap.

"Now I must be off. Send me your address as soon as you have one. Think of me a little, if you can."

Think of him! I knew that I was destined to think of nothing else. I told him so in a whisper, so that he had to bend down to hear me, but he merely laughed—that short unbelieving, reluctant laugh, and said again twice:

"Good-by, good-by."

I followed him as far as the door, and when he turned his back toward me, and I thought he could not see me, I kissed his sleeve; but he did see me,—in the long mirror on the door, I suppose,—and he jerked his arm roughly back and said brusquely:

"You must n't do things like that!"

Then he went out, and the door shut hard between us.

I said to myself:

"I will die of starvation, I will sleep homeless in the streets, I will walk a thousand miles, if need be, in search of work, rather than take money from him again. Some one has hurt him through his money, and he believes we are all alike; but I will prove to him that I indeed am different."

A sense of appalling loneliness swept me. If only a single person might have been there with me in my little car! If I had but the smallest companion! All of a sudden I remembered my little dog. My immediate impulse was to get directly off the train, and I rushed over to the door, and out upon the platform. He was down below, looking up at the window of my compartment; but he saw me as I came out on the platform and started to descend. At the same moment the train gave that first sort of shake which precedes the starting, and I was thrown back against the door. He called to me:

"Take care! Go back inside!"

The train was now moving, and I was holding to the iron bar.

"Oh, Mr. Hamilton," I cried, "I've forgotten Verley! I've forgotten my little dog!"

He kept walking by the train, and now, as its speed increased, he was forced to run. He put his hand to his mouth and called to me:

"I'll *bring* him to you, little girl. Don't you worry!"

Worry!

I went back to my seat, and all that afternoon I did not move. The shining country slipped by me, but I saw it not. I was like one plunged in a deep, golden dream. There was a pain in my heart, but it was an ecstatic one, and even as I cried softly, soundlessly, something within me sang a song that seemed immortal.



XI

I SAW Chicago first through a late May rain—a mad, blowing, windy rain. The skies were overcast and gray. There was a pall like smoke over everything, and

through the downpour, looking not fresh and clean from the descending streams, but dingy and sullen, as if unwillingly cleansed, the gigantic buildings shot up forbiddingly into the sky.

Such masses of humanity! I was one of a sweeping torrent of many, many atoms. People hurried this way and that way and every way. I rubbed my eyes, for the colossal city and this rushing, crushing mob, that pushed and elbowed, bewildered and amazed me.

I did not know what to do when I stepped off the train and into the great station. For a time I wandered aimlessly about the room, jostled and pushed by a tremendous crowd of people, who seemed to be pouring in from arriving trains. It must have been about eight in the morning.

All the seats in the waiting-room were taken, and after a while I sat down on my suitcase, and tried to plan out just what I should do.

I had a hundred dollars, a fabulous sum, it seemed to me. With it I presumed I could live wherever I chose, and in comparative luxury. But that hundred dollars was not mine, and I had a passionate determination to spend no more of it than I should actually need. I wanted to return it intact to the man who had given it to me.

As I had lain in my berth on the train I had vowed that he should not hear from me till I wrote to return his money. "Dirty money," he had called it, but to me anything that was his was beautiful. I planned the sort of letter I should write when I inclosed this money. By that time I should have secured a remarkable position. My stories and my poems would be bought by discerning editors, and I—ah me! the extravagant dreams of the youthful writer! What is there he is not going to accomplish in the world? What heights he will scale! But, then, what comfort, what sublime compensation for all the miserable realities of life, there is in being capable of such dreams! That alone is a divine gift of the gods, it seems to me.

But now I was no longer dreaming impossible dreams in my berth. I was sitting in that crowded Chicago railway station, and I was fronted with the problem of what to do and where to go.

It would of course be necessary for me to get a room the first thing; but I did not know just where I should look for that. I thought of going out into the street and looking for "furnished-room" signs, and then I thought of asking a policeman. I was debating the matter rather stupidly, I'm afraid, for the crowds distracted me, when a woman came up and spoke to me.

She had a plain, kind face and wore glasses. A large red badge, with gilt letters on it, was pinned on her breast.

"Are you waiting for some one?" she asked.

"No," I answered.

"A stranger?" was her next question.

"Yes."

"Just come to Chicago?"

"Yes. I just arrived."

"Ah, you have friends or relatives here?"

I told her I did not know any one in Chicago. What was I doing here, then, she asked me, and I replied that I expected to work. She asked at what, and I replied:

"As a journalist."

That brought a rather surprised smile. Then she wanted to know if I had arranged for a room somewhere, and I told her that that was just what I was sitting there thinking about—wondering where I ought to go.

"Well, I've just got you in time, then," she said, with a pleasant smile. "You come along with me. I'm an officer of the Young Women's Christian Association." She showed me her badge. "We'll take care of you there."

I went with her gladly, you may be sure. She led me out to the street and up to a large carriage, which had Y. W. C. A. in big letters on it. I was very fortunate.

Unlike New York's Y. W. C. A., which is in an ugly down-town street, Chicago's is on Michigan Avenue, one of

its finest streets, and is a splendid building.

I was taken to the secretary of the association, a well-dressed young woman with a bleak, hard face. She looked me over sternly, and the first thing she said was:

"Where are your references?"

I took Mr. Campbell's letter of recommendation from my pocket-book, and handed it to her:

It was as follows:

To Whom it may Concern:

The bearer of this, Miss Nora Ascough, has been on the staff of "The Lantern" for some time now, but unfortunately the tropical climate of Jamaica is not suited to her constitution. In the circumstances she has to leave a position for which her skill and competency eminently qualify her.

As a stenographer, amanuensis, and reporter I can give her the highest praise. She has for the entire session of the local legislature reported the proceedings with credit to herself and "The Lantern," notwithstanding she was a stranger to her surroundings, the people, and local politics. These are qualities that can find no better recommendation. I confidently recommend her to any one requiring a skilled amanuensis and reporter.

I was justifiably proud of that reference, which Mr. Campbell had unexpectedly thrust upon me the day I left Jamaica. I broke down when I read it, for I felt I did not deserve it. The secretary of the Y. W. C. A., however, said in her unpleasant nasal voice as she turned it over almost contemptuously in her hand:

"Oh, this won't do at all. It is n't even an American reference, and we require a reference as to your *character* from some minister or doctor."

Now, on the way to the association the lady who had brought me had told me that this place was self-supporting, that the girls must remember they were not objects of charity; but, on the contrary, they paid for everything they got, the idea of the association being to *make* no money from the girls, but simply to pay

expenses. In that way the girls were enabled to board there at about half the price of a boarding-house. In these circumstances I could not but inwardly resent the tone of this woman, and it seemed to me that these restrictions were unjust and preposterous. Of course I was not in a position to protest, so I turned to my friend who had brought me from the station.

"What shall I do?" I asked her.

"Can't you get a reference from your minister, dear?" she asked sympathetically. Why, yes, I thought I could. I'd write to Canon Evans, our old minister in Quebec. My friend leaned over the desk and whispered to the secretary, who appeared to be very busy, and irritated at being disturbed.

All public institutions, I here assert, should have as their employees only people who are courteous, pleasant, and kind. One of the greatest hardships of poverty is to be obliged to face the autocratic martinets who seem to guard the doorways of all such organizations. There is something detestable and offensive in the frozen, impatient, and often insulting manner of the women and men who occupy little positions of authority like this, and before whom poor working-girls—and, I suppose, men—must always go.

She looked up from her writing and snapped:

"You know our rules as well as I do, Miss Dutton."

"Well, but she says she can get a minister's reference in a few days," said my friend.

"Let her come here *then*," said the secretary as she blotted the page on which she was writing. How I hated her, the cat!

"But I want to get her settled right away," protested my friend.

How I loved her, the angel!

"Speak to Mrs. Dooley about it, then," snapped the secretary.

As it happened, Mrs. Dooley was close at hand. She was the matron or superintendent, and was a big splendid-looking woman, who moved ponderously, like a

steam-roller. She gave one look at me only and said loudly and belligerently:

"Sure. Let her in!"

The secretary shrugged then, and took my name and address in Quebec. Then she made out a bill, saying:

"It's five dollars in advance."

I was greatly embarrassed to be obliged to admit that my money was in my stocking. Mrs. Dooley laughed at that, my friend looked pained, and the secretary pierced me with an icy glare. She said:

"Nice girls don't keep their money in places like that."

It was on the tip of my tongue to retort that I was not "nice," but I bit my tongue instead. My friend gave me the opportunity to remove my "roll," and I really think it made some impression on these officers of the Y. W. C. A., for the secretary said:

"If you can afford it, you can have a room to yourself for six a week."

I said:

"No, I can't. This money is not mine."

The elevator "boy" was a girl—a black girl.

We went up and up and up. My heart was in my mouth, for I had never been in an elevator before. Never had I been in a tall building before. We did not have them in Quebec when I was there. We got off at the twelfth floor. Oh me! how that height thrilled me, and, I think, frightened me a little! On the way to the room, my friend—though I had learned her name, I always like to refer to her as "my friend." Ah, I wonder whether she is still looking for and picking up poor little homeless girls at railway stations—said:

"You know, dear, we have to be careful about references and such things. Otherwise all sorts of undesirable girls would get in here."

"Well," I said, "I don't see why a girl who has a reference from a minister is any more desirable than one who has not."

"No, perhaps not," she said; "but then, you see, we have to use some sort of way of judging. We do this to protect our

good girls. This is frankly a place for good girls, and we cannot admit girls who are not. By and by you'll appreciate that yourself. We'll be protecting you, don't you see?"

I did n't, but she was so sweet that I said I did.



XII

OH, such a splendid room! At least it seemed so to me, who had seen few fine rooms. It was so clean, even dainty. The walls and ceiling were pink calcimine, and some one had twisted pink tissue-paper over the electric lights. I did n't discover that till evening, and then I was delighted. No beautiful, costly lamps, with fascinating and ravishing shades, have ever moved me as my first taste of a shaded colored light in the Y. W. C. A. did.

Our home in Quebec had been bare of all these charming accessories, and although my father was an artist, poor fellow, I remember he used to paint in the kitchen, with us children all about him, because that was the only warm room in the house. In our poor home the rooms were primitive and bare. Papa used to say that bare rooms were more tolerable than rooms littered with "trash," and since we could not afford good things, it was better to have nothing in the place but things that had an actual utility. I think he was wrong. There are certain pretty little things that may be "trash," but they add to the attractiveness of a home.

Though papa was an artist, there were no pictures at all on our walls, as my older sisters used to take his paintings as fast as he made them, and go, like canvassers, from house to house and sell them for a few dollars. Yet my father, as a young man, had taken a gold medal at an exhibition at the Salon. Grand-papa, however, had insisted that no son

of his should follow the "beggarly profession of an artist," and papa was despatched to the far East, there to extend the trade of my grandfather, one of England's greatest merchant princes. When misfortune overtook my father later, and his own people turned against him, when the children began to arrive with startling rapidity, then my father turned to art as the means of securing for us a livelihood.

One of my sisters was known in Quebec as the "little lace girl." She sold from door to door the lace that she herself made. Marion followed in her steps with papa's paintings. Other sisters had left home, and some were married. I was the one who had to mind the children,—the little ones; they were still coming,—and I hated and abhorred the work. I remember once being punished in school because I wrote this in my school exercise:

This is my conception of hell: a place full of howling, roaring, fighting, shouting children and babies. It is supreme torture to a sensitive soul to live in such a Bedlam. Give me the bellowings of a madhouse in preference. At least there I should not have to dress and soothe and whip and chide and wipe the noses of the crazy ones.

Ah, I wish I could have some charming memories of a lovely home! That's a great deal to have. It is sad to think of those we love as in poor surroundings.

I suppose there are people in the world who would smile at the thought of a girl's ecstatic enthusiasm over a piece of pink paper on an electric light in a room in the Chicago Y. W. C. A. Perhaps I myself am now almost snob enough to laugh and mock at my own former ingenuousness. That room, nevertheless, seemed genuinely charming to me. There were two snow-white beds, an oak bureau, oak chairs, oak table, a bright rug on the floor, and simple white curtains at the window. At home I slept in a room with four of my little brothers and sisters. I hate to think of that room. As fast as I picked up the scattering clothes, others seemed to accumulate. *Why* do children soil clothes so quickly!

There was even a homy look about my room in the Y. W. C. A., for there were several good prints on the wall, photographs on the mantel and the bureau, a bright toilet set on the bureau, and a work-basket on the table. From these personal things I speculated upon the nature of my room-mate to be, and I decided she was "nice." One thing was certain, she was exceedingly neat, for all her articles were arranged with almost old-maid primness. I determined to be less careless with my own possessions.

After unpacking my things, and hiding my money,—right back in my stocking, despite what the secretary had said!—I went down-stairs again, as I had been told a large reading-room, parlor, reception-rooms, etc., were on the ground floor.

The night before I had planned a definite campaign for work. I intended to go the rounds of the newspaper offices. I would present to the editors first my card, which Mr. Campbell had had specially printed for me, with the name of our paper in the corner, show Mr. Campbell's reference, and then leave a number of my own stories and poems. After that, I felt sure, one or all of the editors of Chicago would be won over. You perceive I had an excellent opinion of my ability at this time. I wish I had it now. It was more a conviction then—a conviction that I was destined to do something worth while as a writer.

In the reading-room, where there were a score of other girls, I found not only paper, pencils, pens, but all the newspapers and journals. Nearly all the girls were looking at the papers, scanning the advertising columns. I got an almanac,—we had one in Jamaica that was a never-failing reference-book to me,—and from it I obtained a list of all the Chicago papers, with the names of the proprietors and editors. I intended to see those editors and proprietors. It took me some time to make up this list, and by the time I was through it was the luncheon hour.

I followed a moving throng of girls into a great clean dining-room, with scores of long tables, covered with white

cloths. There were all sorts of girls there, pretty girls, ugly girls, young girls, old girls, shabby girls, and richly dressed girls. In they came, all chatting and laughing and seeming so remarkably care-free and happy that I decided the Y. W. C. A. must be a great place, and there I would stay forever, or at any rate until I had won Mr. Hamilton.

You perceive now that I intended to court this man and, what is more, to win him, just as I intended to conquer Fate, and achieve fame in this city. How can I write thus lightly, when I felt so deeply then! Ah, well, the years have passed away, and we can look back with a gleam of humor on even our most sacred desires.

It was a decent, wholesome meal, that Y. W. C. A. luncheon. All the girls at my table seemed to know one another, and they joked and "swapped" stories about their "fellows" and "bosses," and told of certain adventures and compliments, etc. I attracted very little notice, though a girl next to me—she squinted—asked me my name. I suppose they were used to strangers among them. New girls came and went every day.

All the same, I did feel lonely. All these girls had positions and friends and beaux. I ardently hoped that I, too, would be working soon. A great many of them, however, were not working-girls at all, but students of one thing or another in Chicago who had taken advantage of the cheapness of the place for boarding purposes. By right they should not have been there, as the association was supposed to board only self-supporting girls. However, they got in upon one excuse or another, and I think the other girls were rather glad than otherwise to have them there. They were of course well dressed and well mannered, and they lifted the place a bit above the average working-girl's home. Curiously enough, there were few shop or factory girls there. Most of the girls were stenographers and bookkeepers.

When I went up to my room after luncheon, I found a girl washing her face in the basin. She looked up, with her

face puffed out and the water dripping from it, and she sang out in all her dampness:

"Hello!"

She proved, of course, to be my roommate. Her name was Estelle Mooney. She was not good-looking, but was very stylish and had a good figure. Then, her hair appeared such a wonderful fabric that really one could scarcely notice anything else about her. It was a mass of rolls and coils and puffs, and it was the most extraordinary shade of glittering gold that I have ever seen. I could not imagine how she ever did it up like that—till I saw her take it off! Well, that hair, false though it was, entirely dominated her face. It was stupendous, remarkable. However, it was the fashion at that time to wear one's hair piled gigantically upon one's head, and every one had switches and rolls and rats galore—every one except me. I had a lot of hair of my own. It came far down below my waist, and was pure black in color. It waved just enough to look well when done up. Canadian girls all have good heads of hair. I never saw an American girl with more than a handful. Still, they made it look so fine that it really did not matter—till they took it down or off.

My room-mate chewed gum constantly, and the back of our bureau was peppered with little dabs that she, by the way, told me to "please let alone." As if I'd have touched her old gum! I laughed at the idea then; I can still laugh at the remembrance.

Estelle was a character, and she talked so uniquely that for once in my life I listened, tongue-tied and secretly enchanted. Never had I heard such speech. With Estelle to room with, why had I not been born a female George Ade! But, then, I soon discovered that nearly all American girls (the working-girls at least) used slang fluently in their speech, and it did not take me long to acquire a choice vocabulary of my own.

Estelle had to return to her office by one, so she could snatch only a moment's conversation with me, and she talked with

hair-pins in her mouth, and while sticking pins, bone knobs, and large rhinestone pins and combs into that brilliant mass of hair that dominated her. On top of this she finally set a great work of art, in the shape of an enormous hat. Its color scheme was striking, and set rakishly upon Estelle's head, it certainly did look "fetching" and stylish.

Now, this girl, with all her slang and gaudy attire, was earning fifteen dollars a week as a stenographer and type-writer. She not only supported herself in "ease and comfort," as she herself put it, but she contributed three dollars a week to her family—she hailed from Iowa, despite her name—and she saved two dollars a week. Also she was engaged. She showed me her ring. I envied her not so much for the ring as for the man. I should have loved to be engaged. She said if it was n't for the fact that her "fellow" called every evening, she 'd take me out with her that night; and perhaps if Albert did n't object too much, she would, anyhow. Albert must have objected, for she did not take me.

Albert worked in the same office as Estelle. He got twelve dollars a week; but Estelle planned that if they married, Albert, who was the next in line, would take her place. He was bound to rise steadily in the firm, according to Estelle. As they did not intend to marry for two or three years, she expected to have considerable saved by then, especially as Albert was also saving. I liked Estelle from the first, and she liked me. I always got on well with her, though she used to look at me suspiciously whenever she took a piece of gum from the back of the bureau, as if she wondered whether I had been at work upon it in her absence.

I don't know how I found my way about the city that afternoon, but I declare that there was not a single newspaper office in Chicago at which I did not call. I went in with high hopes, and I sent in my card to proprietor and editor, and coldly stared out of countenance the precocious office boys, patronizing, pert, pitying, impudent, or indifferent, who

in every instance barred my way to the holy of holies within. In not one instance did I see a proprietor of a paper. No deeply impressed editor came rushing forth to bid me enter. In most of the offices I was turned away with the cruel and laconic message of the office boy of "Nothing doing."

In two cases "cub" reporters—I suppose they were that, for they looked very little older than the office boys—came out to see me, but although they paid flattering attention to the faltering recitation of my experiences as a reporter in Jamaica, West Indies, they, too, informed me there was "nothing doing," though they took my address. As far as that goes, so did the office boys. One of the reporters asked me if I 'd like to go out to dinner with him some night. I said no; I was not looking for dinners, but for a position.

I was very tired when I reached "home." I went up to my room to think the matter over alone, for the reading-room and the halls were crowded with girls. Estelle, however, had returned from work. She had taken off all her puffs and rats, and looked so funny with nothing but her own hair that I wanted to laugh, but turned away, as I would not have hurt her feelings for worlds.

"Hello!" she sang out as I came in. "Dead tired, ain't you?"

How *can* a firm employ a stenographer who says "ain't"?

She offered me a piece of gum—unchewed. I took it and disconsolately went to work.

"Got soaked in the eye, did n't you?" she inquired sympathetically.

I nodded. I knew what she meant by that.

"Well, you 'll get next to something soon," said Estelle. "What 's your line?"

I started to say "journalism." In Canada we never say "newspaper work." Journalism seems a politer and more dignified term. To Estelle I said, "I write," thinking that that would be clear; but it was not. She thought I meant I wrote letters by hand, and she said at once:

"Say, if I were you, I 'd learn type-

writing. You can clip off ten words on the machine to one you can write by hand, and it's dead easy to get a job as a type-writer. Gee! I don't see how you expect to get anything by writing! That's out of date now, girl. Say, where do you come from, anyhow?"

Unconsciously, Estelle had given me an idea. Why should I not learn type-writing? I was an expert shorthand-writer, and if I could teach myself that, I could also teach myself type-writing. If a girl like Estelle could get fifteen dollars a week for work like that, what could not I, with my superior education—

Heavens and earth! compared with Estelle I called myself "educated," I whose mind was a dismal abyss of appalling ignorance!

A type-writer, then, I determined to be. It was a come-down; but I felt sure I would not need to do it for long. Estelle generously offered to have a type-writer sent to our room (three dollars a month for a good machine), and she said she would show me how to use it. In a few weeks, she said, I would be ready for a position.

A few weeks! I intended to go to work at once. I had a hundred dollars to pay back. Already I had used five of it. If I stayed here a few weeks without working, it would rapidly disappear. Then, even when I did get a position, suppose they gave me only a beginner's salary, how could I do more than pay my board from that? The possibility of getting that hundred dollars together again would then be remote, remote. And if I could not get it, how, then, was I to see him again?

I would stick to my first resolve. I would not write to him until I could send him back that money—that dirty money. I felt that it stood between us like a ghost.

I wonder if many girls suffer from this passionate sensitiveness about money. Or was I exceptional? *He* has said so, and yet I wonder.

I was determined to get work at once. I would learn and practise type-writing at night, but I would not wait till I had

learned it, but look for work just the same through the day. Secretly I thought to myself that if Estelle took three weeks in which to learn the type-writer, as she said she did, I could learn it in two days. That may sound conceited, but you do not know Estelle. I take that back. I misjudged Estelle. Ignorant and slangy she may have been, but she was sharp-witted, quick about everything, and so cheerful and good-humored that I do not wonder she was able to keep her position for four or five years. In fact, for the kind of house she was in—a clothing firm—she was even an asset, for she "jollied" the customers and at times even took the place of a model. She said she was "perfect thirty-six, a Veenis de Mylo."

Conceit carries youth far, and if I had not had that confidence in myself, I should not have been able to do what I did.

All next day I tramped the streets of Chicago, answering advertisements for "experienced" (mark that!) stenographers and type-writers. I was determined never to be a "beginner." I would make a bluff at taking a position, and just as I had made good with Mr. Campbell, so I felt I should make good in any position I might take. I could not afford to waste my time in small positions, and I argued that I would probably lose them as easily as the better positions. So I might as well start at the top.



XIII

I HATE to think of those nightmare days that followed. It seemed to me that a hundred thousand girls answered every advertisement. I stood in line with hundreds of them outside offices and shops and factories and all sorts of places. I stood or sat (when I could get a seat) in crowded outer offices with scores of other girls, all hungrily hoping for the "job" which only one of us could have.

Then I began to go from office to office, selecting a building, and going

through it from the top to the bottom floor. Sometimes I got beyond the apraising office boys and clerks of outer offices, and sometimes I was turned away at the door.

I have known what it is to be pitied, chaffed, insulted, "jollied"; I have had coarse or delicate compliments paid me; I have been cursed at and ordered to "clear out—" oh, all the crucifying experiences that only a girl who looks hard for work knows!

I 've had a fat broker tell me that a girl like me did n't need to work; I 've had a pious-looking hypocrite chuck me under the chin, out of sight of his clerks in the outer offices. I 've had a man make me a cold business proposition of ten dollars a week for my services as stenographer and type-writer, and ten dollars a week for my services as something else. I 've had men brutally touch me, and when I have resented it, I have seen them spit across the room in my direction, and some have cursed me.

And I have had men slip into my hand the price of a meal, and then apologize when they saw they had merely hurt me.

When the day was done, I 've wearily climbed aboard crowded cars and taken my stand, packed between a score of men and women, or clung to straps or doors, and I have envied those other people on the car, because I felt that most of them were returning from work, while I was looking for it.

And then I 've gone back to my room in the Y. W. C. A., hurrying to get there before the chattering, questioning Estelle, and counted over my ever-diminishing hundred dollars, and lain down upon my bed, feverishly to think ever and only of *him!* Oh, how far, far away now he always seemed from me!

Sometimes, if I came in early enough, and if I were not too desperately tired, I would write things. Odds and ends—what did I not write? Wisps of thoughts, passionate little poems that could not bear analysis; and then one day I wrote a little story of my mother's land. I had never been there, and yet I wrote easily of that

quaint, far country, and of that wandering troupe of jugglers and tight-rope dancers of which my own mother had been one.

A week passed away, and still I had found no work. What was worse, I had no way of learning type-writing, even with the machine before me; for Estelle, despite her promises, went out every night with Albert. She had merely shown me one morning how to put the paper on and move the carriage back and forth. I used to sit before that type-writer and peck at the type, but my words ran into one another, and sometimes the letters were jumbled together.

I now knew a few of the girls in the house to speak to slightly, but I hesitated to ask any of them to show me something that perhaps I ought to pay to learn; for I did not want to spend the money for that. So I waited for Estelle to keep her promise.

Sometimes I would approach a group of girls, with the intention of asking one of them to come with me up to my room, and then when she was there, ask her about the type-writer; but the girls at the Y. W. C. A. were always occupied in some way or another in the evening, and a great many of them, like myself, were looking for work.

They used to cluster together in the lower halls and reading-room and talk over their experiences. Snorts of indignation, peals of laughter, strenuous words of advice—all these came in a stream from the girls. You 'd hear one girl tell an experience, and another would say, "I tell you what *I 'd* have done: I 'd have slapped him in the face!" Or again, a girl would say, "I just gave him one look that putrified him." From all of which I gathered that my own experiences while looking for work were common ones. Alas! most of us had passed the stage where we "smacked" or "slapped" a man in the face or "putrified" him with a stare when he insulted us. What was the use? I had got so I used to take a nasty proposition from a man with a shrug and a smile, and walk out gamely.

I dare say there are people who cannot believe men are so base. Well, we girls who work see them at their worst, remember, and sometimes we see them at their best. There are men so fine and great in the business world that they compensate for all the contemptible wolves who prey upon creatures weaker and poorer than they are.

I did not have time in those days to notice much that happened in the house, and yet small riots and strikes were on all sides of us. Girls were protesting about this or that. I remember one of the chief grievances was having to attend certain amateur theatrical performances given by patronesses of the association. We poor girls were obliged to sit through these abortive efforts at amusing us. Most of us, as Estelle said, could have "put it all over" these alleged actors. Then, not all of the girls cared to attend the religious services and prayer meetings. It was a real hardship to be obliged to sit through these when one would have much preferred to have remained in one's room. The ten-o'clock rule was the hardest of all. At that hour all lights went out. We were supposed to be in bed unless we had permission to remain out later. Vehement protests against this rule were daily hurled at the powers that were, but in vain. The girls asserted that as there were no private parlors in which to see their company, they were obliged to go out, and it was cruel to make it obligatory to be in so early.

So, you see, pleasant as in many ways the association was, it had its drawbacks. Even I, who was charmed with the place, and grateful for the immediate shelter it gave me, revolted after I had been working some time.

One day a statue of General Logan was to be unveiled opposite our place, and a great parade was to mark the occasion. Naturally the windows of our house that faced the avenue were desirable and admirable places from which not only to see the parade, but to watch the unveiling exercises. Promptly the patrons and patronesses descended upon us, and our

windows were demanded. We girls were told we would have to give up our rooms for that afternoon and go to the roof.

I'll tell you what one girl did. When the fine party that was to occupy her room knocked upon her door, she called, "Come in!" and when they entered, they found the young person in bed. She declined to get up.

Threats, coaxings, the titterings and explosive laughter of the association's "honored guests" (they were of both sexes) fell upon deaf ears. She declined to get up, and dared any one of them to force her up. She said she had paid for that room, and she, and no one else, was going to occupy it that day. That girl was I. I suppose I would have been put out of the place for that piece of unheard-of defiance but for the fact that one of the patronesses undertook to champion me. She said I was perfectly right, and as she was a most important patroness, I was not disturbed, though I received a severe lecture from Miss Secretary.

Taken on the whole, however, it was a good place. We had a fine gymnasium and even a room for dancing. There were always lectures of one kind or another, and if a girl desired, she could acquire a fair education.

At the end of my second week, and while I was still looking for a place, I made my first real girl friend and chum. I had noticed her in the dining-room, and she, so she said, had specially selected me for consideration. She called upon me one evening in my room. Of course she was pretty, else I am afraid I should not have been attracted to her. Pretty things hypnotize me. She was several years older than I, and was what men call a "stunning-looking" girl. She was tall, with a beautiful figure, which she always showed to advantage in handsome tailor-made suits. Her complexion was fair, and she had laughing blue eyes. She was the wittiest and prettiest and most distinguished-looking girl in the house. I forgot to describe her hair. It was lovely, shining, rippling hair, the color of "Kansas corn," as one of her admirers once phrased it.

Estelle was out that evening, and while I was forlornly picking at my type-writer, some one tapped at my door, and then Lolly—her name was Laura, but I always called her Lolly—put her head in.

She said:

"Anybody but yourself at home?" and when I said no, she came in, and locked the door behind her. She was in a pink dressing-gown so pretty that I could not take my eyes from it. I had never had a dressing-gown.

Lolly stretched herself out on my bed, brought forth a package of cigarettes, a thing absolutely forbidden in the place, offered me one, and lit and began to smoke one herself. To be polite, I took her cigarette and tried to smoke it; but she burst into merry laughter at my effort, because I blew out instead of drawing in. However, I did my best.

Of course, like girls, we chatted away about ourselves, and after I had told her all about myself, Lolly in turn told me her history.

It seems she was the daughter of a prominent Texas politician whose marriage to a stepmother of whom Lolly heartily disapproved had induced her to leave home. She was trying to make a "sort of a livelihood," she called it, as a reporter for the newspapers.

When she said this carelessly, I was so surprised and delighted that I jumped on the bed beside her, and in a breath I told her that that was the work I had done, and now wanted to do. She said that there "was n't much to it," and that if she were I, she 'd try to get something more practical and dependable. She said she had a job one day and none the next. At the present time she was on the "Inter Ocean," and she had been assigned to "cover" the Y. W. C. A. (she called it "The Young Women's Cussed Association") and dig up some stories about the "inmates" and certain abuses of the officials. She said she 'd have a fine "story" when she got through.

How I envied her for her work! Hoping she might help me secure a similar position, I read to her my latest story. She

said it was "not bad," but still advised me to get a stenographer's place in preference. She said there were five thousand and ninety-nine positions for stenographers to one for women reporters, and that if I got a good place, I would find time to write a bit, anyway. In that way I 'd get ahead even better than if I had some precarious post on a newspaper, as the space rates were excessively low. She said that she herself did not make enough to keep body and soul together, but that she had a small income from home. She said her present place was not worth that, and she blew out a puff of smoke from her pretty lips. Any day she expected that her "head would roll off," as she had been "falling down" badly on stories lately.

In her way Lolly was as slangy as Estelle, but there was a subtle difference between their slangs. Lolly was a lady. I do not care for the word, but gentlewoman somehow sounds affected here. Estelle was not. Yet Lolly was a cigarette fiend, and, according to her own wild tales, had had a most extraordinary career.

Lolly had the most charming smile. It was as sunny as a child's, and showed a row of the prettiest of teeth. She was impulsive, and yet at times exceedingly moody.

I told her I thought she was quite the prettiest girl in the place, whereupon she gave me a squeeze and said:

"What about yourself?"

Then she wanted to know what I did with myself all the time. I said:

"Why, I look for work all day."

"But at night?"

Oh, I just stayed in my room and tried to write or to practise on the type-writer.

"Pooh!" said Lolly, "you 'll die of loneliness that way. Why don't you get a sweetheart?"

I suppose my face betrayed me, for she said:

"Got one already, have you?"

"No, indeed," I protested.

"Then why don't you get one?"

"You talk," I said, "as if sweethearts were to be picked up any day on the street." *soft*®

"So they are, as far as that goes," said Lolly. "You just go down the avenue some night and see for yourself."

That really shocked me.

"If you mean make up to a strange man, I would n't do a thing like that, would you?"

"Oh, yes," said Lolly, "if I felt like it. As it is now, however, I have too many friends. I've got to cut some of them out. But when I first came here, I was so d—— lonely"—she used swear-words just like a man—"that I went out one night determined to speak to the first man who got on the car I took."

"Well?"

Lolly threw back her head and laughed, blowing her smoke upward as she did so.

"He was a winner from the word go, my dear. Most of the girls get acquainted with men that way. Try it yourself."

No, I said I would n't do that. It was too "common."

"Pooh!" said Lolly, "Lord knows I was brought up by book rule. I was the belle of D——, but now I'm just a working-girl. I've come down to brass tacks. What a fool I'd be to follow all the conventional laws that used to bind me. Then, too, I'm a Bohemian. Ever hear of that word?" she interrupted herself to ask.

I nodded.

Mama used to call papa that when she was angry with him.

"Well," said Lolly, "I'm the bona-fide Bohemian article. My family think I'm the limit. What do you think?"

"I think you are trying to shock me," I said.

"Well, have I?"

"No, not a bit."

"Then you're the only girl in the house I have n't," she said with relish. "You know, I'm in pretty bad here, a sore spot in the body politic. Out I'd go this blessed minute if it was n't for the fact that they're all afraid of me—afraid I'll show 'em up scorchingly."

"Would you do that?" I asked.

"Watch me!" said Lolly, laughing.

The lights went out, and then she

swore. She had to scramble about on the bed to find her cigarettes. When she was going out, she said:

"Oh, by the way, if you like, I'll give you a card to a fellow out in the stock-yards. You go out there to-morrow and see him. He may have something for you."

Have I, I wonder, in this first rough picture of Lolly done her an injustice? If so, I hasten to change the effect. Lolly was a true adventurer; I dare not say adventuress, for that has a nasty sound. I wonder why, when adventurer sounds all right. Though at heart she was pure gold, though her natural instincts were refined and sweet, she took a certain reckless pleasure in, as it were, dancing along through life with a mocking mask held ever before her. For instance, she took an almost diabolic delight in painting herself in black colors. She would draw off one startling story after another about herself as with half-closed eyes, through the smoke, she watched my face to judge of the effect of her recital. Sometimes she would laugh heartily at the end of her confidences, and then again she would solemnly assert that every word was true.

The morning after her first visit she woke me up early and, although Estelle grumbled, came airily into our room and got into bed with me.

A queer sort of antagonism existed between Lolly and Estelle, which I never quite understood at the time, though perhaps I do now. Lolly, with her reckless, handsome stylishness and dash represented the finished product of what poor Estelle tried to be. To make a crude sort of comparison, since Estelle herself worked in a clothing house and used clothing-house figures of speech, it was as if Lolly were a fine imported model and Estelle the pathetic, home-made attempt at a copy. She had copied the outlines, but not the subtle little finishing touches. Lolly, moreover, was acutely, amusedly aware of this, and she took a wicked and heartless delight in teasing and gibing at Estelle with words fully as slangy as Estelle's own, but which fairly stung with their keenness and caustic wit.

I could understand why Estelle hated Lolly, but I never could understand Lolly's contempt for Estelle. She always dismissed her as "Trash, Nora, trash!"

So now Estelle turned over in bed and snorted loud and long as Lolly got into mine.

Lolly said:

"George! how the *hoi-polloi* do snore!"

Estelle lifted her head from the pillow, to show she was not sleeping, and, as she would have put it, "putrified" Lolly with one long, sneering, contemptuous look.

Lolly had come in, in fact, on an errand of mercy toward me, to whom she had taken a sudden fancy very much reciprocated by me. She said she wanted me to go out to the stock-yards as early as possible, as she understood this man she knew there wanted a stenographer right away. His name, she said, was Fred O'Brien, and she gave me a card which read, "Miss Laura Hope, the Inter Ocean." On the back she had written:

"Introducing Miss Nora Ascough."

I was delighted. It was like having another reference. I asked her about this Mr. O'Brien. She said, with a smile and significantly, that she had met him on a recent expedition to the yards in an inquiring mood of the "Inter Ocean" in regard to the pigs'-hair department, of which he was then manager.

"Pigs' hair!"

I had never heard of such a thing, and Lolly burst into one of her wildest peals of laughter, which made Estelle sit up savagely in bed.

"You 'll be the death of me yet," said Lolly.

That was all the explanation she gave me, but all the way to the stock-yards, and as I was going through it, I kept wondering what on earth pigs' hair could be. I must say I did not look forward with any degree of delight to working in the pigs'-hair department.



XIV

HAVE you ever ridden through the Chicago stock-yards on a sunny day in the

month of June? If you have, you are not likely to forget the experience.

As I rode with about twenty or thirty other girls in the bus, all apparently perfectly contented and normally happy, I thought of some of my father's vivid stories of old Shanghai, the city of smells.

I shall not describe the odors of the Chicago stock-yards. Suffice it to say that they are many, varied, and strong, hard to bear at first, but in time, like everything else, one becomes acclimated to them, as it were. I have heard patriotic yards people, born and reared in that rarefied atmosphere, declare that they "liked it." And yet the institution is one of the several wonders of the world. It is a miraculous, an astounding, a mighty organization.

Again, as on that first day in Chicago, at the railway station, I was one of many atoms pouring into buildings so colossal that they seemed cities in themselves. I followed several of the stenographers—only the stenographers rode in the busses; the factory girls of the yards walked through, as did the men—up a few flights of stairs, and came to a vast office where, I believe, something like three thousand clerks are employed on one floor. Men, women, girls, and boys were passing along, like puppet machines, each to his own desk and chair.

The departments were partitioned off with oak railings. There was a manager and a little staff of clerks for every department, and, oh! the amazing number of departments! During all the months I worked there I never knew the names of more than half the departments, and when I come to think of what was on the other floors, in other buildings, the great factories, where thousands were employed, I feel bewildered and stupendously impressed.

To think of the stock-yards as only a mighty butcher shop is a great mistake. It is better to think of them as a sort of beneficent feeder and provider of humanity, not merely because of the food they pour out into the world, but for the thousands to whom they give work.

I heard much of the abuses there, of the hateful actions of many of the employers; but one loses sight of these things in contemplating the great general benefit of this astounding place. Of course I, in the offices, saw perhaps only the better and cleaner side of the yards, and therefore I cannot tell what went on elsewhere.

I asked a boy for Mr. O'Brien, and he said:

"Soap department."

I went along the main railing, inquiring for the soap department, and a sharp-eyed youth (in the pickled snouts department) with a pencil on his ear, undertook to take me to O'Brien.

As I passed along with him, I found myself the attacked of many eyes. A new girl is always an object of interest and speculation in the yards. I tried to look unconcerned and unaware, an impossibility, especially as some of the clerks coughed as I went by, some grinned at me, one winked, and one softly whistled. I felt ashamed and silly, and a fierce sort of pity for myself that I should have to go through this.

"Lady for you, Fred," at last sang out my escort as we approached an inclosure, and then smiling, he opened a little gate, and half pushed, half led, me in.

I found myself at the elbow of a long, lanky young man who was doubled over in such a position that his spine looked humped up in the middle. He had a large box before him, in which were a lot of pieces of soap, and he kept picking up pieces and examining them, sometimes smelling them. There was one other person in the inclosure, or department, and he was a very red-haired, freckle-faced boy of about twelve.

For some time the long, lanky young man did not even look up, but continued to examine the soap. I was beginning to think he was ignorant of my presence at his elbow when he said, without taking his nose out of the box, and shifting his unlighted cigar from one side of his mouth to the other, in a snarling sort of voice, like the inquiring bark of a surly dog:

"Wa-al, what d' yer want?"

"A position as stenographer," I answered promptly.

He straightened up in his seat at that, and took a look at me. His cheek-bones were high and lumpy; he had a rather pasty-colored skin, sharp-glancing eyes, and a humorous mouth. It was a homely face, yet, curiously enough, not unattractive, and there was something straightforward about it. He wore his hat on the back of his head, and he did not remove it in honor of me. After scrutinizing me in one quick glance, in which I felt he had taken in all my weaknesses and defects, he said in a less-snarling tone:

"Sit down."

I sat.

Lolly's card I timidly proffered. He took it, stared at it with an astonished expression, and then snorted so loudly it made me think of Estelle, and I felt a quaking fear that Lolly's card was a poor recommendation. He spat after that snort, looked at me again, and said:

"Well, I like her nerve!"

Of course, as I was not aware of just what he meant by that (I subsequently learned that Lolly had gone to work for O'Brien supposedly as a stenographer, and then had written up and exposed certain conditions in the yards), I stared at him questioningly, and he repeated with even more eloquent emphasis:

"Well, I like her *nerve*! It beats the *Dutch*!"

Then he chuckled, and again scrutinized me.

"That all the reference you got?" he asked.

I produced Mr. Campbell's, and as I watched him read it with a rather puzzled expression, I hastily produced Canon Evans's reference as to my character, which my father had sent me for the Y. W. C. A. O'Brien handed the letters back to me without comment, but he kept Lolly's card, putting it carefully away in his card-case, and chuckling as he did so.

"What do you know?" at last he said to me. "Good stenographer, are you?"

"Yes, very good," I eagerly assured

him.

"Humph! How much salary do you expect to get?"

"I got ten a week in the West Indies," I said. I never even thought that that "free board" at the hotel amounted to something, too. Ten dollars was my salary, and so I said ten.

He hugged his chin reflectively, studying me, and after a moment he said:

"I was n't expecting to take any one on for a day or two, but so long as you're here, and come so highly recommended,"—and he grinned,—"you may stay. Salary fifteen per."

"Oh, thank you!" I said so fervently that he got angrily red, and turned away.

The red-haired office boy, who had been acutely listening to the conversation, now came up to me and pertly asked me if I was engaged. Which insolent question I at first declined to answer. When I realized that he did not mean engaged to be married, but engaged for the position, then I said, with scarlet face, that I was.

"Red Top," as they called him, then showed me my desk, next to Mr. O'Brien's, filled my ink-wells, brought me pens, pencils, and note-books. I was inwardly congratulating myself that there was no sign of a type-writer when the boy pulled up the lid of my desk, and, lo! there was a fine, glistening machine.

I suppose some girls really take a sort of pride in their machine, just as a trainer does in his horse. I confess that I felt no fond yearnings toward mine, and while I was debating how in the world I was ever going to copy the letters, Mr. O'Brien pulled out a slat on my desk, leaned over, and began to dictate. All the time he was dictating he was chewing tobacco, stopping once in a while to spit in a cuspidor at his feet, and watching my face out of the corner of his eye. This was a sample of the letters I took, and you can judge of my feelings as I wrote:

Messrs. So and So.

Gentlemen:

I send you F.O.B. five hundred broken babies, three hundred cracked babies, one thousand perfect ones, etc.

Broken babies, cracked babies, perfect ones! What sort of place was this, anyway? The pigs' hair department was mystifying and horrifying enough, and I *had* heard that sausages were made from dogs and horses; but a trade in *babies*—cracked and broken!

I suppose my face must have betrayed my wonder and perhaps horror, for O'Brien suddenly choked, though I don't know whether he was laughing or coughing, but he made a great noise. Then he said, clearing his throat:

"Got all that?"

I nodded.

"That's all," he said, and turned back to his soap-box. There was nothing for me to do now but to type-write those letters. I stared at that machine blindly, and to put off the evil moment, I tried to engage my "boss" in conversation while pretending to dust the machine.

"Mr. O'Brien, have—have you many babies here?" I asked.

"Thousands," he returned.

"It must be like a hospital," said I.

He grunted. I've often thought that O'Brien delighted to put stenographers through that "baby" joke, but I don't suppose any other girl was ever quite so gullible as I.

"I'd like to see some of them," I said.

"You're looking at them now," said he.

I looked about me, but I saw no babies. O'Brien was digging down in the box. Suddenly he tossed up a handful of odd-shaped pieces on his desk. Then I understood. They were all in the shape of babies—Wool-Soap babies! O'Brien, with his tobacco in his cheek, thought it a good joke on me.

I stuck the paper into the type-writer, and then I began slowly to write, pecking out each letter with my index-finger. I felt rather than saw O'Brien slowly turning round in his seat, and though I dared not look up, I felt both his and Red Top's amazed eyes on my slowly moving fingers. Suddenly O'Brien stood up.

"Well, upon my word," said he, "you sure are a twin of that friend of yours! I like your nerve!"

I sat still in my seat, just staring at the type, and a fearful lump came up in my throat and almost choked me. I could not see a thing for the tears that came welling up despite myself, but I held them back fiercely.

Suddenly O'Brien snapped out in his most angry and snarling tone:

"Say, who are you staring at, anyway?"

I thought he meant me, and I started to protest that I was merely looking at the type, when I heard the feet of Red Top shuffle, and he said, oh, so meekly and respectfully:

"Yes, sir; I ain't staring at *her*, sir."

I was relieved, anyway, of a part of the pressure, for the office boy was now busy at some files. I found enough courage at last to look at O'Brien. He was studying me as if I were some strange curiosity that both amused and amazed him.

"You 're a nice one, are n't you," said he, "to take a job at fifteen per as an experienced and expert stenographer and—"

I said quickly:

"I am an expert stenographer. It 's just the type-writing I can't do, and, oh! if you 'll only give me a chance, I 'll learn it in a few days, honestly I will. I 'm cleverer than most girls, really I am. I taught myself shorthand, and I can type-writing, too. I 'll practise every night, and if you 'll just try me for a few days, I 'll work so hard—and you won't be sorry; I 'm sure you won't."

I got this all off quickly and warmly.

To this day I do not know what impulse moved Fred O'Brien to decide that he wanted me as his stenographer. His was an important department, and he could have had as good a stenographer as fifteen dollars a week will get, and that 's a fair salary for work of that kind. Here was I, palpably a green girl, who could not type a line! No man's voice ever sounded nicer than that gruff young Irishman's when he said that I could stay, that for the first week I could do the letters by hand; but I was to practise every opportunity I got, and I could help him a lot if I would write the letters without

making it necessary for him to dictate them.

In justification of my boast to O'Brien that I would "make good," let me say that I stayed in his department all the time I was at the yards, and this is the reference he gave me when he himself left to take charge of the New York office:

To Whom it may Concern:

This is to certify that Miss Nora As-cough, who has been in my employ for the past few months as stenographer and type-writer, is an A No. 1 Crack-a-Jack.

Smith & Co. Per, Fred O'Brien, Mgr.

Some one once said of me that I owed my success as a writer mainly to the fact that I used my sex as a means to help me climb. That is partly true not only in the case of my writing, but of my work as a stenographer. I have been pushed and helped by men who liked me, but in both cases I *made good* after I was started.

I think it would have broken my heart not to have "made good" to Fred O'Brien after he had trusted me in this way. This man, the first I worked for in America, was probably the best friend I ever had or will have. I do not mean so much while I worked for him, but later in my life.

I have spoken of the mild sensation I made as I walked down that main aisle. All through the day, in whatever direction I looked, I encountered interested eyes bent upon me. Some were those of girls like myself, some office boys, a number of department managers, and nearly all the clerks in my vicinity. Some craned their necks to get a glimpse of me, some came officiously to talk to O'Brien. Thus it was an embarrassing day for me, especially at luncheon-hour, when I did not know quite what to do. Then a girl from another department came over and asked me to go to luncheon with her. She said that her "boss," whose name was Hermann, and who was a chum of O'Brien, had bade her look out for me.

She pointed Hermann out to me as we passed along, and he seized his hat, and came after us; but as he was passing our

department, O'Brien seized him, and, looking back, I saw them both laughing, and I felt sure O'Brien was telling him about me.

Hermann was about twenty-five. He had a stiff thatch of yellow hair which he brushed up straight, and which stood up just like bristles on his head. He had wide-awake eyes, and looked like a human interrogation-point, dressed very dudishly, and flirted right and left with all the girls. Though born in America, and wiry and active, nevertheless there was the stamp of "Made in Germany" everywhere upon him. Later in the afternoon he stuck so insistently about our department that O'Brien finally introduced us, and then said with a grin:

"Now clear out. You got what you wanted."

Two or three departments to the left of me I had noticed a very blond, plumpish, rather good-looking young man, who watched me unceasingly throughout the day, but, whenever I looked at him, would blush, just like a girl, and look down and fuss with papers on his desk. Well, about the middle of the afternoon, and while O'Brien was away from the department, a boy came over and laid a note on my desk. It was folded ingeniously, twisted into a sort of bow-knot, and it was addressed, "Stenographer, Soap Dept."

I thought it was some instruction from O'Brien, especially as the boy said:

"Any answer?"

I unfolded the note, and this is what I read:

I'm stuck on you. Will you keep company with me?

I had to laugh, though I knew my furiously red swain was watching me anxiously.

"Any answer?" again asked the boy. I wrote on a piece of paper the one word, "Maybe."

People who have called me clever, superior, etc.,—oh, all women writers get accused of such things!—have not really reckoned with a certain weak and silly side to my character. If as I proceed with

this chronicle I shock you with the ease and facility with which I encouraged and accepted and became constantly engaged to men, please set it down to the fact that I always felt an inability to *hurt* by refusing any one who liked me enough to propose to me. I got into lots of trouble for this,—call it moral lack in me,—but I could not help it at the time. Why, it's just the same way that I once felt in a private Catholic hospital, and little Sister Mary Eulalia tried to convert me. Out of politeness and because I loved *her*, I was within an ace of acknowledging her faith, or any other faith she might choose.

If you could have seen the broad smile of satisfaction that wreathed the face of my first stock-yards "mash," you, in my place, would not have regretted that little crumb of hope that I had tossed him. Yet I had no more intention of "keeping company" with him than I had of flying.

It pleases me much to record that on this my first day in the yards I received three "mash" notes, which one of the girls later told me "was going it some for fair."

My second note was a pressed flower, accompanied by these touching lines:

The rose is red; the violet's blue,
Honey's sweet, and so are you!
And so is he, who sends you this,
And when we meet we'll have a kiss.

I don't know who sent me this, but I suspected an office boy in a neighboring department.

My third note came just about an hour before leaving. It was from Hermann, and in a sealed envelop. It was as follows:

How about "Buffalo Bill" to-night?

O'Brien leaned over me as I opened the note, deliberately took it from me, and read it. As he did so, Hermann stealthily pelted him with tightly chewed wads of paper, though, from his hunched-over position at his desk, no one would have suspected who was throwing those pellets. I saw him, however, and he winked at me as if I were in a conspiracy with him, and as much as to say:

"We 'll fix him."

O'Brien, his cigar moving from one side of his mouth to the other, answered the note for me.

"Nothing doing," was his laconic response to Hermann's invitation, and he despatched it by Red Top. He let me out with the five-thirty girls instead of the six, and he said:

"Now step lively, and if you let Hermann catch up with you, I 'll fire you in the morning."

I went flying down the aisle with my heart as light as a feather. Next to being in love, there is nothing finer in the world, for a working-girl, than to have a good "job" and to know that some one is "stuck" on you.

(To be continued)



Wish-horses

By WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

DON'T you see the horses trampling down the street,
Great white chargers, with their heavy gilded feet,
With caparisons embroidered in an azure flapping ample—
Don't you hear them, don't you hear them? *Trumple-trumple, trumple-trumple!*
From fetlock to forelock they loom shaggy and gigantic.
Their manes and tails are flowing like the silver-frothed Atlantic;
Their eyes are kind and brown like the wood pools out of town;
And their knights bear forest branches for the spears of their renown.

All around you in the ranks of department stores and banks,
Hotels and office buildings, restaurants and flats and towers,
A million brains of weary folk are throbbing through the hours
With wishes tremendous,—from some of which defend us;
Employers, for a few of them, would very likely end us,—
But most are longings old for the country to enfold
And drown them in its purple and its greenery and gold
Or its fleece of dazzling white, with a star-blaze through the night.
They are longing for the clean air of the land of lost delight.
Therefore come the horses, white dream-steeds to cheer and free them:
Don't you hear them trampling past you? Don't you see them, don't you see them?

I hear a sunrise shouting and a noise of clashing cymbals,
I hear a great wind roaring o'er the rattling of the timbals;
There 's a horn of vast adventure that is winding overhead,
With its chords that are like colors now the sunset flushes red.
And now the black crowds pour from each office building's door.
They are only rushing homeward, but more glad than e'er before;
For they see the horses' banners, star-embroidered, blue, and ample,
Wave before them out of heaven, as the steeds mount *trumple-trumple*
Through blue evening up to cloudland, *trumple-trumple, trumple-trumple!*