

## \* \* \* The Story Page \* \* \*

### The Bad Quarter.

BY ANNA JOHNSON.

"I'm afraid, Irene, you'll have to take my place to-day."

Irene Gage turned briskly from the window. Low in the east the sun was painting the sky with crimson and golden lights. It would be a perfect day, and the ice on the river was firm and smooth. The first Saturday of the winter, too, on which skating had been possible.

"Of course, Leona, I will," she said after swallowing once or twice. "If you stay at home and let mamma doctor your cold you will be all right by Monday."

Just then the gentle, little mother brought in the steak and coffee, and they all took their place at the breakfast table. The family consisted of the father and mother and these two daughters. Leona was twenty-one, and for a year she had a small stock of fancy work materials for sale in the book and stationery store of a friend. In addition to selling these goods, she did embroidery for others. Her mother and sister helped with this work.

Irene was fourteen and a tenth-grade pupil in the Somerville High School. She was little, dark, impulsive and quick-spoken, a decided contrast to the tall, fair, and always serene Leona. There was an especial reason that winter for the great interest shown in the store. In two months the small mortgage on their home was due. Mr. Gage had been a partial invalid for years, but had now regained his health, and was working at a fair salary. He would be able to pay the debt all but \$110, and this must go until another year. His wife and daughters were working hard, hoping to be able to surprise him by giving him the needed sum.

So Irene cheerfully gave up her holiday and listened to Leona's directions.

"It's too bad it's Saturday," the eldest sister began, but Irene interrupted her:

"I'd have to be excused from school if it was any other day. I know Saturday is a busy day, but I'll try not to make many blunders."

Leona smiled. She dearly loved her work, while Irene, preferring books, out-door sports and day dreams, had sometimes given the most astonishing replies to customers' questions.

"Stop at the express office as you go down," Leona began. "The mediocval embroidery silk for Mrs. Hunter will be there. Be careful not to get the floselle mixed with the others. Miss Clay is coming in to-day to select silks for a violet centerpiece. You'll get along with that nicely, as your eye for color is perfect. Oh, don't forget to tell Lena Cramer that the Caspian floss came yesterday. She will stop on her way to dinner."

"Don't tell me any more," Irene cried, hastily drawing on her overgaiters. Then, as she noticed her sister's pallor and dark circles under her eyes, she went on: "Go back to bed, dear, I'll do my best, and you will know that means something, to me at least."

They all laughed merrily, and Irene set off. Turning a corner she caught a glimpse of the far-off river. The glittering expanse of ice looked very tempting to the sport-loving girl.

"I'm ashamed of you, Irene Gage," she said to herself. "You ought to be glad of a chance to help a little." On reaching her sister's place of business, she proceeded to arrange the small stock of goods in the most attractive manner possible. There were several customers, then a lull came. Irene looked over longingly at the display of books on the opposite counter. Mr. Wilkins always allowed her to read any she choose, and there was "A Singular Life" that she could finish in a couple of hours. The story had thrilled her heart; she did so want to read on.

"I won't though," she decided suddenly. "I will attend to the store, for if I begin to read I shall forget where I am."

She sat down to work at the pretty photograph frame her sister had commenced. It was to be embroidered with scarlet carnations, and she selected the shades with the greatest care.

During the forenoon she rose several times to attend to the wants of customers. Somehow their orders were all small ones. Irene grew a little impatient, for she had hoped to have a good day's trade to report to Leona.

She had just finished her mid-day lunch when a man, who was a stranger to her, entered the store and called for a paper of needles. He threw down a silver dollar in payment. Irene brought him the change, but he handed her back one of the quarters she had given him.

"I don't want that. It's no good," he said harshly. Irene examined it closely. It was worn and defaced, and the stamp was different from the one usually found upon coins of that denomination.

"Are you sure it is not good?" she asked. "I'm sure you can't pass it off on me. I'm in a hurry," was his unceremonious reply.

The girl's cheeks flushed. He thought she was trying to cheat him. She brought another quarter of a dollar without a word. When he was gone she again looked

intently at the piece of money that she held in her hand.

"I don't know where I got it, but it will have to be thrown away," she thought. "The loss will eat up the profits on the sales I have made this morning. Just when we are so anxious to earn money, too. It may be good after all."

She stood a moment irresolute. Then she went to the cash drawer and put the quarter in the department where the coins of that denomination were kept. Her face burned, but she went back to her work.

The silk knotted, and her impatient fingers made the matter worse. A party of school girls, skates over their arms, hurried by, nodding and waving their hands to her. Irene compressed her lips. Even the sunlight seemed dimmed. She did not understand the influence of even an evil thought.

Customers were plentiful that afternoon. There was no opportunity of disposing of the quarter, however, until the short winter day was drawing to a close. Mrs. Van Dorn, a wealthy but eccentric old lady, entered and asked for ribbon.

"Let me see some of your work that is finished," she said after selecting a yard and a quarter of ribbon. "I want to have some embroidery done, if I can find some one who will do it well."

Irene deftly spread before her the few pieces of work Leona had on hand. Mrs. Van Dorn scrutinized them closely, and asked many questions about the texture of the linen and the laundering of the silks. Irene answered her politely. So interested did she become that the haunting coin was forgotten until Mrs. Van Dorn said, taking a half dollar from her purse to pay for the ribbon:

"I'll see about the work after I come back from Detroit next week."

Irene was disappointed. The order would have been such a help to them. As she opened the drawer to get Mrs. Van Dorn's change the suspected quarter caught her eye.

"I'll give it to her," she thought. "She is so rich, she will never feel the loss of twenty-five cents."

She gave herself no time for thought. Mrs. Van Dorn dropped the piece of money in her purse without looking at it, and started for the door.

"It's done," Irene said to herself, "and I'm so glad, for—"

She stopped abruptly. What had she done? An overwhelming sense of her wrongdoing smote her. Was it gone forever—her honesty and peace? Mrs. Van Dorn was closing the door from the outside when her name was called.

"Come back please, Mrs. Van Dorn," Irene said, opening the door. "Your change is not right."

"There was a bad quarter in the drawer," she went on as Mrs. Van Dorn re-entered the room, "and I gave it to you. I will get another."

In silence the lady extracted from her plethoric purse the coin given her by Irene. When she had returned it to Irene and received another in its place, she spoke:

"Queer you should make such a mistake when you knew it was there," and the small gray eyes shot a keen glance at the girl's agitated face. "Was it a mistake?"

Irene's scarlet lips trembled. Surely she had done evil enough, and, realizing her own weakness, a swift cry for help went up to the Mighty One who always hears.

"It was not a mistake. The coin was given me, and I tried to make myself believe it would not be wrong to pass it on, but—"

Her voice failed her. Mrs. Van Dorn showed no mercy.

"What made you call me back when your scheme worked so well?" she asked, an unmistakable sneer in her voice.

"Because I saw all in a moment how wicked it was," Irene said faintly.

Mrs. Van Dorn went away. Irene bent over the box of ribbons to hide her tears. A trembling little prayer for forgiveness went up, then a customer entered, and she was obliged to give her attention to business.

The store closed at 6. Irene found that Leona was better and resting in the big, sleepy hollow chair before the parlor grate. Irene looked around as she slowly removed her wraps. From the kitchen came the appetizing odor of scalloped oysters and coffee. Mrs. Gage was apparently busy over the 7 o'clock dinner. The girl's eyes wandered from the neatly spread table in the dining-room to the cosy parlor where the rose-shaded lamp cast a subdued glow over the blossoming plants in the window, the ivory keys of the cottage organ, and the books in the pretty oaken case.

It was so home like. And they had been so happy. Would she ever be happy again? Sitting down on the hearth rug, she told her sister all. Leona's eyes were filled with a tender light as she bent over Irene.

"You poor, little thing, I ought to have told you about that quarter. Mr. Wilkins gave it to me two weeks ago.

He found it when he made up the cash, and he told me perhaps I could sell it to Cousin Bert. You know he is an enthusiastic collector of old and curious coins. So you see you did not take the quarter in change."

"But I tried to cheat Mrs. Van Dorn. I've lost you the order for her work, too. Oh, Leona, I didn't know I could be so wicked."

Leona's tears dropped on the pale face that rested on her knee. "Temptation comes to us all little sister. Let us thank the dear Saviour that you were given strength to overcome in the end. He loves you, dear, and he understands."

On Monday Leona was able to resume her duties. Thursday afternoon Irene stopped in the store on her way home. The flush of excitement on her sister's face told her at once that something had happened.

"It's Mrs. Van Dorn," Leona cried, dropping the brown linen cushion she was embroidering with sweet peas, in her lap.

Irene sank into a chair. "Well," was all she could say.

Leona nodded her golden head. "She's a dear. She has ordered a whole set of table linen embroidered in cowslips. I—we, rather, for you and mamma must help me—are to have \$25 for the work. Then the commission on the materials which she buys here will amount to \$5 more."

Irene gave a little gasp. "Oh, papa will surely have the hundred-dollars now."

"You haven't heard it all. Mrs. Van Dorn said: 'Tell your sister that she is the bravest girl I know. The sense of right that enables one to face again and conquer a temptation once yielded to is of God.'"

Irene bowed her head. Mrs. Van Dorn was right, God had given her strength to win the victory, although at first she had failed.

A month later Leona entered the parlor one evening and held up a crisp five-dollar bill. "See, Cousin Bert gave it to me for the bad quarter."

"For what?" Irene cried. "Oh, is it possible it wasn't bad, after all?"

Leona laughed gleefully. "It proved to be valuable because of its scarcity. Bert has been looking for one to add to his collection for a long time."

Irene looked thoughtfully out across the snow-covered street. It had indeed been a valuable quarter to her, for it had taught her the need of the continual presence of Christ in her heart.—Observer.

### Push—A New Year's Story.

BY GULIELMA ZOLLINGER.

It was late in the afternoon of a mid-October day that an undersized boy of twelve appeared on the steps of the house Mr. and Mrs. Calderwood had recently taken for the winter. He had appeared twice before on those same steps, though at different hours, and had been promptly run off by the one man-servant of the family.

And here he was again, to the wrath of the man-servant, for this time the master and mistress were going out at the door and he was powerless.

"I'm lookin' for a job," said the boy, looking up solemnly. He seemed not to know how to smile.

"What kind of a job did you want?" asked Mr. Calderwood, kindly. "And why did you come to me?"

"I come 'cause I heard them that worked for you had a soft snap."

Mr. Calderwood frowned. He was aware of his reputation for soft-heartedness, and it annoyed him to hear it referred to. Mrs. Calderwood, looking upon the little face, which was quite unmoved by her husband's frown, laughed merrily. "It is of no use, Phil," she said.

"I've been here twice before," volunteered the boy.

"What's your name?" asked Mr. Calderwood, in an impatient tone. His wife's laughter had jarred upon him.

"Push Bramrick."

"What! Push? Where did you get such a name as that?"

"The fellows gave it to me sir." He paused, and added, "Cause when I'm after anything I keep a-pushin' till I get it if I can."

And now Mr. Calderwood smiled. "So you've been here three times after a job, have you?" he asked, kindly.

"Yes, sir," answered the boy, still more solemnly. "And I'd a-come three times more, and more yet, if I couldn't a-seen you without. I didn't think up this pushin' business myself," he added modestly. "Old Uncle Isaac Watson, he told me that pushin' was what won in this world, if 'twas honest pushin'." And he says, 'You keep a-pushin' and a-pushin', and then if you don't get nothin', 'tain't your fault.' And so I've been doin' it two years now."

"Why, how old are you?" asked Mrs. Calderwood.

"I'm twelve now, ma'am."

Mr. Calderwood looked at the patient, unchildish face.

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