

best he had ever been able to do was seven dollars a week — some weeks. The instinct of self-preservation had driven Elzevir to take in two family washings per week at one dollar and a half each. To her surprise she did not lose caste. Other society queens had been dethroned for less. And Elzevir correctly guessed that because she was possessed of a hundred-and-twenty-five dollar diamond ring, the taking in of a couple of washings was catalogued among the justifiable eccentricities of the wealthy.

She paid the diamond full homage. The Tiffany setting was kept immaculately clean. The stone itself sparkled elegantly from the brown background of her finger. It was the supreme joy of her existence, the fetich to save which she had more than once cheerfully faced hunger. Once, during a long, jobless period, Urias had insisted that she pawn the gem. "Di'min's is all right, Elzevir, but they is no good if'n you is sta'vin' to death."

"This heah ring gwine stay whar it is at -- which is on my finger, 'Rias. If'n I die fum starvin' because you is too lazy to wuk — then I reckon it'll look gran' on my corpse."

But all of her passionate love for the ring could not emancipate Elzevir from her cardinal weakness. She was careless. For instance, she had for months been cognizant of the fact that one of the prongs was badly worn and that there was grave danger of some day losing the stone. For months she had conscientiously meant to see a jeweller and have a new prong installed — but a thousand and one things had prevented.