

"More's the pity, as he can't make a living off it. Do you mean to tell me you would come here amongst all my clerks and work at the post your brother held? It's absurd—the idea is madness!"

"Nothing is madness, sir, if you have not a penny in the world, and there is no one to help you."

"I can help you, if you will marry me? I have made you the offer before, and you scorned it. You are old for your years, why not marry?"

"Because under the circumstances, I prefer to remain penniless. I will not marry you, sir, because I do not love you."

"Isn't love rather an expensive luxury for a beggar? But there is nothing more to be said. Wife of the owner and manager of the firm is the only position you shall ever find in my business, so good-morning."

Helen sprang after him, and called out—

"Stop a minute, you must hear me. All our life you have bought us up. As children together you bought every treasure I possessed, for even then money was horribly scarce, and mother was ill. Ah, how well I remember the day you bought my rabbit with the red eyes, and my canary, my carving tools and paint-boxes, and you paid me a few pence for my childish treasures, when you would not have missed a few pounds. When father died you bought our home, and now you want to buy me. But even for my brother's life I will not sell myself to you; but if he dies, you will have his death at your door, and all your thousands a year will not chain his ghost in your strong room; it will haunt your footsteps—"

"Indeed; so this is the character you give me. It is true, when we were children I was rich and you were poor. What you had of childish treasures to sell I bought and paid for. Was there anything unfair in that? Your old home I took over as a bad debt. What more could I do?"

"You could let me have my brother's post for a few months, and I promise you the work will be well performed!"

"I have already offered you the only post I wish you to fill, and you have refused it."

You say a few months. What does your brother propose doing while his sister keeps him."

"My brother, as you know, is an extremely clever black-and-white artist. He studied in Paris for a year before he came here; if he had only a little spare time he would soon make a good position for himself."

"Then why has he not already done so?"

"Because he has had no time, he dared not give up a certainty for an uncertainty." Helen's eyes had lost their anger, and were full of entreaty, but the falsetto voice said slightly, while he bowed her good-morning: "Then he will have plenty of time in the future. I wish him great success," and there was nothing left for the girl to do but to accept her *conseil*.

On her way back to her lodgings, she stopped at an odd-looking block of buildings, and turned down a dark passage which had rooms opening off it on one side only. At number 28 she stopped and knocked twice. A pleasant voice quickly answered "Come in," and Helen opened the door and entered a comfortably-furnished studio.

"Oh, you're the very person I wanted to see, Miss Churchill. Can you come to-morrow at ten o'clock; it's rather a difficult position for you, but you are very strong, I know, and you've got just the figure to suit me."

A flush mounted to the very roots of the girl's glossy curling hair, and she stood before the critical eye of the artist.

"I shall be very pleased to come, sir, but you know I have never stood in a difficult position. You have only painted my hair and complexion before."

"Well, I won't tire you out, I promise you, and you must come, for I can't find a suitable model. I want someone who will look a lady in a simple frock, and that's what is so impossible to find. I've only six weeks before the Academy opens to paint the picture in, and my mind is full of it at the present time."

Helen smiled at his impetuosity, and said brightly: "Then I'll come, sir, and I'll try and stand properly."

He was going to ask her to stay and make a cup of tea for him, as he would have done to an ordinary model, but he checked himself and let her out of the studio with the same ceremony as he would have shown to a wealthy visitor to his studio.

Just as he was saying good-bye, Helen mustered up courage and faltered out—

"Would you mind paying me for my last two sittings, sir; I am sorry to trouble you, but you had no change the last time, you remember, and I want some money very badly just at present."

When Helen walked down the long dark passage with the money safe in her pocket, the artist's eyes followed her.

"Poor little girl, I should think she's jolly hard up. I wonder what her story is. I wish I could get Nan to call on her. I'm sure she's in awful trouble, and Nan's such a brick." Nan was his young wife, who was also his devoted friend and lover.

When Helen got back to her lodgings, her brother was awake and asking for her. She adroitly evaded his questions as to where she had been by busying herself in making him a cup of tea.

"And now I must leave you again, dear, for I have promised to go downstairs and see Mrs. Larkin on business. Harold thought that the business meant making arrangements for shifting him into the front room. He stroked her hand gently, and drew her face down to his.

"Chum, darling, you're such a brick. I don't know how to thank you, and I don't know where you get the money from, for when I try to think my poor head aches so, and I just give it up. I'm so selfish, dear, and you're so good; but I'm going to write and ask James to lend us ten pounds."

Helen promptly sat down on the bed.

"Promise me you won't do that, Harold. He wouldn't lend us a red cent, and it is no good humiliating ourselves. Promise me, Harold."

The girl's earnestness startled him, and as he was accustomed to obey her he acquiesced, and she went away downstairs to help Mrs. Larkin.

(To be continued.)

HOUSEKEEPING IN LONDON.

By A GIRL-PROFESSIONAL.

CHAPTER I.

A TURN IN THE TIDE.



Necessity calls out. Invention it is certain that there is nothing like it for showing up our true colours and the real value of the attainments we may pride ourselves upon possessing.

For instance, I had taken credit to myself for some small skill with paint brush and pencil, and my modest literary efforts had met with unqualified encouragement, but when it came to deciding whether these could be relied upon for rent, for daily food and clothing, as well as for the other expenses which make up what we call "living," I must confess that I first hesitated, then decidedly said "no." The more decidedly, perhaps, that another's maintenance, besides my own, depended upon such earnings.

Then came the question "what can I do?"

"Well," suggested someone, "you can cook!"

"Yes, but cookery lessons are not a very paying undertaking—that is, they pay well for a period but the appointments do not last long."

"True, but why not make your cookery pay in a home of your own, by cooking for others at the same time as for yourself. A good cook is a *rara avis* in these days, despite the cookery schools, and as much of the comfort of life depends upon cooking, there are many people who will pay well to ensure their comfort in this respect."

I pondered over this advice; there was common-sense in it certainly, and Necessity was ever at my elbow urging me to remember that she might soon teach me a difficult lesson.

A few days later a letter came to me in our little country home, which we must soon vacate, from my sister, a typical girl-bachelor who lived in the "dwellings" that typify London Bohemian liberty. She wrote, "I have a very desirable residence," which you and I have so often envied is actually To Let, I wish we could take it."

"Now is your chance," said a voice within me; but yet I hesitated. Visions of rent, taxes, rates, and what not loomed large before me, besides the possible repairs that might be required inside, although outside the residence was attractive enough.

Was it chance again, that, while waiting for a local train the next day, a bill announcing "excursion to London" caught my eye, and reading it, I found it to be for the next morning, returning the same day. Surely the Fates were conspiring together!

It was true that to avail myself of this projected trip meant leaving home at the early hour of six, on a November day, and the return three-mile-walk would be at the still earlier hour of three o'clock the next morning, but that was no great deterrent.

Therefore, not knowing what good thing might be missed if this chance was lost I did not hesitate here, but when the next morning dawned, set out post-haste over the deserted fields, in the grey light, to meet the train which all but waited for me, as if determined to take me whether I would or no. By ten o'clock we drew up in St. Pancras station; a cup of hot coffee there raised my courage again,