

BOYS AND GIRLS

On Quiet Street

(By Annie Hamilton Donnell, in the 'Christian Endeavor World'.)

When the little Clearwaters moved into Quiet Street, it made a ripple of excitement all along the street on both sides. To be sure, 'all along' was very short, it was such a tiny street! You could count the houses on the right-hand side on the fingers of your right hand, and those on the left-hand side on your left-hand fingers. The thumb would not be needed, either, on one side.

There were as many little Clearwaters but one as there were houses on Quiet Street. Bless me, it took both hands, except the thumbs, to count them!

'One, two, three, four, five—it makes me dizzy, Lucretia! I can't count 'em. When

creaking boards in the floor that rasped Lucretia's nerves.

'And, Lucretia—Lucretia! Mercy, I guess she's fainted away, an' I don't much wonder.'

But the lean, sallow face among the pillows was distinctly conscious. Lucretia was smiling.

'Your voice sounded so dretful die-away, Ruth!' she laughed faintly. 'Anybody'd think the world was coming to an end.'

'Well, I guess it is!' Ruth Todd said grimly.

The furniture vans unloaded the Clearwater 'goods,' one after the other. They were mostly cribs and little beds and high-chairs, the neighbors remarked. Towards night the doors closed on the last piece of furniture—it was a crib—and the last little Clearwater boy. Quiet street settled down

those among them who advocated eviction, like Irish landlords, but they were put down.

'There ain't a thing to do,' Ruth Todd said briefly, and Ruth Todd was a leader on Quiet Street.

'We can't turn 'em out. We don't own the street, and we don't live in Ireland. They've got as good a right to live in that house as we've got to live in ours. And I suppose all those terrible children's got a good right to be boys—the Lord forgive 'em!'

'We can move out,' a mild little neighbor suggested. And that seemed the only recourse. One by one, they settled down again resignedly.

Ruth Todd 'settled down' last. She kept her front blinds shut all summer, but the slats were ajar. One can see a good deal through open slats. And, woe's me, how much one can hear through them! Lucretia lay patiently on her bed and listened for the shrill voices of little children all summer. She dared not tell Ruth how much comfort they were to her, or how by degrees she came to know the little voices apart and to give their little owners names. It was Trotty's voice she listened for most—a little, high-pitched, clear-toned voice as sweet as an Easter bell.

The summer days grew into summer weeks and months. Then it was early fall. The six little Clearwaters raced all day long, up and down Quiet Street; and, as the time went on, the babies' little legs grew to racing strength, too. They had need to grow up, for on one of the September days another Clearwater baby moved into Quiet Street. It was then the neighbors took up their groaning afresh.

One day—that was when October was getting under way—a terrible thing happened in the tiny, misnamed street. Lucretia Todd was the first to scent disaster. She heard the slow, heavy wheels first.

'Look out and see what's turning into our street, Ruth—quick, open the blinds! That ain't any grocer's waggon or coal-cart. It sounds strange to me, Ruth.'

'It's an ambulance,' Ruth Todd cried out sharply. 'It's stopping there.'

She had flung the shutters wide open. Her voice sounded strained and full of pain, in Lucretia's ears.

'Dear Lord, have pity!' murmured the bedridden woman. It was a prayer.

The Clearwater father had been brought home dead. The tired, sweet-faced mother and the stranger baby stayed only a little while, a very little while, behind him. There were eight little Clearwater boys left in the lonely little house on Quiet Street. They were very quiet and awed. The letters on the corner lamp-post spelled the right name then.

Ruth Todd and the other neighbors went in and performed all the kindly offices. They dressed the eight little silent Clearwaters in their best clothes, and formed them into a little procession, to trudge soberly down Quiet Street after the mother and the stranger baby. There was no racing, and Lucretia Todd heard no shrill voices shouting.

There seemed to be no friends or relatives. The city authorities came and talked about the orphan asylum or the Home for Little Friendless Ones. And then all Quiet Street rose up. There was a 'mass-meeting' at



THEY'RE ALL OF 'EM BOYS!

I get under way, they all wiggle, and then there are dozens of 'em!

Miss Todd sat in her sunny window, looking out between her geraniums. She was talking to Miss Lucretia Todd, her invalid sister. It was necessary to raise her voice a good deal. The invalid's room was across a tiny strip of hallway, and the invalid's ears were muffled among the pillows.

'And O, Lucretia—'

'Well, Ruth, well? what say?'

'They're all of 'em boys, every mother's son! I know it; they all wear pants but the two babies, and the biggest baby wears kilts. And of course the smallest baby's a boy, or he wouldn't be alive in such a mess o' boys!'

Miss Todd's chair swayed back and forth in agitation, and for once she forgot the

into almost its usual calm. There was nothing to disturb it further that day unless it were the glimpses, through curtainless windows, of a troop of little yellow-nightgowned figures cavorting around bare, dismal rooms. When the nightgowns formed in procession and filed up to the tired, sweet-faced little Clearwater mother to be kissed, Miss Todd could count them easily.

'Six,' she murmured softly, 'and that don't take in the two babies. Well, I do declare!'

Everybody on Quiet Street 'declared.' At the first week's end the neatly-printed letters on the corner lamp-post misled passers-by. They should have spelled 'Noisy Street.'

The neighbors on the little street got together and talked it over. There were