

"Sure. Did you think I meant the Big Chief? Say, she's away for a week's trip, did you know? The Under-Dragon is in charge. Tra la—I won't have to kiss her good-bye! I've been scared stiff I'd bounce her a biff by mistake, the old thing! Why, Babette, dearie, what's got you?"

Babette had given way to silent tears.

"I don't want to leave everything, Bab," she whispered. "I'm afraid to go alone to strange people. I don't want to leave my plant, and Minnie and her kittens, an'—and Barry, an' all! And, oh, Bab, I don't want to leave you!"

"Hush, kid—you mustn't take on so! I've been tipped off we're both going to homes in the city here, and like as not we'll be adopted for keeps, and then everything'll be hunky-dory, and I'll come and visit you, and you'll come and visit me, and we'll have the grandest time. And maybe they'll let you take your plant with you."

"Oh, do you think so, Bab? And you'll always be a sister to me, Bab?"

"Surest thing you know!"

"Oh, Bab, I'm so glad! And I'll always be a sister to you, forever and ever, whatever happens!"

The familiar gong sounded then. They hurried down, hand in hand, to the last meal of all together.

II

THE Institution is an outcropping of civilized society against which none should indiscriminately throw stones. It represents public provision for cases where the home, for good reason or bad, has ceased to be or to care, and where society must substitute as best it may for that which really admits of no sufficient substitution.

There are also, at times, unhappy errors made.

The care of the children in an orphanage, for instance, is sometimes committed to a being whose maternal sense, if it ever existed, has been crushed into nothingness by the irksome round of harassing duty. It is a task that none should undertake but those who have a sublimity of character, in which efficiency and a sort of vicarious mother love exist in well-balanced proportions. Even granted these happy qualifications, the hands of superintendence may be almost hopelessly tied by well-meaning but misguided committees or councils of management.

In the Institution to whose charitable care Babette had been entrusted, the committee in charge regularly inspected the place with fatuous complacency, saw that the handsome mottoes provided by a wealthy contributor—who gave little more—informed all and sundry that "The Lord Will Provide," and went away and left the matter very largely in the hands of the Almighty, whose ineffective agents they thus became. The larger motto, just over the entrance way in the small lobby, by the bare little office, was also a source of satisfaction. "God Bless Our Home," it said, and the Committee, looking upon it, went their way in smug satisfaction, to enjoy a real home life which a long-suffering Providence had sanctioned. Let no one, either, cast too many stones at this committee of ladies and gentlemen: they discharged, in their misguided way, responsibilities which the stone-thrower may not have lifted with a little finger.

The matter of the disposition of the orphans was left very largely to the judgment of the superintendent, a woman who should never have been given charge, but who plodded painfully on with a stern sense of duty, and who came in time to regard her charges very much in the light of a gardener who follows the profession from necessity and not from choice and love of flowers.

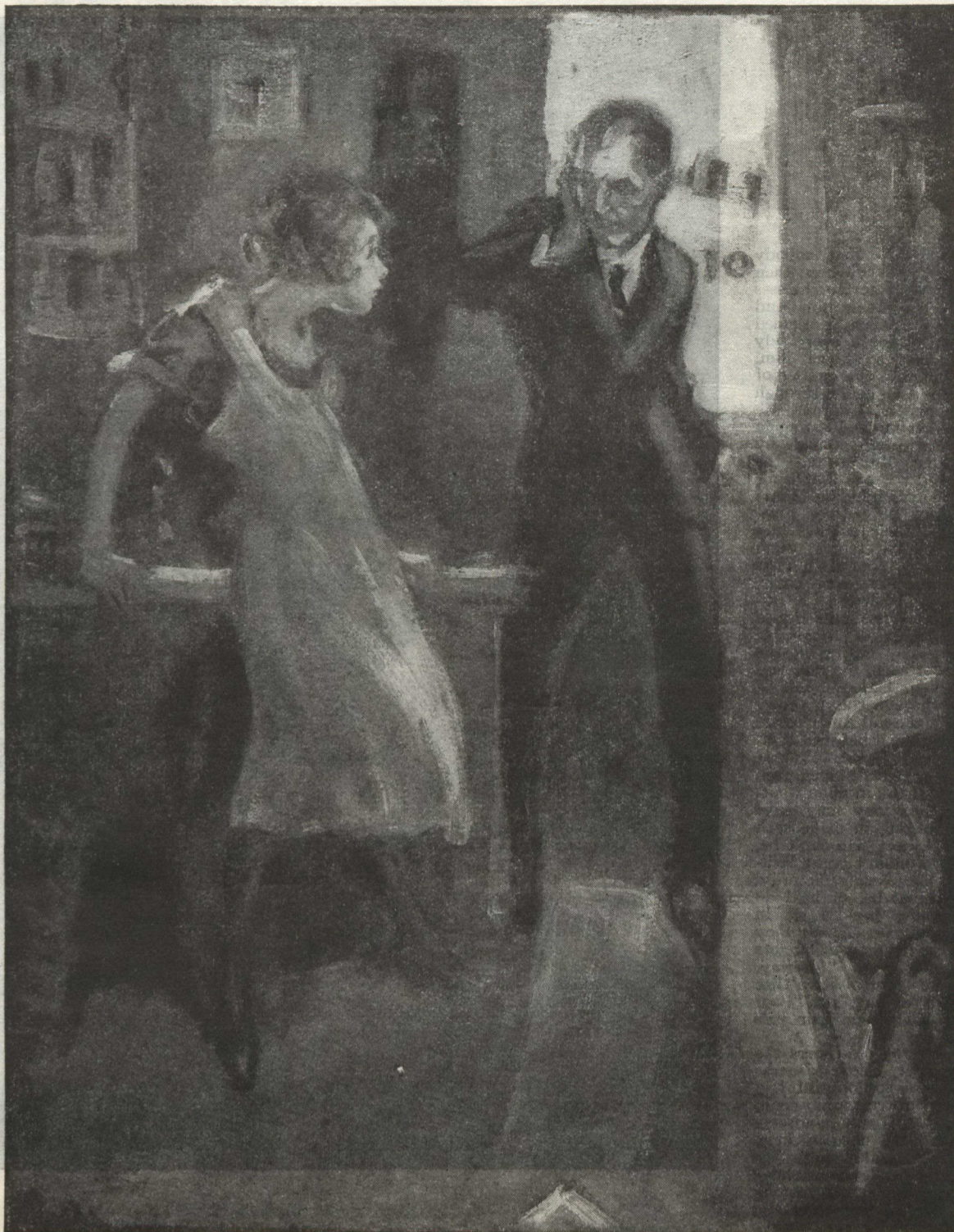
WHEN the time seemed fitting to transplant her flowers of childhood, and the occasion arose, she lifted hand of authority and set them in such places as seemed most expedient. To have one of her number adopted into a home, and thus taken from her care, was an occasion for rejoicing. She courted this kind of thing assiduously; and had even instituted a system of "trial" by which homes desiring to adopt children might have them sent to them for a period of probation, following which the official seal might be put upon the transaction, or otherwise. The height of her happiness lay in presenting, at the end of each year, a report of the number of orphans duly installed in homes of adoption, and her stern features knew no more softening influence than the murmur of approval from gentle voices:

"My dear, isn't it wonderful to think so many of our dear little folk have been found such lovely homes?"

The fact that Jim, the chauffeur, was ready with the car for transportation of a quintette of orphans that afternoon, showed that, if she were away herself, her cherished project was well cared for in her absence. Miss Parks had, in fact, examined applications, and selected candidates for adoption, prior to leaving for her holiday. Bab's "Under-Dragon" was left with full instructions.

Each candidate had a pitiful little valise with her, and was dubiously happy over the prospect of a new home; but undoubtedly happy over the delights of a drive, and the new dresses provided.

It so happened that Nan, and Jennie, and little Liza, the cripple, were each "delivered" at their doors before the turn came of Bab and Babette. It was a thrilling matter, this watching for the houses, and speculating what the place would be like. Hearts were brightened and cheered by houses with pretty lawns and gardens, however humble, and smiling faces that brought greetings for the "orphans on trial." Babette quite cheered up, especially as the memory of Barry's smiling reply, and brave words of encour-



"LITTLE TIGER CAT" HE STROKED HIS REDDENED CHEEK, HALF-JOKINGLY, HALF-ANGRILY

agement, were in her consciousness.

Bab's turn came next.

"Oh, golly, Babette, look—for the love of Pharaoh's daughter's adopted son,—cast your eyes on my humble-home-to-be! Isn't it gee-orgious? Look at the driveway, an' the garadge, an' the garden behind, an' all!"

BABETTE was silent. She was just drinking it all in. Once she had lived, out in the country, it is true, but in a house with grounds not less beautiful than these. And when a trim maid opened the door, and a motherly woman forgot her dignity enough to run out—Babette did not know it was the housekeeper—tears of happy memory and of joy that Bab, her adopted sister Bab, should have such a home as this, came flooding.

"I'll be a blooming lady!" said Bab, in an aside.

"I'm so happy for you, Bab," cried Babette, but held to her as though afraid to let her go. "I'll come and see you soon, Bab dear—just as soon as—they'll let me. P'raps they'll bring me. They may know your people, too."

"Sure!" agreed Bab, and kissed her in return, but it was a light caress for such a parting, and Babette saw her almost fly into the house in the wake of the waiting woman, as though anxious to be engulfed in this new life opening before her.

Then Jim's car carried Babette away down the driveway, towards her own door of welcome.

Fine streets of houses gave way to shops, and shops to factories, and factories to cheap streets, where long rows of dwellings showed a uniformity of design that reminded her so of the drab uniform she had escaped that she almost laughed and clapped her hands.

It occurred to her, as she saw more streets of similar bareness stretching before her, that her home must be a long way off from Bab's, because no sign of such houses as the others had gone to were here.

Then the car stopped, and Jim seemed to be examining an address on his card. Finally he grunted, and turned into a little cul-de-sac, in which ten houses aside, frowsy places, stained with weather and the grime of factories, grim with a bare stoniness, clustered.

A horrible fear gripped Babette.

Jim seemed very gruff about something, which was not like his cheery, good-natured self.

"Here you are, little lady, No. 10 it is!"

The house nearest that great brick factory wall at the end! A desolate looking house. Not even a geranium in the window, or a cat lying on the doorstep, as at the house on the corner.

"It's well," said Babette bravely,—"It's well I brought my plant, isn't it?"

Jim did not answer. He seemed to be scowling at her, almost, as he watched her greeted by a slovenly, stout woman who bade her "hurry up and come in." He did manage a kindly smile to match the brave one she gave him before the door closed upon her. It seemed terrible when the familiar, friendly chugging of his car ceased to be heard, and she was left—alone.

III

IT was that same day that Barry Campbell approached the "Under-Dragon."

"Miss Jarnley," he commenced, with some hesitation. For some time there had been about her an air that suggested storm and stress.

"Well?"—sharply.

"There's something—about Babette. Babette Willisdon, you know, not Bab Stockley."

Miss Jarnley turned on him with a sudden inexplicable anger.

"I don't want to hear!" she told him. "If there's anything, attend to it yourself. Can't you see I'm busy, Barry?"

As a matter of fact Miss Jarnley had been sitting for

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