

## The Girl who was Left Out.

(By Mabel Nelson Thurston, in 'The Wellspring'.)

The secretary was reading the list of the new committees. Her voice was a trifle unsteady and her color came nervously as she pronounced the names; it was not easy to stand up there before the society and disappoint people. Yet there must always be some disappointed ones. No matter how conscientiously the officers worked over their task—and they had been conscientious—there were inevitably some members who didn't seem to 'fit' anywhere; and, besides, the officers—faithful and earnest though they were—could not always agree.

As the secretary read there were little rustles of satisfaction or discontent or surprise all over the room. Only one girl sat absolutely motionless, her coarse hands clutching each other tightly, down in her lap, and her sombre eyes fixed on the speaker. Beneath the forced quiet her thoughts were in a tumult.

'Miss Julia Dickson,' she was thinking over and over. 'It will come in a minute, "Miss Julia Dickson."'

She was not concerned about the position assigned her; thoughts of that would come later. Just now it would be wonder enough to know that her name, 'Miss Julia Dickson,' stood with equal dignity beside the names of the dainty girls about her. How amazed those girls would have been if only they had known the joy two words could give! But none of them had ever been 'Jule Ann' at the poorhouse.

The society was a large one, and the names seemed endless. Julia Dickson knew but few of them, and most of these happened to be girls younger than she. One by one their names were called. Still she waited, motionless; it almost seemed as if she was listening with her eyes as well as with ears, so intense was the eagerness in them.

The secretary laid down her paper at last. 'That completes the list of committees as made out by the new officers,' she said. 'You may have noticed that there are a few names yet unassigned; the officers ask these members to be patient a little while. The work for the year is not planned out in full; when it is, every one will have a place. Meantime no one, we are sure, will think for a moment that she is not needed. Not one of you can be spared, we need your help in the meetings and in the socials, in winning new members and keeping up the comradeship that makes this society so dear to all of us. More than this, to you who are unassigned is given the special opportunity denied to those whose hands are full; I mean that you may be scouts and pioneers to discover new needs and push the work on in fresh fields. The officers thought that possibly they could not do a wiser thing than leave this pioneer band utterly free for a few weeks, that there might, through the zeal of these, be opened to us new and wholly unimagined ways of serving "Christ and the Church."'

It was an earnest little speech. After the first few words the secretary's voice had grown confident and even enthusiastic. Her audience followed her with quick sympathy, and as she went to her seat members glanced approvingly at one another. The plan had caught their fancy, and the 'awkward squad,' the odds and ends of incompetence and laziness over whose assignment the weary officers had worked so long the week before, lifted their heads with unwonted confidence. All except one. Over at one side, so far that the secretary's glance had not strayed to her, sat Julia Dickson, all alone. There was no eagerness in her eyes now; only fierce resentment directed

toward the secretary, because it was through her that the blow had come.

'I hate you, hate you, hate you!' her passionate heart was crying. 'Mebbe I ain't had things—that wasn't my fault, was it? Wouldn't I have had 'em if I could? Mebbe I wanted to grow up in the poorhouse! Mebbe I'm working out for old Miss Deely because I like to! They've been cheating me, that's what! They said I could help, and that they wanted me, and a lot of such things! It is all lies. I ain't good enough for 'em. I knew it all the time, only I let myself be fooled because that May Armstrong asked me. I hate her worse 'n anybody, so there! Guess they'll find they won't have to trouble themselves 'bout me; they can't fool me twice.'

They were singing now—the tender refrain floated softly through the room—'Sweet peace, the gift of God's love.' Somebody from behind passed over an open hymn-book. The girl let it fall into her lap and lie there unheeded. It made no difference; she couldn't have read the words with those hot tears in her eyes. It was the thought of May Armstrong that brought them. If only the officers, facing with dismay the problem of Julia Dickson a few nights before, had known of the secret place in the girl's heart where the other girl's name was written! They saw only the awkward product of poorhouse ignorance and repression. They were sorry for her, of course, and they were going to 'be nice' to her always. But there didn't seem to be any place where she could 'fit.' They never guessed that in this poorhouse girl something that meant life was stirring to pain at the sight of May Armstrong's beautiful womanhood.

After the hymn the president rose for a few words. Julia Dickson, waiting with stubborn endurance for the meeting to end, made no pretence of listening. She sat wide-eyed through the closing prayer, and the moment the stir began about her pushed toward the door like a wounded wild creature seeking solitude. When she felt a detaining hand upon her arm she turned with a fierce frown.

'You let me alo'—she began in the old poorhouse formula of resistance; but the sentence faltered and broke, for the face that looked into hers was May Armstrong's.

If May had heard she did not show it. Her blue eyes, full of confidence, smiled into the dark, sombre ones.

'Won't you wait a minute, Miss Dickson? I go part way in your direction to-day; and I'd so much rather have company,—if you'll wait just till I pay my dues. Here's the treasurer now.'

Still with one hand upon the other girl's arm, she turned to the treasurer. The poorhouse girl waited, her mind in a tumult of confusion. She wanted to slip away, but that light touch could not be evaded. So she stood, a dull color slowly coming into her face. Was May Armstrong pitying her? She didn't want to be pitied—she hated being pitied! She only wanted a chance like other folks. She—

May Armstrong's voice interrupted her. 'Now I'm ready, Miss Dickson. I hope that I have not kept you too long.'

They turned up the street together, one girl stiff and silent, the other chatting easily in her sweet, unconscious fashion. Some people might have called it a coincidence that May Armstrong alone of all that roomful of young people had seen the battle and sore defeat of this other girl; it was the kind of coincidence that often happens to souls that stand alert and keen to signals of sorrow and need.

By careful steps she brought the talk to the afternoon's assignments.

'I'm always sorry for the officers when it comes to the making out of committees,' she said confidentially. 'It's about the hardest work of the whole year, and no matter how careful they are, some people are sure to be dissatisfied. I suppose it's too much to expect that they shouldn't be.'

The silence of the girl at her side might have seemed stolid but for the sudden tightening of the lips. That was ominous.

May broke into a little reminiscent laugh. 'I remember the time when I was one of the disaffected,' she said. 'Oh, it was worse than that. I was mad—there isn't any other word for it. You see, I hadn't been in the society very long; we had just moved here, and I didn't know anybody, and I felt shy and left out, and had been looking forward to the committee appointments to make me feel as if I "belonged." I never shall forget how I felt when I waited for my name and it didn't come. The moment the meeting was over I rushed home to mother and told her that nobody wanted me there, and there wasn't a thing for me to do, and I never was going to another meeting so long as I lived.'

The other girl was listening now. She said no word, but her eyes pleaded for the rest of it. May answered the eyes.

'Oh, yes, I went back, of course. Mother made me see how I was thinking about myself and not the work; and as soon as I got myself out of the way, I found the work waiting,—a little crippled girl that I went to see Sunday afternoons. We used to have Sunday-school together, a Sunday-school of two. She lived only three months after I knew her, but when her mother told me afterwards how she had looked forward to Sunday-afternoons I was so glad that I had had the time to give!'

There was a little quiver in the sweet voice; it was not easy for her to reveal herself to anyone—it had been unspeakably hard to reveal herself to this girl. The girl looked straight ahead, still frowning, but there was a difference in the frown.

'I don't know anybody sick,' she muttered.

May turned to her, quickly—to the girl who had strange fancies that nobody dreamed of—and it seemed as if a purple lilac plume brushed her face, something infinitely beautiful and fragrant and full of eager life.

'Oh, but you don't have to!' the earnest voice cried. 'That was my little bit of work—it wasn't yours. Yours is waiting for you, just for you, and nobody else in the world can do it. Oh, you don't know how eager I am to see what it will be!'

Julia didn't answer; she couldn't. Something climbed up into her throat and choked the words, though whether it was something glad or sad she could not have told. For two or three minutes more they walked on together, then May stopped.

'I have to go in here,' she said, simply, holding out her hand. 'Good-by, Miss Dickson. Thank you for waiting for me.'

The other girl walked on slowly, through the summer twilight. She had got Miss Deely's supper before she had left, and the whole evening was hers if she cared for it. Obeying a sudden impulse, she turned up the road that passed the poorhouse. At least, she was not there any longer. She wanted to pass it, just to prove that she could pass it and hear no authoritative summons.

She drew a sharp breath as the bare yellow building thrust its sharp outlines against the sky; she almost turned back, but old habit drew her on. She went along the path slowly and more slowly. As she reached the gate a curious old voice started out of the dusk.

'Land alive, ef 'taint Jule Ann Dickson!'

Jule Ann stopped irresolute. A thin, yel-