

"Julia," said Bessie, gravely, "I wish you would not speak so disrespectfully of the poor."

"Am I disrespectful? Well, I didn't mean to be. You know Jack and I were engaged when he went away and I am more or less interested in him; not, you understand, that I mean to keep the promises I made,—promises don't count for much anyhow—but merely as a matter of curiosity. I suppose," she went on in the same half-mocking tone, so common to "girls of the period," as she called them. "I suppose Jack will expect me to resume our old relationship, and sympathize with him in his misfortunes. Well, if he has any such expectations, he is doomed to a sad disappointment, for, I assure you, there is no more Jack Denham for me. But, I say, Bess, what are you going to do with your Christmas present? I am going to buy a lovely sealskin sacque with mine. They have some real beauties down at Schuyler's, and I am bound to have one of them. You ought to come and get one, too."

"I have other use for my money," Bessie replied.

"Oh, yes; some more paupers to feed, no doubt," said Julia, sneeringly.

"They are not paupers, Julia, but poor unfortunate——"

"Protégés of Banker Fawcett's daughter," put in Julia. "That's what people are beginning to say, and I, for one, am ashamed of it. Just think! only last night, at Mrs. Perkin's reception, young Mr. Hartly asked me how my sister was keeping her poor people alive this cold weather. I felt so ashamed I thought I'd drop on the spot. I tell you, Bess, you must stop it or I will speak to pa."

Then, Julia, who had grown somewhat excited, got up and marched out of the room with the air of an injured queen. Bessie, not the least bit disturbed by her sister's threat, went to her room, put on her wraps, and left the house on her mission of kindness. When she returned to it again, all her money was gone—but where? Could you have heard the many prayers for the welfare of kind Bessie Fawcett that ascended the clouds that night, you would have known that she had laid up a store where "neither moths destroy nor thieves break through and steal."

It was evening, and a pleasant family group were gathered round Banker Fawcett's table. Mr. Fawcett, who sat at the head, was a man of five and forty, with a pleasant black eye, a well shaved head, rather inclined to be bald, and a manner, at once dignified and affectionate. Mrs. Fawcett, who sat at the other end of the table, was a lady of—well, of that uncertain age ladies always are. Her matronly countenance still bore traces of her youthful beauty, which were particularly noticeable in her eyes, that seemed to brighten up her features, as the setting sun does the western sky just ere day fades into night. Julia, bright and talkative as she always was, sat at the side of the table to the right of her father, while Bessie occupied the seat opposite. Julia was her mother's favorite, perhaps because she was her prototype herself in her younger days; but Bessie claimed the larger portion of her father's heart. As the meal progressed, the conversation turned to what the girls had bought for Christmas. Julia went into raptures over the sacque she had secured at Schuyler's, while Bessie remained silent. Finally, her father inquired:

"What have you bought for Christmas, Bess?"

"For myself? I hav'nt bought anything."

"Oh, no," put in Julia, "Bess prefers spending her money on paupers, and setting the whole city talking about her."

"Why, Bess, how is this?" asked Mr. Fawcett, who did not appear to be the least bit disturbed by Julia's awful revelations.

"It is as Julia has said," Bessie replied, "I have spent all my money in purchase of presents for the poor, and am quite willing to go without any myself."

"Yes; it is all very well to say go without any yourself, but you must remember that your carelessness in the matter of dress and your associating with the paupers of the town, reflect discreditably on the whole family, and is a source of continual annoyance to me," said selfish Julia.

"It shows an affectionate, charitable disposition, at any rate," said Mr. Fawcett.

"Oh, I admit that," Julia replied, "but there is a limit to charity, and, surely, affection was never meant to be scattered broadcast through the slums of a city."