

Sidelights From Blossom Alley.

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looked kind of sorry. An' that made me mad. You know how you feel when you get mad—all hot an' choky in your throat an' face an' little tiny twitches in your hands and fingers as if you'd like to get at somebody. An' I jes' spoke right out.

'Well, Sister,' I says, 'mebby you wouldn't love her either if she got after you a few times—dragged you round the room by the hair. An'—see here!' I jes' pulled up my sleeve and showed her my arm. I was real glad the scar was red yet. Want to see it yourself? An' I said to her, 'That's where she got after me with a hot poker a little while ago—kind of practisin' burnt-work, you see. She'd 'a' done a lot more only I yelled so; she was 'fraid the copper'd get on to her.'

Well, you should 'a' seen that deac'ness' face! 'Twas just like the theatre pictures when the man's just shot the other man. And so I up and told her a lot more things 'bout how I frequent' didn't get a mouthful to eat all day unless I could swipe an apple or a bun at some stand. An' then she said it was wicked to swipe! But she said it kind o' weak like, as if she might be faint. An' I looked at her an' I never said a single word back! It wa'n't no use, you know. She hadn't never been hungry—never in all her life, and she didn't know how it felt. She wa'n't to blame for not understandin'.

Well, pretty soon Nancy Freeder's thread came out an' the deac'ness had to go to help her. I was sorry, for I liked to have her sittin' so close to me, all warm an' nice. But when the sewin' school was out she asked me where I lived an' wrote down Blossom Alley in a little red book an' said she was comin' to see me next Saturday morning.

Well, the deac'ness came, bright an' early. Aunt Angie was to home, an' I was awful glad of it. She was in bed, an' I myself hadn't much more'n crawled out, for I didn't dast come home the night before till two o'clock in the mornin'—Aunt Angie was so bad. She'd 'a' killed me if I'd come in before she'd got settled down.

'Good mornin'!' says the deac'ness, kind of brave like, an' I could see she was tryin' to stop the theatre-picture look in her face.

An' then Aunt Angie waked up an' got right up. I tell you she was a terror! She don't never undress, you know, 'specially when she's on a tear. An' her hair an' eyes were pretty bad.

'What yer want?' says she, very cross. But I told her that it was only my deac'ness, an' I got the chair for her to set on an' told her to be careful an' not lean too far back—'cause it goes down, you know, if you do.

I called to see if you could spare Nelly for a couple of weeks,' says the deac'ness, awful sweet. 'We are making up a party of Fresh Airs, and I can arrange to have her go with them if you are willin'.' An' then she went on to tell how nice it would be, an' 'bout how we'd see trees an' grass an' birds an' cows an' lots of things. It was just lovely!

Aunt Angie blinked an' looked kind of dazed, as if she didn't really understand. But the deac'ness was so takin' in her ways that the first I knew it was all fixed up. Aunt Angie said I could go, an' the deac'ness was comin' for me early Tuesday mornin'.

'But now, about your clothes, my dear. Where's your other dress?' says she.

Now, I didn't have no other dress, an' I s'pect she knew it all the time. But I wasn't goin' to lose all them nice times just because I didn't have no other dress, so I spoke up real brave:

'O, this dress'll do first-rate! I can mend it real nice, an' wash it an' iron it an' fix it all up 'fore Tuesday. This braid around the bottom is real pretty yet.'

'Well, what about your nightgown? The regulations say "one nightgown."'

Now, I didn't know then what a nightgown was. But I wasn't goin' to let on, so I said, 'O, yes'm. I'll have the ni'-gown all right.'

I looked so brave and rich that the deac'ness must have thought I knew all about ni'gowns an' such rich folks' duds. An' so after talkin' a little more, she went away.

Aunt Angie hadn't said a dozen words all the time—just sat on the side of the bed and blinked. I was awful glad of it, for if she got

started an' takin' things wrong, as she probably would, there would have been a pretty how-de-do!

I picked up five baskets of coal that day, 'cause I wanted Aunt Angie to feel pleasant, an' I thought of the grass an' the cows every minute. I asked Aunt Angie, bringin' it in kind of natural like, what a ni'gown was? But she said she didn't know. An' then I asked Molly Gehowski an' Jennie Flynn and Molly O'Rierty an' everybody else, but not one of 'em knew a thing about it. I was completely dumfustered, an' so Saturday night I just got up my courage an' went to see the deac'ness—we all knew where she lived.

'Please, ma'am,' I said, 'I could get it all right if I knew what it was. But I don't know, and Aunt Angie don't know, an' Molly Gehowski don't know, an' Jennie Flynn don't know, an' Molly O'Rierty don't know, an' so I thought mebby you'd tell me.'

'But what is it, dear, that you don't know about?' said she, just as sweet.

'The ni'gown!'

She laughed a little. An' then she told me it was a pretty little white dress that you wear at night, an' that some little girls always had them. It's hard enough for me to get a dress to wear daytimes without another one to wear when nobody sees you. I told her so an' she laughed again, an' turned away her head an' acted as if she was cryin' some, too. But she asked me a lot of questions an' found out all about me. She wanted to know if Aunt Angie was my mother's sister or my father's sister. An' I told her mighty quick that she wa'n't nobody's sister, but just Aunt Angie; an' how I could just remember mother's dying before Aunt Angie got me, an' how I picked up coal.

'Don't you go to school, child?'

'No. Aunt Angie says I've got to earn my keep.'

'What does she do with the coal you get? She surely can't burn it all.'

An' then I told her how she sold it an' got things, an' specially whiskey.

'And she ain't any relation to you at all?'

An' I told her I'd be 'shamed to my grave to have such a relation. An' then she said something about some 'society' an' asked me if I'd like to go into the country to live all the time? An' mebby I didn't tell her I would. Only there was one thing. But she looked so kind that I jes' asked her right out, was the cows all chained up tight, 'cause I was afraid they'd bite me. An' then she laughed an' told me they was just as gentle—just as gentle as a kitten, an' never bit anybody in all their born days!

Well, when I went away from that house that night I had another dress an' some of the nicest little white things to wear under it, an' another pair of shoes and a nightgown—all done up in a little bundle ready to start. But O, I must tell you, I didn't set in the parlor all the two hours I staid in that house. She took me upstairs to the funniest little white room with lots of water runnin' in a tub, an' my! such a wash as she gave me! An' then she cut my hair tight an' burned up every bit that came off, just as if she was afraid of it, an' put some medicine on my head. Mebby I didn't feel nice and clean an' sweet as I paraded down the street under the gas lights! An' mebby I didn't feel rich with all the things. An' mebby I didn't lay them all out on the table for Aunt Angie to see when she got home. But there's just where I made the worst mistake in all my life; that's all there is to it.

I thought I should die, the next mornin'. I wanted to die. Aunt Angie didn't come home all day. She'd come home in the night when I was asleep an' taken the things an' pawned 'em all for whiskey. I staid there alone in the room all day long—laid on the floor most of the time. Once I got up and got the knife an' hid behind the door an' staid there for a long time to kill her when she came home. But she never came home all that day nor night, nor the next day nor night. An' I didn't eat anything all that time except a piece of bread in the cupboard. I made up my mind that I'd just starve to death an' done with it, but that bread kept a-lookin' out at me. Well, I thought I would starve myself to death after it was gone, anyway. An' she never came home at all!

Tuesday mornin', bright and early, the deac'ness came, just as she said she would. An' I was so sorry I hadn't starved to death

yet! Because the nice clothes was gone an' everything was all gone.

An' if she'd come and found me lyin' all dead an' still on the floor I wouldn't have to tell her anything about it, an' mebby she'd feel sorry for me. I went out by the coal shed an' hoped she wouldn't find me, but she did.

'Why, Nellie,' she says, just as bright an' nice, 'aren't you ready? We haven't any time to lose.'

An' then I burst out cryin'. I don't believe I'd cried before, in all the two days, not one bit. An' out came the whole story.

'You poor child!' says she. An' then she stood an' thought an' thought an' thought. Then all of a sudden she looked so determined. But she looked at her watch, an' shook her head. Then she looked at me again.

'Haven't you a single thing to wear, Nelly—not a thing but those old dirty clothes?' said she. An' I shook my head an' cried some more.

An' then—an' then—you just couldn't imagine what she did. She took hold of my hand firm like that, as if she wa'n't never goin' to let go. An' she asked me if there was one thing in that house I wanted to take with me, 'cause I'd never see the place again in all my life. An' I never have. An' she took me away with her down to the Deac'ness Home an' I staid there three days, right in the house with her, an' then I came to Mr. Lee's house up here in Greenvale. An' I'm goin' to stay here always an' for ever. He's goin' to be my father an' Mrs. Lee's goin' to be my really truly mother. An' I ain't a bit afraid of the cows—'course they don't bite folks! An' I find eggs every day out of the straw nests where the hens lay them. Once I found 'leven.

An' the eating out here! We eat three times a day just as reg'lar as the sun. An' there's always some more on the table that we can't eat even after we've stuffed ourselves. I hid some bread in my lap the first mornin', for there was such a lot I thought there surely couldn't be anything more that day. But there was. Three times a day as reg'lar as the sun. An' then Mrs. Lee—that's my new mother, you know—every single mornin' she comes to the door where I'm playin' with a big slice of bread and butter on it, or sometimes it's a glass of milk, and says so coaxin' like, 'Aren't you hungry, Nelly?' An' she says that from this time on I'm always an' for ever goin' to have enough to eat. She says I'm gettin' some fat on my poor bones. An' my cheeks are gettin' rosy. That's the way she talks.

Sometimes I think about what Miss Percy said—that we must love everybody. I love Mrs. Lee an' Mr. Lee—they're my father an' my mother, you know. An' I just love our little cows without any horns. An' I love the deac'ness. I don't just love Aunt Angie yet. But I feel awful sorry for her—she used to cry an' cry so, sometimes, an' say she couldn't stop the drink. Sometimes when I think about her, 'specially if the birds is singin' an' the soft wind blowin', a kind of soft feeling toward her comes up in my heart. Mebby—mebby—sometime, 'way off, as much as two years from now.—'Classmate.'

The Short Cut.

'We shouldn't have to leave the house until twenty minutes before nine, mother,' said Hetty, who hated to be hurried.

'I could stop in every morning for Jack Smith on my way by his house, father,' said Sylvester, the sociable.

'N' then we wouldn't have to c'ross the howwid railroad tracks, muvver,' lisped timid Polly.

'Indeed, dearies, I wish you wouldn't have to go to school by way of the depot,' sighed mother; and then she turned to father. 'Don't you think they would better ask Mr. Lane about it?'

Father said yes, Sylvester might, and accordingly next morning the little boy asked the old market-gardener whether he would allow him and his little sisters to pass through the little vegetable garden instead of going to school the long and devious way round.

Mr. Lane said they might on one condition: the two gates—one at each end of the garden patch—must never be left unfastened.

'You see, sonny,' said the kind old man, 'if the cows, or some old nag, or even Mrs. Mur-