

THE LOVE LETTERS OF SMITH.

When the little seamstress had climbed to her room in the story over the top story of the great brick tenement-house in which she lived she was quite tired out. If you do not understand what a story over a top story is, you must remember that there are no limits to human greed and hardly any to the height of tenement-houses.

When the man who owned that four-story tenement found that he could let another floor he found no difficulty in persuading the guardians of our building laws to let him clap another story on the roof, like a cabin on the deck of a ship; and in the most southeasterly of the four apartments on this floor the little seamstress lived. You could just see the top of her window from the street—the huge cornice that had capped the original front, and that served as her window-sill now, quite hid all the lower part of the story on the top of the top story.

The little seamstress was scarcely thirty years old, but she was such an old-fashioned little body in so many of her looks and ways that I had almost spelled her sempstress, after the fashion of our grandmothers. She had been a comely body, too; and would have been still if she had not been thin, pale, and anxious-eyed.

She was tired out to-night, because she had been working hard all day for a lady who lived far up in the West End, and after the long journey home she had to climb four flights of the tenement-house stairs. She was too tired, both in body and in mind, to cook the two little chops she had brought home. She would save them for breakfast, she thought. So she made herself a cup of tea on the miniature stove, and ate a slice of dry bread with it. It was too much trouble to make toast.

But after dinner she watered her flowers. She was never too tired for that; and the six pots of geraniums that caught the south sun on the top of the cornice did their best to repay her. Then she sat down in her rocking chair by the window and looked out. Her circle was high above all the other buildings, and she could look across some low roofs opposite and see the further end of Tomkins-square, with its sparse spring green showing faintly through the dusk. The eternal roar of the city floated up to her and vaguely troubled her. She was a country girl, and although she had lived for ten years in London she had never grown used to that ceaseless murmur. To-night she felt the languor of the new season as well as the heaviness of physical exhaustion. She was almost too tired to go to bed.

She thought of the hard day done and the hard day to be begun after the night spent on the hard little bed. She thought of peaceful days in the country, when she taught school in the village where she was born. She thought of a hundred small slights that she had to bear from people better fed than bred. She thought of the sweet green fields that she rarely saw nowadays. She thought of the long journey forth and back that must begin and end her morrow's work, and she wondered if her employer would think to offer to pay her fare.

Then she pulled herself together. She must think of more agreeable things, or she could not sleep. And as the only agreeable things she had to think about were her flowers, she looked at the garden on top of the cornice.

A peculiar gritting noise made her look down, and she saw a cylindrical object that glittered in the twilight advancing in an irregular and uncertain manner towards her flower-pots. Looking closer, she saw that it was a pewter beer-mug, which somebody in the next apartment was pushing with a two-foot rule. On top of the beer-mug was a piece of paper, and on this paper was written, in a sprawling, half-formed hand—

*porter
pleas excuse the libberty And
drink it*

The seamstress started up in terror, and shut the window. She remembered that there was a man in the next apartment. She had seen him on the stairs on Sundays. He seemed a grave, decent person; but—he must be drunk. She sat down on her bed, all a-tremble. Then she reasoned with herself. The man was drunk, that was all. He probably would not annoy her further. And if he did she had only to retreat to Mrs. Mulvaney's apartment in the rear, and Mr. Mulvaney, who was a highly respectable man and worked in a boiler-shop, would protect her. So being a poor woman who had already had occasion to excuse—and refuse—two or three “liberties” of like sort, she made up her mind to go to bed like a reasonable seamstress, and she did. She was rewarded, for when her light was out she could see in the moonlight that the two-foot rule appeared again, with one joint bent back, hitched itself into the mug handle, and withdrew the mug.

The next day was a hard one for the little seamstress, and she hardly thought of the affair of the night before until the same hour had come round again, and she sat once more by her window. Then she smiled at the remembrance. “Poor fellow” she said, in her charitable heart, I’ve no doubt he’s awfully ashamed of it now. Perhaps he was never tipsy before. Perhaps he didn’t know there was a lone woman in here to be frightend.”

Just then she heard a gritting sound. She looked down. The pewter pot was in front of her and the two-foot rule was slowly retreating. On the little pot was a piece of paper, and on the paper was

*porter
good for the helth
it makes meet*

This time the little seamstress shut her window with a bang of indignation. The colour rose to her pale cheeks. She thought that she would go down and see the housekeeper. Then she remembered the four flights of stairs, and she resolved to see him in the morning. Then she went to bed and saw the mug drawn back just as it had been drawn back the night before.

The morning came, but, somehow, the seamstress did not care to complain to the housekeeper. She hated to make trouble, and he might think—and—and—well, if the wretch did it again she would speak to him herself, and that would settle it.

And so, on the next night, which was Thursday, the little seamstress sat down by the window, resolved to settle the matter. And she had not sat there long, rocking in the creaking little rocking-chair which she had brought with her from her old home, when the pewter pot hove in sight, with a piece of paper on the top.

This time the legend read—

*Perhaps you are afraid i will
adress you
i am not that kind*

The seamstress did not quite know whether to laugh or to cry. But she felt that the time had come for speech. She reached out of her window and addressed the twilight heaven—

“Mr.—Mr.—sir—I—will you please put your head out of window, so that I can speak to you?”

The silence of the other room was undisturbed.

The seamstress drew back, blushing. But before she could nerve herself for another attack a piece of paper appeared on the end of the two-foot rule.

*when i Say a thing i
mene it
i have Sed i would not
Adress you and i
Will not*

What was the little seamstress to do! She stood by the window and thought hard about it. The creature was perfectly respectful. No doubt he meant to be kind. He certainly was kind to waste these pots of porter on her. She remembered the last time—and the first—that she had drunk porter. It was at home, when she was a young girl, after she had had the diphtheria. She remembered