

looked at him,—which it is more than likely a good many of them did, for Paul Stuyvesant's was a personality to attract attention anywhere, and men of his stamp are scarce enough in Bleeker Street. But he felt as though they all penetrated his purpose,—as though they were saying, "There's a fellow going into the pawn shop. First time, most likely. Don't he feel cheap about it?"

And Stuyvesant did feel cheap about it. He was fully conscious that there was nothing wrong or dishonorable in what he was about to do, he knew that even if he had been compelled to sell his watch there was nothing in the act that he had any reason to be ashamed of, and yet if he had been going to commit a theft he could not have felt more nervous and uncomfortable than he did as he ran up the steps and pushed open the creaking door. He let it fall behind him, glad to screen himself from the street, yet feeling more like a sneak than he had ever felt in his life before.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. PAUL STUYVESANT CALLS ON M. ZALINSKI.

He found himself in a long room, which ran the entire depth of the house, the partitions having been removed. It had a close, musty smell, in strong contrast to the keen, frosty air without. Little daylight filtered through the unwashed windows, but the place was bright enough with the garish brilliance of half a dozen flaring gas jets. To the left of the entrance door the view was obscured by a couple of wooden screens, which served to wall off little spaces not unlike the stalls in a confessional. These were for the transaction of business with such customers as might feel a delicacy about negotiating their loans in the bold publicity of the main shop. Paul tried each of these sanctuaries in turn, but all three of them were occupied. Then he stepped back. The door was invitingly close to him, but he had no idea of retiring. To his mind, the hardest part of the ordeal was already passed. He would go on now, at any cost, and learn what might be Charley's connection with this repulsive den.

Down the entire length of the room ran an extremely broad counter of cheaply painted wood, stained and dirty, and worn smooth at the edges by clinging hands. The wall behind it was completely hidden by a succession of shelves filled to their utmost capacity with queer, nondescript bundles. Some of these were neatly pinned in shawls, towels, or handkerchiefs; some looked like a selection from the flotsam of the ash barrel; but all were duly ticketed and piled up with some appearance of order.

Near the window was a tall desk, at which sat a flashily dressed young man with a marked Hebraic nose, balancing a pen in his hand and chewing vigorously on the end of an unlighted cigar which projected from the corner of his mouth. A gas jet just behind him threw out his silhouette in brutal relief. A large safe, with the door partly open like the doors outside in the street, formed a shadowy recess, whence the long legs of the desk and the tall office stool emerged into the bright light of the gas jets.

"One coat and vest,—a dollar ninety!"

The Hebraic youth bent over his desk and wrote rapidly. Paul turned sharply in the direction of the strident voice, and saw the whole long vista of the pawnbroker's shop stretching out before him in the gas light, the package encumbered wall, the broad brown counter, the various customers lined along it. Poverty's exchange was doing a rushing business.

A tall and rather good looking young man was at the receipt of custom. He had dark eyes, black, curly hair, and a shapely, erect figure. As he fiddled and with a practised hand rolled up some garments into a tight bundle, the glitter of a peculiarly white diamond on one finger caught Paul's eye. Could this be Zalinski? he wondered; and he rather hoped it was.

"Now don't let the moths get at them," said a frowsy looking man who had just—it is to be hoped only temporarily—relinquished possession of the coat and waistcoat.

The young man laughed lightly and pleasantly.

"We can't afford to board no moths here," he answered, as he stepped back and took two small pieces of paper from the clerk at the desk. "You'll find the goods right enough when you come to redeem them,—if you ever do," he added, in a lower tone, pinning a ticket to the bundle and absently tossing it into a narrow vacant place on the crowded shelves near the ceiling. Then he opened a drawer, slapped a silver dollar, three quarters, and a dime and a nickel loudly down on the counter, and pushed them across to the frowsy man along with the other ticket, on which the ink was still wet and shining through the sand that had been sprinkled on it.

"A dollar ninety," he said. "Next."

"Sure an' that's me," said a trembling voice, and a young woman took her place at the counter. Paul looked at her with interest. Under more favorable circumstances he might have thought her a pretty girl, but now, with hollow cheeks and bright eyes, with a thin, slightly stooped figure clad in this inclement weather in nothing better than an old calico gown, and a ragged shawl pinned across her shoulders, she seemed pathetic enough.

Stuyvesant was surprised to hear so cheery a ring in her voice as she reached the counter. But she knew well enough that she was in the last place in the world where she could expect to meet with pity. Her one chance was to enlist a little sympathy by gaiety and raillery. That even this was a forlorn hope she was fully aware; and yet she tried it. When men or women come to their last chance they are apt to give it a trial; flesh and blood will make the attempt, even if reason is convinced that it will prove utterly vain.

"Ah, but it's well ye're lockin' the day, Mr. Zalinski,"—Paul started as he heard the name,—an' as handsome an' fine as iver. Sure it's a treat to the poor souls that does be comin' here to have the likes of yerself to the aid."

(To be continued.)

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1 Real Estate worth.....	2,000	2,000
1 Real Estate worth.....	1,000	1,000
4 Real Estates worth.....	500	5,000
10 Real Estates worth.....	300	3,000
20 Furniture Sets.....	200	6,000
60 Furniture Sets.....	100	6,000
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1000 Silver Watches.....	10	10,000
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