



WANTING A MOTHER; OR, Photographed for Santa Claus.

BY LAZ.

"Mister, please, I want to be took." Baroni, the great photographer, looked up from the portrait he was examining. He was at first amazed, but a smile broke out on the face, where the celebrities who sat before his camera were accustomed to see only a frown. Before him stood a bareheaded gamin, a bootblack, with the box on which he earned his living suspended from his shoulder by straps. From the box projected the end of a brush.

The boy's pose was graceful, respectful, pleading. His face was handsome and winning.

"How did you get in?" asked the photographer, who wondered how the boy had passed the line of call-boys stationed in the office and reception room as a guard to the studio, into which no one entered without first sending in a card.

"The swell lady wuz kickin' up a fuss, and I says to meself, 'Here's yer chance, Nebby,' and I up the stairs end here I is. End, please, mister, do, won't yer take me?"

Cassandra had come that morning to sit, but Baroni had found so much fault with her that she had gone away in a rage. As the bootblack had stated, he took advantage of the excitement her exit had caused to slip unobserved into the studio.

"I wuz hangin' aroun' all mornin' waitin' for a chance, and now, please, Mister Baroni, don't put me out. I'll work for ter pay yer, and I do want a picter. Make a picter uv me, won't yer?"

In his earnestness the boy forgot himself, and the natural pose he assumed delighted Baroni's artistic eye.

"Nebby—what is the rest of your name?"

"Chudnaser," and the namesake of the Hebrew king unconsciously put out his hand in beseeching gesture and approached the artist, almost touching him.

A call-boy came in with a card, but Nebby did not notice him, so absorbed was he with the desire of being photographed. Nor did the artist look at it. He sat twirling it in his fingers while he gazed at the gamin. A more interesting face he had never seen in a child. It was delicate, refined, sensitive, all out of keeping with the coarse clothes and careless manners of the street arab.

The call-boy looked in wonder from his employer to the gamin. A fear that he might be discharged for neglect of duty had led him to seek for assurance in the face of the artist that Nebby was welcome, and when he found the strange boy there by permission, his astonishment knew no bounds.

"May I come in?" asked a soft voice from without.

"Yes, certainly," Baroni replied.

The call-boy sped to the door, and as he opened it, a well-dressed middle-aged lady entered the studio.

"A new sitter?" she asked. At a glance she had noted the beauty of the boy whose name was most uncomely.

"Yes, would you like to see him pose?"

"Very much," replied the visitor, as she seated herself on the chair the call-boy pushed to her.

A singular group. The handsome lady, the famous artist, the grotesquely beautiful gamin, and the faultlessly dressed call-boy, who was eager to throw the bootblack into the street.

"How did he get in?" asked the lady, who was none other than Madame Barnauld, the satirist.

"Cassandra was here, got up in a ridiculously extravagant style, and I refused to let her sit. She raised a hubbub going out, and Nebby slipped in."

Madame Barnauld threw up her pretty jewelled hands and exclaimed: "Mercy, Baroni. You will soon be a bankrupt if you treat your patrons so."

"Fudge!" ejaculated Baroni, and snapped his fingers.

Meanwhile Madame Barnauld was closely studying the gamin as he stood gazing at the portraits on the walls and easels.

"No wonder you smile, Baroni; that boy's face would dispel a darker frown than yours. Come here, Nebby."

The gamin promptly obeyed.

She laid her hand upon his shoulder. Her husband was dead and she had no children, nor pets but her hands. She fondled and caressed them. Baroni smiled grimly when he saw one of them on the soiled, weatherbeaten coat of the street arab.

"Why do you want to be photographed?" she inquired.

Nebby hung his head.

"Are you ashamed to talk?"

Her voice was tender and her smile winning.

He lifted his head and looked defiantly at the call-boy.

"Not before him, missus; I ain't tellin' him."

Baroni sent the call-boy out of the studio.

"Now, Nebby," Madame Barnauld's voice was full of encouragement. Her tender tones and soft smile warmed the heart of the street boy, and he told his story.

"Well, yer see, missus, Santa Claus has been kinder forgettin' me since he otherdied 'bout two years ago, and I tho't I'd send him my picter took by Baroni; he'd mebbey think I wuz worth a present or two."

Madame Barnauld turned and looked out of the window, one hand still rested on Nebby's shoulder. Did that hand involuntarily close and press him? He glanced at her quickly, as if it had. Her other hand was raised to her eyes. Was it only the gleam of the cold diamond on her finger, or did a tear glisten there? Baroni thought it a tear. He too was deeply touched.

Presently she faced the boy again. Tenderness had overflowed her heart, and he saw it in her eyes.

"Please, missus," he pleaded, "ask Mister Baroni ter take me. I ain't got much money now, but I'll work for it."

"You will take him, Baroni?"

"Of course I will."

When they entered the operating room Baroni directed the boy to pose as if asking a gentleman to have a shine. In a few minutes the plate was inserted. Nebby, with his cap on the back of his head, his box unsung and ready for action, took a step towards the artist's assistant, to whose feet he pointed with the index finger of his disengaged hand and exclaimed, "Shine!"

"Capital—hold that!" called Baroni.

He was looking through the camera.

Another moment and Nebby was transferred to the glass.

"Well, there ain't nuthin' slow 'bout that," he exclaimed, his spirits having risen equal to the occasion.

"That is all this time, Nebby." Come next week and the photograph will be ready for you."

With a "thank yer, missus and mister," he was gone; but in a moment he was back, interrupting Baroni's enthusiastic declaration that that was the first time in years he had photographed unaffected naturalness.

"How much will it cost, mister?"

"We will settle that next week," Baroni replied, and with another "Thank yer," Nebby bowed out of the room and hurried into the street to brush together more nickels.

"Why not strike off a thousand?" suggested Madame Barnauld, "and label them 'Nebby,' whose picture was taken at

his request as a Christmas present for Santa Claus. They would sell like hot cakes, and Nebby would realize a handsome sum above their cost."

"I will do it," cried the artist.

"But me a favor, please. When he comes, ask him how he means to direct the package. I intend to get it."

The next week went by like a flash with the artist, who was oppressed with patronage, and consequently in a most disagreeable humor. He was rich and had no patience with the exacting demands of his patrons. But he smiled every time he thought of Nebby, whose pictures were piling up in the finishing department.

At the appointed time Nebby presented himself. The moment was a proud one with him when the call-boy obsequiously opened the door and said:

"Mr. Baroni expects you."

"I ain't got much money, but I hope you will trust me, Mister Baroni," was his greeting to the artist, who excused himself from a venacious patron to welcome the boy.

Baroni handed him a picture and set up for the mail, then showed him one he was keeping for himself. Nebby was delighted with the correctness of the portrait. He did not notice the wondering looks of the other visitors, of whom there were several in the reception room, but proceeded at once to empty his pockets of all the money he had.

"No, not now; only tell me how you mean to direct it."

The artist bent over and Nebby whispered something to him. A smile brighter than any the gamin had yet called forth lighted up the artist's dark features.

When Nebby was again on the street he had his picture, all his money and the happiest heart in New York.

The day before Christmas, Madame Barnauld sat in her boudoir eagerly awaiting the call of the mail carrier. The postmaster had promised to send her a certain package. Presently her maid brought her the letters. She tossed them all aside and took the flat package that they covered. It was addressed to "Santa Claus, Somewhere Near Hevin." She tore it open quickly and Nebby smiled at her from the card she lifted.

His position was so natural that she almost involuntarily replied "No" to the question "Shine?" that seemed to have just fallen from his lips to the bottom of the page, where it was printed.

In the package she found a note.

DEAR SANTA CLAUS:—Ef yer ant tew bizzy I wud ax yer ter cast yer eye over the inkboxed countynance end see if ye kin member it. Please put Nebby—what's his last name he don't know—on yer list so he won't be missed, end send him some presents. I'd like ter hev a muther, ef yer don't mind my tellin' yer what ter bring. There ain't been no woman kist me ner run her fingers throo my hair since muther died. I'll be home all day Kristmas—number eleven Avenue C, room 23. Wrote by Dan fer yours,

P. S.—Don't forget the muther if yer got won convenient. Christmas bells were ringing and Nebby heard them. Boys and girls were shouting merrily in the streets, but he did not join them.

He did not look out of the window. If he had, he could have seen only the roofs and walls of the opposite houses. After he ate his lonely breakfast he had set down on his one chair by the little window. His room was really only a window, and was one of the small divisions of a house rented to bootblacks and newsboys, peddlers and men of roving trade.

He looked in about the middle of the day and asked if "Santy" had come, but did not deride the faith Nebby expressed by his waiting.

Just as the darkness began to fall there came a resounding rap on his door. He thought that a very noisy Santa Claus, but called out bravely: "Come in!"

The door was rudely opened, and there stood a tall coachman, who looked as if he did not relish his errand.

"My lady is here," he said, gruffly, and then stood aside respectfully, revealing Madame Barnauld.

Nebby's face lighted up with welcome; but when he noticed her rich furs and remembered the coachman's rough manner, he feared she had come to arrest him.

"Nebby," he called, "your voice was tender and musical."

"Santa Claus has sent you the present you asked for. He has bidden me to be your mother."

Nebby understood at once, but he protested.

"Santa Claus must hev got mixed. Yer were ment fer some rich orphan."

"No; he sent me to Nebby, No. 11, Avenue C, room 23, and here I am. Will you come?"

Indeed, I'd go anywhere with yer." Then he hesitated.

"Call me mother, Nebuchadnezzar, and I will call you Nebb."

"May I bring my ole friend, mother?" Although he uttered the last word timidly, he had asked the question eagerly, as he laid his hand on the blacking-box that had been his constant companion since his mother died.

"Yes, Nebb, you may."

Seated in the carriage, Madame Barnauld drew the boy to her and ran her fingers through his soft, glossy hair. Of these fingers, with their shining jewels, a critic had once said:

"Her sentences glitter as brilliantly as the diamonds upon the fingers that pen them, and as coldly."

How soft and gentle was the caress these famous fingers gave the boy the woman's heart had adopted, and how fond the kiss she impressed on his lips.

The money realized from the sale of Nebby's pictures he gave to Dan.

Nebb is happy with the mother whom Santa Claus sent him, and her heart runs over with love for him.

Good-Night.

The tales are told, the songs are sung,
The evening romp is over,
And up the nursery steps they climb,
With little buzzing tongues that chime
Like bees among the clover.

Their busy brains and happy hearts
Are full of crowding fancies,
From song and tale and make believe
A wondrous web of dreams they weave
And airy child romances.

The starry night is fair without,
The new moon rises slowly,
The nursery lamp is burning faint,
Each white-robed, like a little saint,
Their prayers they murmur lowly.

Good-night! The tired heads are still
On pillows soft reposing,
The dim and dizzy mists of sleep
About their thoughts begin to creep,
Their drowsy eyes are closing.

Good-night! The tired heads are still
On pillows soft reposing,
The moonbeams pale are streaming,
They drift from daylight's noisy shore,—
"Blow out the light and shut the door,
And leave them to their dreaming."

The Newly Wed—"Edith did the hatefulness thing at our reception, and I'll never forgive her." Cousin Jane—"Why, what could it be?" "She addressed Charles in the most pitying manner, and said, 'I hope you'll be happy.' The way she uttered that word 'hope' was positively unbearable."

MINNIE MAY'S DEPARTMENT.

MY DEAR NIECES,—I wonder what you would like me to write to you about this time! You know when you sit down to write to a friend how you naturally recall her face to your memory before you begin your letter. I found myself trying to do this before I began my letter to you just now, but of course my imagination had to be brought into play to supply your faces, instead of my memory, as I have never seen you all. Still, I feel as though I have had quite a good look at you, and many of my younger nieces seem to look very happy and good-natured and full of fun, and, perhaps, some slight amount of mischief. We are near the beginning of another year, and I feel as if I would like to have a better talk with you about how it is to be spent. I have written you a great many sensible, practical letters about your clothes and your homes, and how to make them and yourselves neat and attractive. But now I want to talk about your *very selves*. Of course it is only natural and right that you should be as happy as possible and full of fun, but there is something more than that. While school life lasts it is sufficient if you do your daily tasks, learn your lessons, and keep from breaking rules, but later on you will find there are wider claims by far; and it is of this time that I would like to talk to you. What sort of women are you going to make of yourselves? Are you just going to be content with getting all the fun you can out of life, and letting the more substantial things go? It is so easy, so very easy, to do this, but it is a great mistake. You could not possibly make a greater. You know how it is at school. I am sure you will admit that you enjoy your holidays more, and, indeed, not your holidays only, but your school days as well, if you work honestly while you should work. I dare say most of you have experienced a miserable regretful feeling on the closing day of a school term, if you have allowed yourself to be idle and thoughtless and your time has been wasted. And, then, on the other hand, what a feeling of honest satisfaction you have when you have worked hard and done your best, and can you not imagine that it will be just the same when you are older and you look back and see that you have wasted your time and not made the most of your opportunities. I can assure you it will be just the same, with this great difference: that you cannot so easily make up for a lost year as you can for a lost term at school. Perhaps you are beginning to think that I would have you work all the time, and do nothing else, but it is not so. Your youth is the play time of your life, and you should be as happy as possible in it, but that need not prevent you from working, too. Work has been called the "greatest of earthly blessings," and you certainly would not be very happy if you had nothing to do. So what I want to say to you is, "Have a purpose in life." Make up your mind that *your life* shall not be spent in a butterfly chase after pleasure, but that you will try to make something of it. Of course, we cannot all expect to do something great or to be something great, but whatever your work in life is, resolve to do it well, and you will ennoble it. There is a homely little rhyme that I have heard somewhere that exactly expresses my meaning. Probably some of you have heard it, but in case you have not I will put it in here:—

"If I were a cobbler, I'd make up my mind
The best of all cobblers to be;
If I were a tinker, no tinker you'd find
Should mend a tin kettle like me."

I am not prepared to defend the grammatical construction of my little favorite, for it certainly leaves something to be desired, but its spirit is fine, and we could not do better than imitate it. So when the question comes to you, "What sort of a woman am I going to be?" make up your mind that your standard shall be high. Some one has spoken of "a woman perfected" as being "Earth's noblest thing," and surely it is worth your while to try even in a slight degree to attain to that. In order to do this you must cultivate unselfishness, for it is the keynote of all true nobility. More than two thousand years ago that wise old philosopher, Plato, said, "The love of self is in reality the source to all men of all offenses," and we cannot begin too soon to fight with this giant. A well-known lady novelist, in one of her books, remarks: "If a man is of no other use in a household, he seldom fails to give the women about him abundant opportunities for self-denial, and thus calls into exercise the noblest part of their nature." This seems a somewhat sweeping assertion as far as the men are concerned; for my part I do not believe that they have a monopoly of the vice of selfishness. But any one who has either brothers or sisters, and who is on the lookout for these "opportunities," will find them every day. So to all of you I would say, "Live much in the lives of others" and be content with doing your best. Probably no very great things will ever be required of you, but I cannot do better than end by reminding you of what George Eliot says about this. She says: "The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life and rest in unvisited tombs." And once more, just a few lines that Mr. Lowell has written of woman's life:—

"In herself she dwelleth not,
Although no home were half so fair;
No simplest duty is forgot;
Life hath no dim and lonely spot
That doth not in her kindness share."