

WHAT CAN SHE DO?

By E. F. Roe.

(Continued.)

"And I can't get any work," said Edith despondingly. "People have got to know how to do things before anybody wants them, and we haven't time to learn."

"Ten dollars won't last long," said Zell

recklessly.

"I will go down to the village and

make further inquiries to-morrow," Zell

continued in a weary tone. "It seems

strange how people stand aloof from

one calls and everybody wants what

we owe them right away. Are there not

any good kind people in Pashon? I

wish we had not offended the Lacey's.

They might have advised and helped us,

but nothing would tempt me to go to

them after treating them as we did."

The next day Edith started on another

unsuccessful expedition to the village,

and while she was gone, Zell went to

the post office to which she had told Van

Dam to direct his reply. She found the

plausible lie we have already placed be-

fore the reader.

At first she experienced a sensation of

anger that he had not complied with her

wish. It was a new experience to have

gentlemen, especially Van Dam, so long

her obsequious slave, think of anything

contrary to her wishes. She also feared

that Edith might be right, and that Van

Dam designed evil against her. She

would not openly admit, even to herself,

that this was her purpose, and yet Edith's

words had been so clear and strong, and

Van Dam's conditions placed her so en-

tirely at his mercy, that she shrank from

him and was fascinated at the same time.

But instead of indignantly casting the

letter from her, she read it again and

again. Her foolish heart pleaded for

him.

"He couldn't be so false to me, so false

to his written word," she said, and the

letter was hidden away, and she passed

into the dangerous stage of irresolution,

where temptation is secretly dwelt upon.

She hesitated and according to the pro-

verb, the woman who does this is lost.

Instead of indignantly casting temptation

from her, she left her course open, to be

decided somewhat by circumstances.

She willfully shut her eyes to the danger,

and tried to believe, and did almost be-

lieve that her lover meant honestly by

her.

And so the days passed, Edith vainly

trying to find something to do, and work-

ing hard in her garden, which at present

brought no return. She was often very

sad and despondent and again very irri-

table. Laura's apathy only deepened,

and she seemed like one not yet awak-

ed from a dream of the past. Zell made

some show of work, but after all most

everything for Hannibal as before, and

when Edith sharply chided her she

laughed recklessly and said—

"What's the use? If we are going to

starve we might as well do so at once and

its over with."

"I won't starve," said Edith, almost

fiercely. "There must be honest work

somewhere in the world for one willing

to do it, and I'm going to find it. At any

rate, I can raise food in my garden before

long."

"I'm afraid I'll starve before your

cabbages and carrots come to maturity,

and we might as well as try and live

on such garbage. Supplies are running

low, and as you say, the money is nearly

gone."

"Yes, and people won't trust us any

more. Two or three declined to let us

visit to-day, and I feel too discouraged

and ashamed to ask any further. For

some people seem afraid of us. I see

persons turn and look after me, and yet

they avoid me. Two or three impudent

clerks tried to make my acquaintance,

but I snubbed them in such a way that

they will let me alone hereafter. I wonder

if any stories could have got around

about us? Country towns are such places

for gossip."

"Have you heard of any scholars?"

said Laura languidly.

"No, not one," was Edith's despondent

answer. "If nothing turns up before, I'll

go to New York next Monday and sell

some more things, and I'll go where I

know this time."

Nothing turned up, and by Sunday

they had nothing in the house save a lit-

tle dry bread, which they ate moistened

with wine and water. Mrs. Allen sighed

and cried all day. Laura had the strange

manner of one waking up to something

unrealized before. Realization began

to take the place of apathy, and her eyes

often sought the face of Edith in a ques-

tioning manner. Finding her alone in

the garden, she said—

"Why, Edith, I'm hungry. I never

remember being hungry before. Is it

possible we have come to this?"

Edith burst into tears, and said broken-

ly—

"Come with me to the arbor."

"I'm sure I'm willing to do anything,"

said Laura pitifully, "but I never real-

ized we would come to this."

"Oh, how can the birds sing?" said

Edith bitterly. "This beautiful spring

weather, with its promise and hopefulness,

seems a mockery. The sun is shining

brilliantly, flowers are budding and

blooming, and all the world seems so

happy, but my heart aches as if it

would burst. I'm hungry, too, and I

know poor old Hannibal is faint, though

he tries to keep up whenever I am

around."

"But Edith, if people knew how we are

starved they would not let us want. Our

old acquaintance in New York, or

our relations here, though not very friend-

ly, would surely keep us."

"Oh, yes, I suppose so for a little while,

but I can't bring myself to ask for

charity, and no one would undertake to

support us. What discourages me most

is that I can't get work that will bring in

money. Between people wishing to have

nothing to do with us, on one hand, and

my ignorance on the other, there seems

no resource. Some of those whom we

owe seem inclined to press us. I'm so

afraid of losing this place and being out

on the street. If I could only get a

chance somewhere, or get time to learn

to do something well!"

"Then after a moment she asked sud-

denly, "Where's Zell?"

"In her room, I think."

"I don't like Zell's manner," said Edith,

after a brief, painful reverie. "It's so

hard and reckless. Something seems on

her mind. She has long fits of abstraction

as if she was thinking of something,

or weighing some plan. Could she have

any communication with that villain,

Van Dam? Oh, that would be the bitter

est drop of all in our cup of sorrow. I

would rather see her dead than that."

CHAPTER XX.

A FALLING STAR.

(Continued.)

Zell slept most of the day. She had

reached that point where she did not

want to think. On hearing Edith say

that she would go to New York on Mon-

day, a sudden and strong temptation as-

sailed her. Impulsive, but not courage-

ous, abounding in energy, but having lit-

tle fortitude, she found the conditions of

her country life growing unendurable.

Van Dam seemed her only refuge, her

only means of escape. She soon lost all

hope of their sustaining themselves by

work in Pashon. Her uncurbed nature

could wait patiently for nothing, and as

the long idle days passed, she doubted,

and then despaired, on any success from

Edith's plans. She harbored Van Dam's

temptation, and the consciousness of do-

ing this hurt her womanly nature, and

her hard, reckless tone and manner was

the natural consequence. Though she

said to herself, and tried to believe,

"I will marry me—he has promised

again and again."

But to satisfy her conscience, which

she could not stifle, and to provide some

excuse for her action, and still more, to

brace the hope she tried to cherish that

he really meant truly by her, she wrote,

"If I will meet you at the boat wharf

evening, will you surely marry me? Promise me on your sacred honor."

Van Dam muttered, with a low laugh,

as he read the note,

"That's a joke, for her to accept

such a proposition as mine, especially after

all that has happened, and still prate of

her sacred honor!"

But he unhesitatingly, promptly, and

with many protestations, assured her that

he would, and at once prepared to carry

out his part of the promise.

"What's the use of half-way lies?" he

said, carelessly.

On Monday Edith again took the early

train, and the valuable she designed dis-

posing of. Zell had said indifferently—

"You may take anything I have left

except my watch and chain."

But Laura had insisted on sending her

watch, saying, "I really wish to do some-

thing, Edith. I've left all the burden on

you too long."

Mrs. Allen sighed, and said, "Take

anything you please."

So Edith carried away with her the

means of fighting the wolf, hunger, from

their doors a little longer. But if she had

known that a more cruel enemy would

despoil her home in her absence, she

would have starved than gone.

Laura was reading to her mother when

Zell put her head in at the door, saying—

"I am going for a short walk, and will

be back soon."

She hastened to the office at which she

told Van Dam to address her, and found

his reply. With feverish cheeks, and eyes

in which glowed excitement rather than

happiness, she read it as soon as alone on

the road, and returned as quickly as

possible. Her mind was in a wild tumult,

but she would not allow herself one con-

cented thought. She spent most of the

day in her room preparing for her fight.

But when she came down to see Hannibal

about their meagre lunch, he said it some-

times seemed as if he were not there.

"Oh, Miss Zell, how burnin' red your

cheeks be! You've got a ragin' fever, sure

'nuff. Go and lie right straight down,

and I'll see to every ting. I've been to

de village and got some tea. A man give

it to me as a sample, and I telled him

we's like our tea mighty strong, so you'll

all have a cup of tea to-day, and to-night

Miss Edith'll come back with a heap of

money."

"Poor old Hannibal," said Zell, with a

sudden rush of tenderness. "I wish I

were as good as you are."

"I've been you, Miss Zell, I ain't good,"

he said, with a hearty laugh. "But some-

times I feel that the Lord will bless me

when I steal for you all."

"Oh, Hannibal, I wish I was dead and

out of the way! Then there would be one

less to provide for."

"Dead and out of de way!" said Han-

nibal, half indignantly, "dat's jest how

to get into de way. I'd be afeard of

your spook whenever I was alone. I

had no comfort in New York arter Miss

Allen died, and was mighty glad to get