

"NORA'S LITTLE LAD"

"There is one thing sure, I must find work by this day week or else the first of the month will see me without a dollar or a notion where to get it."

Nora McDonald, having counted over her small store of money, replaced all but a few silver coins in the little netted purse she wore suspended from her neck, and thrust the purse into her blouse.

As she sat on her trunk in the attic of a cheap New York boarding-house, she looked indeed forlorn and discouraged. It was too early in the season for her to hope to obtain steady employment.

The families who had patronized her in the past were still away in the Adirondacks or Catskills, or at their country homes. They would not require the service of a seamstress for some time yet, and meanwhile what should she do?

Although Nora had for years earned her bread by "going out sewing," the monotonous stitching of the days away had not broken down her health or stolen all the color from a face that had been glowing as a rose of the Irish hedgerows when for the love of the dear ones at home, she became a voluntary exile from Erin and landed at New York in the spring of 1886.

Ella, the American wife of her brother Tom, now called her an old maid and even Jim, the youngest brother, often joked her, saying she was "getting too old to think of taking up with a husband." Yet Nora was only thirty-five, and better-looking than either Ella or Jim's wife had ever been.

But Nora's part in life had been to make pretty frocks and furberlows for others and to be satisfied with the plainest attire for herself, and since "fine feathers make fine birds," the world over, few people looked twice at the modest seamstress as she hurried through the streets; while to the majority of her customers she was merely the automaton who worked the sewing-machine.

Was she much more to her own family she sometimes wondered, a trifle bitterly, of late? For to Nora had come the moment of the turn of affection's tide, when, beneath the surface of life's sea, many tributes to the depths of selfishness in others. Would the tide ebb to its most distant margin, leaving her nature hard and dry for all the future? Or would it roll in again in a great wave of generosity and love, and renewed faith in humankind?

On coming to America, Nora had obtained a situation in a wealthy family. By her earnings she had brought out Tom, then Jim, and last of all Nannie, who, poor girl, promptly caught a cold and lived only a year. The dear mother was still at home with Nell, who held the reins of a farm.

Nora wanted her to come to America, but the good soul could not make up her mind to leave her first-born and his children, and, thanks be to God, she and Nell's wife got on well together.

"Perhaps it was for the best that she did not come," Nora acknowledged to herself this afternoon, and yet now her heart went out to the old Irish mother with more intensity of longing than for many a day.

"Eighteen years have passed since I laid eyes on her face or felt her loving arms about me," she said aloud, with a sob. "And how many times have I saved up the price of my passage home, only to see it melt away, and my hopes with it! Now I have hardly enough to pay for a lodging here. I'll never see mother nor Ireland again; I may as well resign myself to the thought."

The story of Ella's life during these eighteen years is soon told. Tom was no sooner earning a time than he was a contractor that he married a pretty shop girl. She made a shiftless wife, but was blessed with "four as fine children as you would find in all America," Tom was wont to declare, with a father's pride.

Because Ella loved Tom and the children, Nora forgave her much, including her ambitions, which were not of the practical sort; for she never rested until Tom got a place as porter in a wholesale house. As he was much more interested, however, in horses and gravel and men than in his new occupation, he did not succeed, but lost his position. The family was saved from absolute want by the generous gift of his sister's savings.

Then, again, Ella was ashamed to have a sister-in-law "living out," so Tom persuaded Nora to make her home with them and take sewing by the day. It did not pay so well, but was a sacrifice to family pride. When Nannie pined away, it was Nora who paid the hospital bill and the undertaker's fee. Tom, with his family to support, could spare nothing toward defraying these expenses.

Jim had fallen in love with a "slip of a colleen" on the ship over, and their wedding followed at the next Christmas; so he never had a chance to make much of Nora. She was looked upon as the "best off" of them all, having no one depending upon her, they said; and thus when she gave of a free hand during various sieges of illness among Tom's children, and helped Jim when he was out of work, they regarded her generosity as a matter of course.

But now, Tom, having gone back to the employment of the contractor, was a foreman; his two boys and older girl had positions. Thus it happened that, a few weeks before Nora sat pondering what she should do, Ella had signed to her sister-in-law that their home was overcrowded, "the young people wanted more space wherein to entertain their friends of an evening," et cetera.

cheerily enough now, and thus before long came to Herald Square, where Broadway and Sixth Avenue cross each other, and the trains of the elevated railroad thunder by overhead. The clock on the handsome facade of the Herald building pointed to 4 P.M. as she made her way over the network of trolley tracks to the newspaper office, where a clerk wrote up her advertisement, for which she paid with the silver she had set aside for the purpose.

After she came out and crossed the street again she looked back at the uptown office of the great daily—the splendid pile of cream-tinted stone, substantial, yet so light in architecture as to suggest a semiblancé to exquisitely wrought ivory. Nora did not know it to be a modern example of the Italian Renaissance; she had never heard of the Renaissance; but she recognized the beauty of the rich establishment and the gleaming columns of polished marble and stood for a second admiring the ornamental traceries that entwined themselves in garlands of sculptured flowers about the arches of the colonnade.

As she turned away, she found herself inadvertently on Broadway. She must get back to the avenue, or else go far out of her route toward her attic room. It was while she paused, looking for an opportunity to thread her way through the vortex of noise and traffic that marks the Square, that the great moment of her life came to her—the moment that was also perilously near to being her last.

As she waited for a break in the apparently endless line of surface cars, wagons, automobiles and carriages rattling, whirring or clanging past, a lady, who led by the hand a little five-year-old lad, separated herself from the ever-changing, rainbow hued throng on the pavement before Macy's great department store, on the western side of the Square, and started across toward Broadway. Nora's eyes were attracted to them at once. The lady was young and pretty; the child, a manly little fellow with sunny curls. In his white sailor suit and natty cap he made a picture such as Sargents love to paint.

"Jim's youngest would look as well if he were dressed in the height of the style, too, reflected Nora, proudly, yet she admired the boy because of his sturdiness, for he was in no wise disconcerted by the confusion that encompassed him.

In safety the two reached the centre of the Square and the shelter of one of the posts of the elevated road. Then the mother hesitated, but, as a clear space opened before them, the child dashed onward. Before he could reach the sidewalk, however, a handsome can, driven rapidly, swung round the corner of Thirty-third street—the child stumbled and fell, a mother's agonized scream rose above the din of traffic, and at the same moment a woman standing on the curbstone sprang forward, snatched the little lad literally from under the horse's hoofs, and sank backward on the pavement with the child clasped in her arms.

For a minute that great stream of traffic ceased to flow. The driver of the hansom had driven off, without slackening his speed; but several among the people on the sidewalk ran out to raise the victim of the accident. Some one telephoned for an ambulance, and the choice of two or three luxurious equipages was offered to convey the lady and her boy to their home.

Without waiting for the ambulance, kind hands had lifted Nora into a splendid automobile; and she lay back against its soft cushions apparently lifeless.

"She is dead!" sobbed the child's mother, distractedly.

"No, madam; but she was undoubtedly struck by the horse's hoofs," answered a surgeon who had appeared out of the crowd. "The extent of her injuries cannot be ascertained at present."

In a cheerful room of the New York Hospital Nora awakened. It was night, and she had a terrible pain in her side. She did not know where she was. A white-capped nurse held a drink of something cool and pleasant to her lips; and again she lost consciousness, but this time it was in the sleep wooed by an anodyne.

Not until the next morning did the memory of that awful moment in the Square come back to her. She could hardly move on her narrow cot, and did not know whether she was seriously injured or not; yet, as she plucked the nurse by the sleeve, her thought was not for herself.

"Tell me," she pleaded, eagerly—"tell me about the little lad!" The attendant understood.

"Oh, he is all right!" she said. Nora's eyes searched her face with a stern inquiry.

"It is not deceiving me you are out of kindness," she faltered.

"No, no!" she got off without a scratch. And you are not badly hurt, only stiff and bruised. You will be out in a few days."

Nora breathed a sigh of happiness and her lips moved in prayer. Since God had given back her life, there must be something left for her to do in the world. Yet, as she lay there helpless, she acknowledged to herself that the future promised her less even than on the previous day; for then she had at least her health and strength.

She grimly wondered if any answers to the advertisement were waiting for her at the Herald office; and if so, what the writers would think when the seamstress they condescended to engage did not appear at the specified time. And from thinking of this she began to worry about the bill at the hospital. When should she be able to pay it?

Her glance, following him, fell upon his mother, who had paused in the doorway—as pretty a picture as one would wish to look upon, in her smart costume of dark silk and flower-wreathed hat.

The lady hastened forward almost as impulsively as the child had done. "Nora," she exclaimed—"how can I ever show my gratitude for your heroism! You rescued my little son from almost certain death. Only a mother's prayers can thank you."

"Taking Nora's hands between her own, she pressed them to her heart, and, sending down, kissed her forehead. Then, accepting the chair the nurse offered, she drew it nearer to the cot, beside which Harold stood as if on guard. He had taken possession of Nora, and evidently considered that she belonged to his circle of "dear ones."

The young mother smiled, though her eyes grew dim, as the moment of peril arose again before her mental vision. She was a beautiful woman and had not only the charm and grace of her breeding, but the quality of distinction that denotes assured social position. Harold's resemblance to hers was marked, Nora thought; but he had an air of decision, probably inherited from his father.

"You will be able to leave here in a week, Nora, the surgeon said; and I have made sure that you shall have the best of care," continued the lady, with earnestness. "It is certainly the best I can do for one to whom I am so greatly indebted."

"Nora could scarcely speak. "You are kind to make so much of what I did, ma'am," she faltered at last. "But, indeed, any one would have done the same. The child was under the horse's feet, and I just snatched him up. I hardly know what I was doing, and there was nothing so brave about it, because I did not think of danger to myself at all. It was God who saved the boy."

"Yes, through you. Ah, Nora, it is the habit of sacrifice, of unselfishness, that in a sudden emergency makes the hero or heroine," said Mrs. Van Ruyter, in voice that trembled with emotion. "But now tell me, is there not some special way I can requite your service to me?"

Nora was silent. Presently an idea occurred to her.

"Perhaps, ma'am, when I am out again you will give me some sewing to do for you," she stammered, as her gaze travelled over her visitor's dainty goods. "I am a seamstress, and had just put in the Herald an advertisement for work when—when Mrs. Van Ruyter laughed merrily.

"Perhaps we could find something better for you than that—" she began. But the little lad broke in:

"Why, you are coming to live with us, Nora, if you will! Father says you are to have a home with us, as long as you live—or until you get married—and you are to do nothing at all. Oh, mother and I have great plans for you!"

Nora turned her wandering eyes to the lady.

"My friend, you shall have every comfort in life that my husband or I can assure to you," said Mrs. Van Ruyter, feelingly. "What would we have in the world to be us if our only child had been taken away by so dreadful an accident! But you must have some wish that you long to see realized? If you could have your heart's desire, what would it be?"

Nora turned away her head and burst into tears.

"Madam, you are very good," she sobbed; "yet all you have offered me would not make me so happy as to see my mother—to go back to Ireland to the cabin where I was born."

Little Harold, in great distress, caught Nora's hands and drew them down from her face.

The pretty young mother beamed with delight.

"Then, dear woman, hurry and get well; for your passage to Ireland shall be engaged to-day," she said. "Stay as long as you choose with your mother, but when you return we want you to come to us. You need take no thought for the future; we have arranged that you shall be independent."

Before Nora could find words to express her thanks, mother and child were gone for the day.

A CRUMB FROM CROESUS

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Behold a tall young man of the blond type, smooth in appearance, except for certain lines of care discernible in his countenance. Behold also a girl with hazel eyes and red brown hair. They are standing beside a table in a room which the experienced observer will instantly recognize as the parlor of a small flat in a big city.

The young man has cleared a space on the table and has dropped several books on the floor. He is unrolling some large sheets of paper which bear architectural drawings.

"Constance," he says, "this means everything to us. It means so much indeed that I didn't dare tell you about it. I wouldn't tell you now if I could help it, because if anything goes wrong you will be so disappointed."

"You should have no secrets from me," said she.

"When you have taken me for better or worse I won't," he responded, "but while we're only engaged it is not my duty to make you unhappy. Cheer up. The time is coming when you will have a right to know the worst. It is coming, my dear, these plans and if you yourself continue to view the humblest of your slaves with that favor which has already exalted him immeasurably above his deserts. In short, beloved, we can afford to get married, whereas at present we cannot even afford to be single. At least I can't. But if I can get this job to do for Eliot Robinson, who is not only a human pocketbook of conspicuous fatness, but a society bellwether as well, my bark will be upon the tide which taken at its flood leads on to fortune, as Mr. Shakespeare says. An job, big or little, that is done for him will bring clients."

She graciously permitted the humblest of her slaves to kiss her hand. "How did you hear of this?" she inquired.

"I used to know Eliot Robinson, Jr., when we both were residents of a little democracy in the midst of this vast plutocracy—in brief, when we were in college. I've met him occasionally at our club, and about three weeks ago he told me what his lawyer was going to do, and so I drew some plans upon a chance. E. Robinson, Jr., inspected them at my office, liked them and told his father about them. Robinson senior is at his country house, laid up with what his son calls a 'charley horse.' Robinson junior promised to take me out there next week, but instead I received a letter to-day from the old gentleman himself, asking me to come to-morrow. His selection of Thanksgiving day for this purpose is somewhat unusual, but will be eminently appropriate if he accepts the plans. If he doesn't no mere proclamation by the President can make it a day of thanksgiving for me. And at the best I shall have missed dining with your mother and you."

The young architect awoke the next morning with the impression that he had failed to hear the gong of his alarm clock. A glance, however, reassured him. The hands upon the dial indicated that he had anticipated the summons by sixty seconds. It was twenty-nine minutes past seven. He began to prepare for his bath in a leisurely manner. There was plenty of time. The train which he must take left at nine.

He fell to wondering what chance he had to win with his drawings and whether others would compete. He saw a competitor in every architect whose name he could remember. He perceived that it was absurd for him to cherish any hope.

For a structure subsidiary to Mr. Robinson's country house and necessarily harmonious in style Mr. Robinson would undoubtedly consult the architect of the larger building. He trembled at this notion for almost a minute before he remembered having disposed of it weeks before by discovering that the man was dead.

By this time Underhill was wide awake. Painful terrors vanished, and a real one attacked him suddenly and sharply. Why did not the alarm ring? He rushed from his bath into his bedroom. The hands of the clock had not moved. He had forgotten to wind it before going to bed, and it had run down. His watch revealed the appalling fact that he had only half an hour to reach the railroad station, twenty blocks away. This meant no breakfast, and, in fact, it came near meaning no train, for a wagon broke down ahead of the trolley car in which Underhill was riding, and he was forced to make the latter part of the way afoot.

It was a hot race not only against time, but against a human competitor. This was a somewhat effeminate young man whom Underhill had noted on the car because he consulted a railroad timetable with visible anxiety and because he carried a thin portfolio which looked as if it might contain architectural drawings. Obviously this man was trying to catch the nine o'clock train, and when he consulted the timetable he seemed to have his eye on Chesterton, the station where the sumptuous equipages of Eliot Robinson meet that gentleman's guests from the city.

When the car's course was checked by the broken wagon the two men seized their watches with equal impatience, and when Underhill started to try his luck about the other peripatetic followed. Before they had gone a block a race had begun and each was pushing the other to a faster pace.

An insane desire to win the race took possession of Underhill's mind. It seemed to him as if the fate of his enterprise depended upon a victory. He was contesting for a great prize. The words which he had spoken to Constance on the previous evening rang in his ears, "It means everything to us."

There is a side entrance from the street directly to the train shed, but no one is allowed to go in that way unless he has a ticket. Underhill had an unused portion of a mileage book which would take him through. Had the other fellow anything? Did he?

Nora laughed, though her face flushed rosy as when she was a girl.

"I'll write and thank the good man for the honor he would pay me," she said. "But I love my liberty too well to take a husband at this late date, and the greatest happiness in life to me will be to go home to see the dear old mother." Mary Catherine Crowley in The Ave Maria.

Table with 4 columns: DAY OF MONTH, DAY OF WEEK, COLOR OF VESTMENTS, and text of the day's events. Includes dates for December 1st to 31st, such as 'S. Didacus', 'Vesper Hymn', 'S. Stanislas Kostka', etc.

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a little out of sorts. What's the matter?" "I haven't had any breakfast," answered Underhill gloomily. "Well, well, I'll fix that." Got your drawings? he added and took them out of Underhill's hand. "Pretty good, eh, Archer?" Archer examined the drawings with critical attention, making the most flattering comments and ending by pronouncing the work "admirable, admirable, sir. No better design could be desired."

Underhill bowed in assent, and he scanned his rival warily. Aside from an attractive personal appearance Mr. Archer was conspicuous chiefly for the serene confidence which visibly radiated from him. Here was a man accustomed to success, one of those easy winners who are spared the pain of anxiety. A sudden hostility flamed in Underhill's breast, he regretted having passed Archer through the gate. This fellow could afford to lose, and he himself could not.