

come to "The King's Head." It's about the respectablest house in the place; and I'm her uncle, and will look after her.'

'Yes, I know,' said Mrs. Joye, at length, 'and we've bin talking lately about whether Nancy should take a situation or not. Times isn't very good with us, and though I'm very glad of her help in my little dairy, I could manage to do without her. It's bin a struggle since my old man died, and it seems sometimes as if we ain't got a chance to put anything by for a rainy day, and that's what we ought to be doing whilst we're strong and well. But I hadn't no thought of anything for Nancy 'cept a nice place as house-maid, or summat like that. And I 'spect you'd want her in the bar?'

'Jest that. She's a good lookin' girl, and seems to me jest cut out for it. I've got two barmaids already, besides a man, but them gels couldn't hold a candle to our Nancy. And she's spry, too, and would soon get into the way of things.'

Mrs. Joye gazed into the fire and thought slowly for a minute or two, with but little imagination. She thought of the one or two village public-houses that she was familiar with, kept by decent country people who saw no harm in it. Then she thought vaguely of her brother's guardianship of Nancy, and of the pounds that she would return home with after a short period of service.

'Well,' she said, at last, 'I bain't teetotal, but I don't very much like the idea of public-houses for women. I shouldn't like no harm to come to my Nancy, nor to anybody else's lass. But there is gels as is barmaids, and I s'pose as they gets no harm. And if so be as you'll look after Nancy, and see no mischief happens to her, I don't mind letting her go for three or four weeks, if she've a mind to go. What d'ye say, Nancy?'

Nancy colored up and smiled, and said she didn't know. She was thinking longingly of the 'pounds,' but she had more imagination than her mother, and she thought of other things. She had never liked going to the neighboring inn to fetch beer for her parents, who were very moderate people. She didn't like the smell of the place, and she was very frightened of drunken men. She knew some families of drunken men, and the privations and miseries that they suffered, and she had often heard poor women say that they wished all the public-houses could be burned down. She had little qualms about the proposal, and being pressed by her uncle for an opinion, she presently said:—

'I s'pose it 'ud be a quiet, decent place, Uncle; no drunken men making rows, or anything of that sort? I should be frightened.'

'That you wouldn't, my dear, with me there, and my right-hand man. He's a rare good chucker-out. But things'll be all right, take my word for it, and you can be very useful to me, and me to you. And I'll give you a smart new frock for a Christmas present. Folks is a bit smarter in towns than they be in the country, you know, and my niece shan't be behind any of 'em in looking spley, I can tell ye. So shall we consider that a job done, for you to come to me the beginning of next week, to stay three weeks or a month over Christmas?'

'Shall I, mother?' said Nancy, more gravely, and still with a heightened color.

'Yes, I think you might try it,' said Mrs. Joye.

'Very well; then I'll slip over with the trap for her, and that'll save her the three mile walk to the station. It allays seems to me not wuth while to take a three mile walk for a ten miles railway journey.'

'If that's settled jest turn ye round and get a cup o' tea,' said Mrs. Joye. 'And make a good meal afore ye turn out again. Won't ye take the trap round to the back, and give the mare a bite?'

Uncle Sam acted on the suggestion, and when he returned to the well-spread teatable, the talk went on about his business, his money-making, the good time that Christmas was for trade, and everything was painted in a rosy light.

When he was muffled up again in his great-coat, he chucked Nancy under the chin, and said, 'We'll make a woman of you before you come back, Nancy! I'll be bound you'll get over your shyness before long, and able to stand up for yourself bold like. There's nothing like rubbing up against other people for giving you a bit of courage. You'll see plenty of life in our place, I can tell ye.'

'You'll ask yer wife to look after her health, won't ye, Sam? She ain't over strong, though she's healthy, and I shouldn't like her to ketch bad colds, or anything.'

'Oh, we'll look after her, never fear,' said Uncle Sam, as he drew on his gloves; and the next minute he was off, leaving mother and daughter to their thoughts.

During the next few days, the thoughts of Nancy were many and varied. Sometimes she felt gay at the thought of having a new experience, and again she felt frightened at the thought of having to do with a lot of strange people, and of being actually an inmate of a public-house, and serving! At such moments she felt inclined to give up all thought of going, but the bait allured her, and she had bright visions of what she could do for her mother and herself with those pounds of which her uncle had spoken.

She had no sister to talk to on the subject, and only one brother, who went out early in the mornings to his work, and was not inclined to talk when he came home at night. However, he said enough on this subject to let his mother and Nancy know that he did not approve of the step that Nancy was taking. And as a final word he said, 'Now see, Nancy, that you don't touch the drink you're selling. You've never bin used to it at home; don't get used to it there.'

On the morning of her going he wished her goodbye, and said, 'I'd rather you'd started after Christmas, Nancy. Mother and me'll have a lonesome time like.'

'Oh no, you won't, Steve,' said Nancy, in a comforting tone. 'You must get one of your friends to tea, and try to make mother a bit lively.'

Nancy was quite in a tremor when her uncle appeared to take her away, and as she wished her mother good-bye, the tears would hardly keep back. Her little paper-covered trunk was safely stowed at the back of the trap, and away they went. She had taken this journey once before since her uncle had been landlord of 'The King's Head,' but on that occasion she and her mother had gone as guests to spend a summer afternoon with the uncle and aunt, and they had had tea in a beautiful parlor, quite away from the bar with its sights and sounds and smells.

But now on her arrival, as soon as tea was over, she was taken into the bar and introduced to Miss Long and Miss Hurst, two good-looking young women who had completely spoiled themselves by their get-up, which was of a sort that almost staggered Nancy, and made her feel the most insignificant little dowdy that ever was. Their dresses were gay and much furbelowed, open

at the neck, and with elbow sleeves. Their heads were a big mass of fringe, and they wore much jewellery of sparkling crystals. Nancy instinctively shrank from them.

'Now, young ladies,' said Uncle Sam, 'I have brought my niece to help you, and you must teach her how to do it. You won't have much chance to-night, I know, so she must just sit and watch you; and to-morrow morning, when you are slack you must teach her how to manage everything. She will soon pick it up, I know.'

So Nancy sat and watched, and during the next few hours there passed before her eyes a panorama the like of which she had never imagined. The barman in his shirt sleeves, and the two barmaids, were kept going at express speed all the time, serving out liquor of every licensed description to all sorts and conditions of men, women and children. Young, well-dressed men and women came together for their glass of beer, or their nip of spirits. Young men with the mark of the beast on their poor, spoiled faces, came to linger over their glasses, and exchange talk with the barmaids that made Nancy flush all over. Children of all ages come with nondescript vessels, ranging from a sound bottle to jugs, and cups, and pots, broken and unbroken—anything in which drink could possibly be carried away.

Women with babies in their arms came for their pennyworths of beer, or gin, which they shared with the wretched infants in some cases. The number and variety of ever-changing customers were bewildering, and baffled description. On every one there was a something that differentiated them from the ordinary sane, wholesome, country people that Nancy had been accustomed to meet with, a subtle sort of indication of their being victims to forces that were dragging them down to destruction.

Nancy could not have defined all this, but she felt it through and through as she sat and watched these people, and heard their money jingling into the tills in a continuous stream, and saw them swallow the liquor that was working out their destruction. What were they getting for their money? she thought. And why should they be spending it thus, when it was evident that for the most part they needed it for other things—for clothes, and shoes, and food? Why were little children sent to such a place, where blasphemous and foul language was the rule and not the exception?

Then she wondered in a dazed sort of way how Miss Long and Miss Hurst managed to take everything as such a matter of course, handing the people their drink as if they were conferring a blessing, cracking jokes with the half-tipsy men, and sometimes taking sips with them, and pretending to make arrangements to meet them for a walk, or to go to the theatre, just to please them, as they afterwards told Nancy, and keep them in a good humor. Very good saleswomen, who had learned their miserable business well!

Nancy presently grew sick and weary of it all, and went away to her aunt to ask if she would let her go to bed early, as she did not feel very well. Mrs. Hazell was very willing and kind, and hoped she would be all right in the morning.

In her own little room Nancy cried as if her heart would break, and sleep was far from her. The rumble and roar of traffic outside, the confused distant murmur of the bar below, kept her on the strain, and, by-and-by, when that murmur developed in to shouts and screams, which were soon heard more plainly in the street below, Nancy sup-