

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Lichtenberg Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lenz Hambrecht Doyle Gjellerup
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Hanrieder Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma Verne Hägele Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer Bebel Proust
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Melville Grimm Jerome Rilke George
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy
Storm Casanova Lessing Langbein Gilm Gryphius
Chamberlain Schiller Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates
Brentano Strachwitz Katharina II. von Rußland Bellamy Schilling Kralik Gibbon Tschchow
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Wilde Gleim Vulpius
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Morgenstern Goedicke
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Kleist Mörike Musil
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo Moltke
Nestroy Marie de France
Nietzsche Nansen Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht Ringelnatz
Marx Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz
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Martha By-the-Day

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Imprint

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CHAPTER I

If you are one of the favored few, privileged to ride in chaises, you may find the combination of Broadway during the evening rush-hour, in a late November storm, stimulating – you may, that is, provided you have a reliable driver. If, contrariwise, you happen to be of the class whose fate it is to travel in public conveyances (and lucky if you have the price!) and the car, say, won't stop for you – why –

Claire Lang had been standing in the drenching wet at the street-crossing for fully ten minutes. The badgering crowd had been shouldering her one way, pushing her the other, until, being a stranger and not very big, she had become so bewildered that she lost her head completely, and, with the blind impulse of a hen with paresis, darted straight out, in amidst the crush of traffic, with all the chances strong in favor of her being instantly trampled under foot, or ground under wheel, and never a one to know how it had happened.

An instant, and she was back again in her old place upon the curbstone. Something like the firm iron grip of a steam-derrick had fastened on her person, hoisted her neatly up, and set her as precisely down, exactly where she had started from.

It took her a full second to realize what had happened. Then, quick as a flash, anger flamed up in her pale cheeks, blazed in her tired eyes. For, of course, this was an instance of "insult" described by "the family at home" as common to the experience of unprotected girls in New York City. She groped about in her mind for the formula to be applied in such cases, as recommended by Aunt Amelia. "Sir, you are no gentleman! If you were a gentleman, you would not offer an affront to a young, defenseless girl who –" The rest eluded her; she could not recall it, try as she would. In desperate resolve to do her duty anyway, she tilted back her umbrella, whereat a fine stream of water poured from the tip directly over her upturned face, and trickled cheerily down the bridge of her short nose.

"Sir—" she shouted resolutely, and then she stopped, for, plainly, her oration was, in the premises, a misfit—the person beside her—the one of the mortal effrontery and immortal grip, being a—woman. A woman of masculine proportions, towering, deep-chested, large-limbed, but with a face which belied all these, for in it her sex shone forth in a motherliness unmistakable, as if the world at large were her family, and it was her business to see that it was generously provided for, along the pleasantest possible lines for all concerned.

"What car?" the woman trumpeted, gazing down serenely into Claire's little wet, anxious, upturned face at her elbow.

"Columbus Avenue."

The stranger nodded, peering down the glistening, wet way, as if she were a skipper sighting a ship.

"My car, too! First's Lexin'ton—next Broadway—then—here's ours!" Again that derrick-grip, and they stood in the heart of the maelstrom, but apparently perfectly safe, unassailable.

"They won't stop," Claire wailed plaintively. "I've been waiting for ages. The car'll go by! You see if it won't!"

It did, indeed, seem on the point of sliding past, as all the rest had done, but of a sudden the motorman vehemently shut off his power, and put on his brake. By some hidden, mysterious force that was in her, or the mere commanding dimensions of her frame, Claire's companion had brought him to a halt.

She lifted her charge gently up on to the step, pausing herself, before she should mount the platform, to close the girl's umbrella.

"Step lively! Step lively!" the conductor urged insistently, reaching for his signal-strap.

The retort came calmly, deliberately, but with perfect good nature. "Not on your life, young man. I been steppin' lively all day, an' for so long's it's goin' to take this car to get to One-hundred-an'-sixteenth Street, my time ain't worth no more'n a settin' hen's."

The conductor grinned in spite of himself. "Well, mine *is*," he declared, while with an authoritative finger he indicated the box into which Claire was to drop her fare.

"So all the other roosters think," the woman let fall with a tolerant smile, while she diligently searched in her shabby purse for five cents.

Claire, in the doorway, lingered.

"Step right along in, my dear! Don't wait for me," her friend advised, closing her teeth on a dime, as she still pursued an elusive nickel. "Step right along in, and sit down anywheres, an' if there ain't nowheres to sit, why, just take a waltz-step or two in the direction o' some of them elegant gen'lemen's feet, occupyin' the places meant for ladies, an' if they don't get up for love of *you*, they'll get up for love of their shins."

Still the girl did not pass on.

"Fare, please!" There was a decided touch of asperity in the conductor's tone. He glared at Claire almost menacingly.

Her lip trembled, the quick tears sprang to her eyes. She hesitated, swallowed hard, and then brought it out with a piteous gulp.

"I *had* my fare—'twas in my glove. It must have slipped out. It's gone—lost—and—"

A tug at the signal-strap was the conductor's only comment. He was stopping the car to put her off, but before he could carry out his purpose the woman had dropped her dime into the box with a sounding click.

"Fare for two!" she said, "an' if I had time, an' a place to sit, I'd turn you over acrost my knee, an' give you two, for fair, young man, for the sake of your mother who didn't learn you better manners when you was a boy!" With which she laid a kind hand upon Claire's heaving shoulder, and impelled her gently into the body of the car, already full to overflowing.

For a few moments the girl had a hard struggle to control her rising sobs, but happily no one saw her working face and twitching lips, for her companion had planted herself like a great bulwark between her and the world, shutting her off, walling her 'round. Then, suddenly, she found herself placed in a hurriedly vacated seat, from which she could look up into the benevolent face inclined

toward her, and say, without too much danger of breaking down in the effort:

"I really *did* have it—the money, you know. Truly, I'm not a—"

"O, pooh! Don't you worry your head over a little thing like that. Such accidents is liable to occur in the best-reggerlated fam'lies. They do in mine, shoor!"

"But, you see," quavered the uncertain voice, "I haven't any more. That's all I had, so I can't pay you back, and—"

It was curious, but just here another passenger hastily rose, vacating the seat next Claire's, and leaving it free, whereat her companion compressed her bulky frame into it with a sigh, as of well-earned rest, and remarked comfortably, "*Now* we can talk. You was sayin'—what was it? About that change, you know. It was all you had. You mean *by* you, of course."

Claire's pale, pinched face flushed hotly. "No, I don't," she confessed, without lifting her downcast eyes.

Her companion appeared to ponder this for a moment, then quite abruptly she let it drop.

"My name's Slawson," she observed. "Martha Slawson. I go out by the day. Laundry-work, housecleaning, general chores. I got a husband an' four children, to say nothing of a mother-in-law who lives with us, an' keeps an eye on things while me an' Sammy (that's Mr. Slawson) is out workin', an' lucky if it's an eye itself, for it's not a hand, I can tell you that. What's your name, if I may make so bold?"

"Claire Lang. My people live in Grand Rapids—where the furniture and carpet-sweepers come from," with a wistful, faint little attempt at a smile. "My father was judge of the Supreme Court, but he had losses, and then he died, and there wasn't much of anything left, and so—"

"You come to New York to make your everlastin' fortune, an' you—"

Claire Lang shook her head, completing the unfinished sentence. "No, I haven't made it, that is, not yet. But I'm not discouraged. I don't mean to give up. Things look pretty dark just now, but I'm not

going to let that discourage me—No, indeed! I'm going to be brave and courageous, and never say die, even if—even if—"

"Turn 'round, an' pertend you're lookin' out of the winder," suggested Mrs. Slawson confidentially. "The way folks stare, you'd think the world was full of nothin' but laughin' hyeenyas. Dontcher care, my dear! Well for some of 'em, if they could shed an honest tear or two themselves, oncet in a while, instead of bein' that brazen; 'twouldn't be water at all, but Putzes Pomady it'd take to make an impression on 'em, an' don't you forget it. There! That's right! Now, no one can observe what's occurin' in your face, an' I can talk straight into your ear, see? What I was goin' to say *is*, that bein' a mother myself an' havin' children of my own to look out for, I couldn't recommend any lady, let alone one so young an' pretty as you, to take up with strangers, here in New York City, be they male or be they female. No, certainly not! But in this case, you can take it from me, I'm O.K. I can give the highest references. I worked for the best fam'lies in this town, ever since I was a child. You needn't be a mite afraid. I'm just a plain mother of a fam'ly an', believe *me*, you can trust me as you would trust one of your own relations, though I do say it as shouldn't, knowin' how queer *own relations* can be and *is*, when put to it at times. So, if you happen to be in a hole, my dear, without friends or such things in the city, you feel free to turn to, or if you seem to stand in need of a word of advice, or—anything else, why, dontcher hesitate a minute. It'd be a pretty deep hole Martha Slawson couldn't see over the edge of, be sure of that, even if she did have to stand on her toes to do it. Holes is my specialty, havin' been in an' out, as you might say, all my life—particularly *in*."

Judicious or not, Claire told her story. It was not a long one. Just the everyday experience of a young girl coming to a strange city, without influence, friends, or money, expecting to make her way, and finding that way beset with difficulties, blocked by obstacles.

"I've done everything I could think of, honestly I have," she concluded apologetically. "I began by trying for big things; art-work in editorial offices (everybody liked my art-work in Grand Rapids!). But 'twas no use. Then I took up commercial drawing. I got what looked like a good job, but the man gave me one week's pay, and that's all I could ever collect, though I worked for him over a month.

Then I tried real estate. One firm told me about a woman selling for them who cleared, oh, I don't know how-much-a-week, in commissions. Something queer must be the matter with me, I guess, for I never got rid of a single lot, though I walked my feet off. I've tried writing ads., and I've directed envelopes. I've read the Wants columns, till it seems as if everybody in the world was looking for a *job*. But I can't get anything to do. I guess God doesn't mean me to die of starvation, for you wouldn't believe how little I've had to eat all summer and fall, and yet I'm almost as strong and hearty as ever. But lately I haven't been able to make any money at all, not five cents, so I couldn't pay my board, and they—they told me at the house where I live, that I'd have to square up to-night, or I couldn't keep my room any longer. They took my trunk a week ago. I haven't had anything to wear except these clothes I have on, since, and they're pretty wet now—and—and—I've nowhere to go, and it *is* pouring so hard, and I should have been put off the car if you hadn't—"

Mrs. Slawson checked the labored flow with a hand upon the girl's knee.

"Where did you say your boardin'-house is?" she inquired abruptly.

"Ninety-fifth Street—West—Two-hundred-and-eighty-five-and-a-half."

"Good gracious! An' we're only three blocks off there now!"

"But you said," expostulated Claire helplessly, feeling herself propelled as by the hand of fate through the crowd toward the door. "You said you live on One-hundred-and-sixteenth Street."

"So I do, my dear, so I do! But I've got some business to transack with a lady livin' in Ninety-fifth Street—West—Two-hunderd-an'-eighty-five-an'-a-half. Come along. 'Step lively,' as my friend, *this nice young man out here on the rear platform*, says."

CHAPTER II

They plodded along the flooded street in silence, Claire following after Martha Slawson like a small child, almost clutching at her skirts. It was not easy to keep pace with the long, even strides that covered so much ground, and Claire fell into a steady pony-trot that made her breath come short and quick, her heart beat fast. She dimly wondered what was going to happen, but she did not dare, or care, to ask. It was comfort enough just to feel this great embodiment of human sympathy and strength beside her, to know she was no longer alone.

Before the house Martha paused a moment.

"Now, my dear, there ain't goin' to be nothin' for you to do but just sit tight," she vouchsafed reassuringly. "Don't you start to butt in (if you'll pardon the liberty), no matter what I say. I'm goin' to be a perfect lady, never fear. I know my place, an' I know my dooty, an' if your boardin'-house lady knows hers, there'll be no trouble whatsomever, so dontcher worry."

She descended the three steps leading from the street-level down into the little paved courtyard below, and rang the basement bell. A moment and an inner door was unlocked, flung open, and a voice from just within the grating of the closed iron area-gate asked curtly, "Well, what's wanted?"

"Is this Mrs. — — ? I should say, is this the lady of the house?" Martha Slawson's voice was deep, bland, prepossessing.

"I'm Mrs. Daggett, yes, if that's what you mean."

"That's what I mean. My name's Slawson. Mrs. Sammy Slawson, an' I come to see you on a little matter of business connected with a young lady who's been lodgin' in your house — Miss Lang."

Mrs. Daggett stepped forward, and unlatched the iron gate. "Come in," she said, in a changed voice, endeavoring to infuse into her acrid manner the grace of a belated hospitality.

Claire, completely hidden from view behind Martha Slawson's heroic proportions, followed in her wake like a wee, foreshortened shadow as, at Mrs. Daggett's invitation, Mrs. Slawson passed through the area gateway into the malodorous basement hall, and so to the dingy dining-room beyond. Here a group of grimy-clothed tables seemed to have alighted in sudden confusion, reminding one of a flock of pigeons huddled together in fear of the vultures soon to descend on them with greedy, all-devouring appetites.

"We can just as well talk here as anywhere," announced Mrs. Daggett. "It's quarter of an hour before dinnertime, but if you'd rather go up to the parlor we can."

"O, dear, no!" said Martha Slawson suavely. "*Any* place is good enough for me. Don't trouble yourself. I'm not particular *where* I am." Unbidden, she drew out a chair from its place beside one of the uninviting tables, and sat down on it deliberately. It creaked beneath her weight.

"O—oh! Miss Lang!" said Mrs. Daggett, surprised, seeing her young lodger now, for the first time.

Martha nodded. "Yes, it's Miss Lang, an' I brought her with me, through the turrbl storm, Mrs. — a —?"

"Daggett," supplied the owner of the name promptly.

"That's right, Daggett," repeated Martha. "I brought Miss Lang with me, Mrs. Daggett, because I couldn't believe my ears when she told me she was goin' to be — to be *turned out*, if she didn't pay up to-night, *weather* or no. I wanted to hear the real truth of it from you, ma'am, straight, with her by."

Mrs. Daggett coughed. "Well, business is business. I'm not a capitalist. I'm not keeping a boarding-house for my health, you know. I can't afford to give credit when I have to pay cash."

"But, of course, you don't mean you'd ackchelly refuse the young lady shelter a night like this, if she come to you, open an' honest, an' said she hadn't the price by her just at present, but she would have

it sooner or later, an' then you'd be squared every cent. You wouldn't turn her down if she said that, would you?"

"Say, Mrs. Slawson, or whatever your name is," broke in Mrs. Daggett sharply, "I'm not here to be cross-questioned. When you told me you'd come on business for Miss Lang, I thought 'twas to settle what she owes. If it ain't—I'm a busy woman. I'm needed in the kitchen this minute, to see to the dishing-up. Have the goodness to come to the point. Is Miss Lang going to pay? If she is, well and good. She can keep her room. If she isn't—" The accompanying gesture was eloquent.

Mrs. Slawson's chair gave forth another whine of reproach as she settled down on it with a sort of inflexible determination that defied argument.

"So that's your ultomato?" she inquired calmly. "I understand you to say that if this young lady (who any one with a blind eye can see she's *quality*), I understand you to say, that if she don't pay down every cent she owes you, here an' now, you'll put her out, bag an' baggage?"

"No, not bag and baggage, Mrs. Slawson," interposed the boarding-house keeper with a wry smile, bridling with the sense that she was about to say something she considered rather neat, "I am, as you might say, holding her bag and baggage—as security."

"Now what do you think o' that!" ejaculated Martha Slawson.

"It's quite immaterial to me what anybody thinks of it," Mrs. Daggett snapped. "And now, if that's all you've got to suggest, why, I'm sure it's all I have, and so, the sooner we end this, the sooner I'll be at liberty to attend to my dinner."

Still Mrs. Slawson did not stir.

"I suppose you think you're a lady," she observed without the faintest suggestion of heat. "I suppose you think you're a lady, but you certainly ain't workin' at it now. What takes my time, though, is the way you ackchelly seem to be meanin' what you say! Why, I wouldn't turn a dog out a night like this, an' you'd let a delicate young girl go into the drivin' storm, a stranger, without a place to lay her head—that is, for all *you* know. I could bet my life, without

knowin' a thing about it, that the good Lord never let you have a daughter of your own. He wouldn't trust the keepin' of a child's body, not to speak of her soul, to such as you. That is, He wouldn't if He could help Himself. But, thanks be! Miss Lang ain't dependent. She's well an' able to pay all she owes. Supposin' she *has* been kinder strapped for a little while back, an' had to economize by comin' to such a place as this! I've knowed others, compelled to economize with three trunks alongside a hall-bedroom wall, for a while, too, an' by an' by their circumstances was such that they had money to burn. It's not for the likes of Miss Lang to try to transack business with your sort. It would soil her lips to bandy words, so I, an old fam'ly servant, an' proud of it! am settlin' up her affairs for her. Be kind enough to say how much it is you are ready to sell your claim to Christian charity for? How much is it you ain't willin' to lend to the Lord on Miss Lang's account?" She plucked up her skirts, thrust her hand, unembarrassed, into her stocking-leg, and brought forth from that safe depository a roll of well-worn *greenbacks*.

Mrs. Daggett named the amount of Claire's indebtedness, and Martha Slawson proceeded to count it out in slow, deliberate syllables. She did not, however, surrender the bills at once.

"I'll take a receipt," she quietly observed, and then sat back with an air of perfect imperturbability, while the boarding-house keeper nervously fussed about, searching for a scrap of paper, hunting for a pen, trying to unearth, from the most impossible hiding-places, a bottle of ink, her indignation at Martha's *cheek* escaping her in audible mumblings.

"Impudence! What right have you to come here, holding me to account?"

I've my own way of doing good — "

Mrs. Slawson shrugged. "Your own way? I warrant you have! Nobody else'd recognize it. I'd like to bet, you don't give a penny to charity oncet in five years. Come now, do you?"

"God doesn't take into account the amount one gives," announced Mrs.

Daggett authoritatively.

"P'raps not, but you can take it from *me*, He keeps a pretty close watch on what we have left—or I miss my guess. An' now, Miss Claire darlin', if you'll go an' get what belongin's you have, that this generous lady ain't stripped off'n you, to hold for *security*, as she calls it, we'll be goin'. An expressman will be 'round here the first thing in the mornin' for Miss Lang's trunk, an' it's up to you, Mrs. Daggett, to see it's ready for'm when he comes. Good-night to you, ma'am, an' I wish you luck."

Never after could Claire recall in detail what followed. She had a dim vision of glistening pavements on which the rain dashed furiously, only to rebound with resentful force, saturating one to the skin. Of fierce blasts that seemed to lurk around every corner. Of street-lamps gleaming meaninglessly out of the murk, curiously suggesting blinking eyes set in a vacant face, and at last—at last—in blessed contrast—an open door, the sound of cheery voices, the feel of warmth and welcome, the sight of a plain, wholesome haven—rest.

Martha Slawson checked her children's vociferous clamor with a word. Then her orders fell thick and fast, causing feet to run and hands to fly, causing curiosity to give instant way before the pressure of busy-ness, and a sense of cooperation to make genial the task of each.

"Hush, everybody! Cora, you go make up the bed in the boarder's room. Turn the mattress, mind! An' stretch the sheets good an' smooth, like I learned you to do. Francie, you get the hot-water bottle, quick, so's I can fill it! Sammy, you go down to the cellar, an' tell Mr. Snyder your mother will be much obliged if he'll turn on a' extra spark o' steam-heat. Tell'm, Mrs. Slawson has a lady come to board with her for a spell, that's fixin' for chills or somethin', unless she can be kep' warm an' comfortable, an' the radianator in the boarder's room don't send out much heat to speak of. Talk up polite, Sammy; d'you hear me? An' be sure you don't let on Snyder might be keepin' a better fire in his furnace if he didn't begrutch the coal so. It's gospel truth, o' course, but landlords is *supposed* to have feelin's, same as the rest of us, an' a gentle word turneth aside wrath. Sabina, now show what a big girl you are, an' fetch mother Cora's nicest nightie out o' the drawer in my beaurer—the nightie Mrs.

Granville sent Cora last Christmas. Mother wants to hang it in front of the kitchen-range, so's the pretty lady can go by-bye all warm an' comfy, after she's took her supper off'n the tray, like Sabina did when she had the measles."

Huge Sam Slawson, senior, overtopping his wife by fully half a head, gazed down upon his little hive, from shaggy-browed, benevolent eyes. He uttered no complaint because his dinner was delayed, and he, hungry as a bear, was made to wait till a stranger was served and fed. Instead, he wandered over to where Martha was supplementing "Ma's" ministrations at the range, and patted her approvingly on the shoulder.

"Another stray lamb, mother?" he asked casually.

Martha nodded. "Wait till the rush is over, an' the young uns abed an' asleep, an' I'll tell you all about it. Stray lamb! I should say as much! A little white corset-lamb, used to eat out o' your hand, with a blue ribbon round its neck. Goin' to be sent out to her death—or worse, by a sharp-fangled wolf of a boardin'-house keeper, who'd gnaw the skin off'n your bones, an' then crack the bones to get at the marrer, if you give her the chanct. I'll tell you all about it later, Sammy."

CHAPTER III

For days Claire lay in a state of drowsy quiet.

She hardly realized the fact of her changed condition, that she was being cared for, ministered to, looked after. She had brief, waking moments when she seemed to be aware that Martha was bringing in her breakfast, or sitting beside her while she ate her dinner, but the intervening spaces, when "Ma" or Cora served, were dim, indistinct adumbrations of no more substantial quality than the vagrant dreams that ranged mistily across her relaxed brain.

The thin walls of the cheaply-built flat did not protect her from the noise of the children's prattling tongues and boisterous laughter, but the walls of her consciousness closed her about, as in a muffled security, and she slept on and on, until the exhausted body was reinforced, the overtaxed nerves infused with new strength.

Then, one evening, when the room in which she lay was dusky with twilight shadows, she realized that she was awake, that she was alive. She had gradually groped her way through the dim stretches lying between the region of visions and that of the actual, but the step into a full sense of reality was abrupt. She heard the sound of children's voices in the next room. So clear they were, she could distinguish every syllable.

"Say, now, listen, mother! What do you do when you go out working every day?" It was Cora speaking.

"I work."

"Pooh, you know what I mean. What kinder work do you do?"

For a moment there was no answer, then Claire recognized Martha's voice, with what was, undeniably, a chuckle tucked away in its mellow depths, where no mere, literal child would be apt to discern it.

"Stenography an' typewritin'!"

"Are you a stenographer an' typewriter, mother? Honest?"

"Well, you can take it from me, if I was *it* at all, I'd be it honest. What makes you think there's any doubt o' my being one? Don't I have the appearance of a high-toned young lady stenographer an' typewriter?"

A pause, in which Martha's substantial steps were to be heard busily passing to and fro, as she went about her work. Her mother's reply evidently did not carry conviction to Cora's questioning mind, for a second later she was up and at it afresh.

"Say, now, listen, mother—if you do stenography an' typewritin', what makes your apron so wet an' dirty, nights when you come home?"

"Don't you s'pose I clean my machine before I leave? What kinder typewriter d'you think I am? To leave my machine dirty, when a good scrub-down, with a pail o' hot water, an' a stiff brush, an' Sapolio, would put it in fine shape for the next mornin'."

"Mother—say, now, listen! I don't *believe* that's the way they clean typewriters. Miss Symonds, she's the Principal's seckerterry to our school, an' she sits in the office, she cleans her machine with oil and a little fine brush, like you clean your teeth with."

"What you been doin' in the Principal's office, miss, I should like to know? Been sent up to her for bad behavior, or not knowin' your lessons? Speak up now! Quick!"

"My teacher, she sends me on errands, an' I got a credit-card last week an', say, mother, I don't *believe* you're a young lady stenographer an' typewriter. You're just trying to fool me."

"Well, Miss Smarty, supposin' I am. So long's I don't succeed you've no kick comin'."

"Say, now listen, mother."

"Hush! You'll wake the pretty lady. Besides, too many questions before dinner is apt to spoil the appetite, to say nothin' of the temper. Turn to, an' lend a hand with them potatoes. Smash 'em good first, an' then beat 'em with a fork until they're light an' creamy, an' you won't have so much gimp left for snoopin' into things that don't concern you!"

"Say, now listen, mother!"

"Well?"

"Say, mother, something awful funny happened to me last night?"

"Are you tellin' what it was?"

"Something woke me up in the middle of the night, 'n' I got up out of bed, an' the clock struck four, 'n' then I knew it was mornin'. 'N' I heard a noise, 'n' I thought it was robbers, 'n' I went to the door, 'n' it was open, 'n' I went out into the hall, 'n' —"

"Well?"

"An' there was *you*, mother, on the stairs — kneelin'!"

"Guess you had a dream, didn't you?"

"No, I didn't."

"What'd I be kneelin' on the stairs for, at four o'clock in the mornin', I should like to know?"

"It looked like you was brushin' 'em down."

"*Me* brushin' down *Snyder's* stairs! Well, now what do you think o' that?" Her tone of amazement, at the mere possibility, struck Cora, and there was a pause, broken at length by Martha, in a preternaturally solemn voice. "I s'pose you never tumbled to it I might be *prayin'*."

Cora's eyes grew wide. "Prayin'!" she repeated in an awed whisper. "But, mother, what'd you want to go out in the hall for, to pray on the *stairs*, at four o'clock in the mornin'?"

"Prayin' is a godly ack. Wheresomedever, an' *_when_somedever* you do it."

"But, mother, I don't *believe* you were prayin'. I heard the knockin' o' your whis'-broom. You was brushin' down the stairs."

"Well, what if I was? Cleanliness is next to godliness, ain't it? Prayin' an' cleanin', it amounts to the same thing in the end — it's just a question of what you clean, outside you or *in*."

"But say, now, listen, mother, you never cleaned down Mr. Snyder's stairs before. An' you been making shirtwaists for Mrs. Snyder, after you get home nights. I saw her with one of 'em on."

"Cora, do you know what happened to a little girl oncet who asked too many questions?"

"No."

"Well, I won't tell you now. It might spoil your appetite for dinner. But you can take it from me, the end she met with would surprise you."

Shortly after, Claire's door quietly opened, and Cora, with a lighted taper in her hand, tiptoed cautiously in, like a young torch-bearing *avant-courrière*, behind whom Mrs. Slawson, laden with a wonderful tray, advanced processionally.

"Light the changelier, an' then turn it low," Martha whispered. "An' then you, yourself, light out, so's the pretty lady can eat in comfort."

The pretty lady, sitting up among her pillows, awake and alert, almost brought disaster upon the taper, and the tray, by exclaiming brightly, "Good-evening! I'm wide awake for good! You needn't tiptoe or hush any more. O, I feel like new! All rested and well and—*ready* again. And I owe it, every bit, to you! You've been so *good* to me!"

It was hard on Cora to have to obey her mother's injunction to "clear out," just when the pretty lady was beginning to demonstrate her right to the title. But Martha's word in her little household was not to be disputed with impunity, and Cora slipped away reluctantly, carrying with her a dazzling vision of soft, dark hair, starry blue-gray eyes, wonderful changing expressions, and, in and over all, a smile that was like a key to unlock hearts.

"My, but it's good to see you so!" said Mrs. Slawson heartily. "I was glad to have you sleep, for goodness knows you needed it, but if you'd 'a' kep' it up a day or so longer, I'd 'a' called in a doctor—shoor! Just as a kind of nacherl precaution, against your settlin' down to a permanent sleepin'-beauty ack, for, you can take it from