

again the squalid old negro existence? Shut out from the higher hopes in the world around her? To be relegated to the back alleys of city life and the miserable cabins of the suburbs? Was she to begin it all over again as her mother and grandmother had done? Then came such thoughts as would have frightened Miss Mary Stuyvesant could she have dreamt that they could ever enter her faithful Lizzie's head.

Meanwhile the morning came over the sea of rooftops, a great, slow inundation of light. To the legions of the suffering and the dying it came as a blessed sign. But into Aunt Lizzie's bedroom it stole with the portentousness of fate; for as it grew in brightness her worn face grew blacker and blacker against the pillows, and looking down at her nervous hands she wrung them together in dull hopeless sorrow.

As for the young girl who some hours later emerged from the door of the apartment house, few if any would distinguish a feature in common between her and the old lady's maid of Stuyvesant Square. Alice had all that nameless quality which is only partly described as patrician and stylish. Her figure in the simple cloth skirt and jacket she wore showed lightness and refinement of line. In her face there was merely a suggestion of olive or creamy tint; her eyes were dark and rather lazy in effect, and even an ethnologist would have pronounced her face to be of the true Caucasian oval. There was, however, about her delicate nostrils and sensitive mouth something that suggested the sugary types of beauty in tropical lands.

At Lexington Avenue she found Jim waiting for her. He appeared to be what is commonly called a man's man and his lighter hair and complexion made his age something of a puzzle; he was evidently somewhat near to thirty. He had about him, moreover, that air of industry and healthy feeling which is so typical of the rising young business man of New York city.

They discussed as they walked down town the events of the evening before: how oddly one of the floor-walkers had danced; how well Miss Cassidy, of the cloak department, had looked in evening dress; of everything, in fact, but what was most before their minds. At last Alice made an opening by saying:

'I am afraid the girls will talk about your not dancing with anybody but me the whole evening.'

'Suppose they do,' he replied; a blind man can see I am head and heels in love with you—let alone a crowd of girls.'

'But some of them may be jealous.'

He laughed heartily in answer to her quizzical look.

'It's more likely some of the fellows in the store will be down on me for monopolising you,' he added. Then after a pause he continued in a more serious tone:

'I hope you are going to give me at least a fighting chance, Alice?'

'Isn't that what I'm doing?' she asked shyly.

'Don't girls ever come out and say what they think? I never had any sisters, so perhaps I am a little backward.'

'Never, so long as they can help it.'

'That isn't your style, Alice. I know you wouldn't keep a poor fellow on the hooks a minute longer than you had to.'

'Oh, I'm a woman, Jim; we're all alike in these things.'

'Then I am going to take the will for the deed and keep on hoping.'

'You see, Jim, I like you well enough to marry you; but then I think I can be happy even without you. You wouldn't want to marry anybody who thought like that.'

'You would learn to think more of me later on.'

'Oh, I don't mean anything foolish or romantic. Besides, what do you know about me or my folks. You see me every day in the store, but what does that amount to?'

'I don't need to know anything about you. All I know is that I want you to take me for the better; I'll stand all the worse that is coming.'

'Even if I—'

'There isn't any "if" to it at all. Just think it all over again when you get a chance to-day; every minute you keep me waiting is a torture.'

They were coming nearer the store and were joined by others of the employees making in the same direction; but before Jim turned to go to his office he arranged to wait for Alice when the store would close.

It was not long before the aisles of the great emporium began to fill up with customers. There were the early morning customers from out of town, the sight-seers from the hotels, and bargain hunters from the four points of—not heaven—but the compass. The roar of traffic began—to last without intermission till the stroke of six o'clock. In the surging throngs were anxious mothers shopping for their darlings, toiling housewives from the tenements, fashionable economists hunting inexpensive luxuries, 'declassé' women relieving the tedium of their way with enforced society of the

salespeople, 'vieux marcheurs' (and young ones) making a feint at purchasing at the counters of the pretty girls, foolish customers asking advice as to what to purchase, troublesome ones refusing to make up their minds to buy.

Therefore it did not seem long before it was Alice's turn to go to the lunch room. She sat down near Miss Cassidy and was repeating some of the complimentary remarks the latter had earned the evening before, when, glancing around the room, she caught a number of eyes quickly turning away. There was no doubt that the girls were discussing her. In a little while she saw one of the girls beckon to Miss Cassidy and whisper something in her ear. Then, shrugging her shoulders, Miss Cassidy returned to her seat and whispered: 'You will pardon me, Miss Williams, but somebody should tell you that several of the girls in the store have received anonymous postal cards this morning saying that—that you are not a white woman.'

Alice's answer was merely to grow deathly pale. Then she asked:

'That is why they have been staring at me so?'

'Yes, but you mustn't mind them. There isn't the slightest sign of negro blood about you; it's somebody jealous after the dance, that's all. I deny it for you.'

'No, Miss Cassidy,' protested Alice, weakly, 'I would prefer if you would say nothing at all about it.'

'But, my dear girl, when you have been in this store as long as I have you will know that the only way to take a scandal here is to throttle it.'

'But if it—suppose it isn't a slander?'

'You—you—don't mean to tell me, Miss Williams, that you—that—'

'Yes, Miss Cassidy.'

'Hush, you mustn't say that; you don't know what it means to us here.'

'I think I do, Miss Cassidy.'

'The girls will be rude to you. Just deny it; I'll keep your secret. If it gets known I am afraid you will have to leave the department.'

'I shall be sorry to do that. Will you say, then, that I will not speak of it to anybody—for to-day at least? Will you—'

'I'll defy anybody to mention it to you. It's a ridiculous piece of malice, that's all.'

'Thank you. I think I'll go back to the counter now. I can't stand the girls taking these shy looks at me.'

She went back and busied herself with the customers and for a while succeeded in taking her mind away from the other girls. She attempted to speak to none of them and they seemed by common consent to avoid any conversation. But at length the suspense began to tell on her; she had not eaten anything at noon, and every time a cash girl or the floor-walker approached her, she was terrified lest it might be a summons to the office; then at the thought of Jim staring in her face, her heart sank within her.

At last she could bear it no longer. She went quietly for her hat and coat and stole out of the store. The cable-car, comparatively empty, the cheerful sunlight of the early afternoon, gave her a sense of novelty. Reaching the apartment house, she rang the bell so as not to startle her mother by returning unannounced at that hour; the front door opened and she started to climb the narrow stairs.

If Aunt Lizzie, standing at the landing, was surprised to see her, Alice herself was no less astonished to find her mother dressed as for a journey in the faded brown bonnet and the fringed dolman she had inherited from Miss Mary Stuyvesant. One look into the rooms explained everything; on the floor were the old satchel and hand-valise; Miss Stuyvesant's and the Lieutenant's portraits were gone from the wall; Alice's baby cup and saucer had disappeared from the mantel.

Tears streamed down Aunt Lizzie's face as she stood in the doorway looking weak and very aged in her ancient finery.

'Mammy,' cried Alice, with one great sob, throwing her arms around her, 'you must let me go too.'

Shortly after six o'clock Jim reached the apartment house and kept his finger on the electric button without receiving any reply. Why Alice should have left so early he could not understand, and as he stood wondering whether he should ring again, the front door of the apartment house opened and a young West Indian of impressive appearance made his way to the street. Jim accosted him:

'Nobody seems to answer the Williams' bell,' he said; 'can you tell me if they are in?'

The West Indian smiled in an affected way and replied:

'They have been passing for white folks, but the other tenants discovered that Miss Williams was a negro and she was requested to leave the apartments at once. They haven't left any clue behind them that I can discover. Perhaps you will find Miss Williams at Wanameyer's.'—'Rosary Magazine.'