

As she stood now in the midst of the busy throng of early fall shoppers, seeking her best to please one customer and answer the questions and stem the impatience of half a dozen waiting ones at the same time, the utter hardness and thanklessness of her lot came over her with such supreme force as it had never done before. What were they all rushing and fussing about, these happy, well-dressed, inconsiderate folk, with thoughts of nothing else but preparing for Christmas gifts and Christmas greetings in their minds! Nobody ever gave her a gift, no one ever sent her a card save dear Father Donegan, whose Christmas pictures or tiny cardboard Christmas crib were valued beyond all her small earthly possessions by the lonely girl.

She had, it is true, the dimmest, faintest remembrance of a time when it was not so, a time when the holiday had been a season of joy and gift receiving for her as well as other children, when beautifully dressed dolls and the most expensive of toys and presents had come to her as her natural right. That was in the days before kind, good Granny Leary had gone to heaven, leaving her lonely little charge to battle the world as best she might under the Widow D'Arcy's roof in the back street of the great, noisy, bustling city to which they had come but such a short time before.

With dim but fragrant memories of the green and lovely country still lingering in her mind like the perfume of some sweet, old-fashioned flower, Kitty from the first had never been content with life in the city. They need never have come there, indeed, had not dear Granny Leary been stricken with a serious illness, which as soon as it was discovered necessitated a visit to a city specialist and subsequently to a city hospital. And that Granny Leary ever feared serious results from her illness could not have been likely, else she would not have left Kitty in the temporary charge of an almost total stranger like Mrs. D'Arcy, her landlady, without giving further directions as to what should be done with the child in case anything happened to herself.

As it was, she had to undergo an operation in the hospital, from which she never emerged alive, and poor Kitty was left lonely, apparently without a living friend or relation in the world. Other people, as Mrs. D'Arcy often took care to impress on the child, would have sent her to the workhouse at once, but she had showed herself more Christianly charitable and kind. Being a widow, lonely, and childless, she was, as a matter of fact, glad enough to have the company and help of the forlorn little creature, who, as the months and years passed on, spared no pains to make herself of real assistance to her benefactress.

Of late years, however, Mrs. D'Arcy had grown old and feeble, and (whatever of real affection she might have had for the girl) showed herself every day more ill-tempered and cantankerous and hard to get on with. Perhaps it was the many sleepless nights she has caused the girl lately by her tinkling scoldings and arrogance that left her feeling now so light-headed and dizzy and weak.

A very charming and sweet-faced lady of middle age who had seemed to regard Kitty's face with a quite extraordinary look of interest and kindness, stood by examining a pair of handsome majolica vases that she thought of purchasing. But at that moment another less charming and decidedly fussy old lady plucked quickly in thoughtless impatience at Kitty's sleeve.

Turning around suddenly, the girl unfortunately swept one of the handsome majolica vases from its place on the counter. It crashed noisily to the floor, breaking into a thousand fragments.

At once a silence seemed to fall in the place. Even the customers were startled out of their noisy eagerness and self-complacency, gazing in consternation from the broken vase on the floor to the ashen pallor in Kitty's terrified face. The other assistants glanced at her sympathetically, but their eyes fell, and they went busily about their work again as Mr. Hinton himself strode hastily down the shop, a look of apoplectic rage lighting up luridly his dark cast of features.

Possibly he tried to keep control of himself as he approached, for the sake of appearances and his other

customers, but there was a cold, steel-like glint of rage and malice in his eyes as he looked at her that terrified poor Kitty even more than one of his ordinary outbursts.

'Pick those pieces up!' he said sternly, pointing to the floor and glaring at the girl, whose utter look of guilt and misery proclaimed her aloud the offender. 'You will take a week's notice now from me for your carelessness and stupidity.'

'A week's notice!' poor Kitty said to herself, with a troubled and aching heart, as she fell on her knees, awkwardly and hurriedly gathering together the broken fragments. But after all, where was the need of surprise? A few weeks would take them on to the end of the year, and it had been openly rumored in the place of late that the services of several assistants would be dispensed with on the 1st of January.

'I am sorry,' she said pleadingly, 'but, of course, I will pay for the vase.'

'You will, and for two of them!' her employer thundered. 'What use is the other vase now that its fellow is broken? They could not be sold except in pairs, and I have neither the time nor inclination to make up for your stupidity and carelessness by looking out for another to replace it.'

'Pardon me, sir!' interrupted the sweet-faced, beautifully dressed woman who had been about to purchase the vases. 'But I must say I think that is most unfair to this poor girl. The breaking of the vase was a mere accident, due to the unavoidable fuss and crush. And certainly she should not be expected to pay for two of them.'

'Oh, I will, I must!' Kitty protested, half-incoherently, in her champion's ear. 'Don't say another word; it will only make him far more angry and determined to get rid of me.'

'I will pay for those vases myself, both of them,' the lady said with sudden determination.

'That is really too good of you, madam,' said Mr. Hinton, surprised and staggered for the moment, yet with a half-sarcastic tone. 'As you please, but all the same Miss Delaney leaves here at the end of next week.'

The lady started visibly, but why Kitty was at an utter loss to know. Her defender was again scanning every line of her face, this time as it were with a new-born look of hope.

'Very well,' she answered for Kitty.

'And perhaps, as it is to be so, the young lady would trust herself to me now. I should like to befriend her.' Turning to the girl, she said then, with an infinite depth of tenderness and pleading in her voice: 'If you will trust yourself to me, dear, I will be a good friend to you. I am a very lonely woman and sorely in need of a companion to make up for the dear child I lost, and I feel that you would exactly fulfil my every requirement. If you come to me, child, I think I can safely promise you a happier Christmas than you are likely to have here--with a glance of some scorn at the now discomfited proprietor of the place. Though glad enough to get rid of some of his assistants in a sense, he would much rather have kept Kitty till the rush of the Christmas week was over.'

'If she goes now she goes without any salary,' he snarled, 'and she needn't look for any recommendation, either.'

'Never mind,' the lady said quietly. 'I think we can get over that. And now, my dear, if you will get your hat and coat and come with me, there is much that I should like to hear from you about yourself.'

There was no gainsaying the kindness and genuineness of her persuasion, and in another few moments after the lady had paid for the vases Kitty, greatly excited and bewildered, was sitting beside her benefactress in the depths of a luxurious carriage. No sooner had they sat down than the lady turned to her with a strangely tremulous and agitated air.

'Thank God, we are alone at last!' she said fervently. 'Tell me, child, what is your other name besides Delaney. I want so badly to know!'

'My name is Kitty,' the girl answered obediently. 'I had a second name, I know, by the initials on some

'Pattillo'

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