

She wondered how she would escape her mother's vigilant eye at Mass next day, for she had no intention of going to Confession, and could not dare go up to the altar with the others. For deep in her heart she knew that she was doing wrong; she could no longer pretend that she did not know that Lucille was no fit friend for her, for during the last few days she had thrown off much of her former reserve, and Yvonne began to feel sick with terror at the idea of going to Paris with her, and yet the picture of its beauty and pleasures drew her like a magnet.

She thought of all her friend had told her—of the delights of dances and theatres and suppers at which they had sparkling wines and dainty dishes, and pretty dresses, and then she looked round at the smoke-begrimed kitchen, at the rough clogs of her parents, and her own, her common serge skirt and coarse white cap—and she shuddered. It was the old, old temptation, and Yvonne was weak, for she had kept away from the only thing that could give her strength—the Sacraments.

The family returned, and Yvonne was forced to go to the church as if for Confession, unless she wished to betray all her plans to her mother.

There were still many waiting round the Confessionals of M. le Curé and the young Vicar, when she entered the building where she had been baptised, and made her First Communion. She slipped up the side aisle and turned into the Lady Chapel—where the Crib was already prepared—even the Divine Child was there before His time—but the villagers would have been disappointed not to see Him there when they came out to make their thanksgivings for the outpouring of His precious Blood on their souls.

Yvonne knelt a moment in the corner, and then sat back on her heels. The Baby Christ was wonderfully sweet, and He smiled as if welcoming each kneeler. The girl moved a little—somehow. His look disconcerted her, though she had always loved that figure of the Divine Child. She had had a long and tiring day, and she was weary and leaned her head against the wall.

When somehow the wall seemed to give way, and Yvonne found herself in the streets of a great city. The roar of the traffic frightened her, the lights blinded her, and a voice which struck terror into her heart asked her what she wanted.

"I am looking for Lucille," she murmured faintly.

"Come and I will show you where she is."

They turned down a side street, dark and silent, which seemed deserted, but presently they met men and women hurrying on, and their voices and above all their laughter made Yvonne shrink away. It seemed a long, long time that they walked and she was cold and miserable. The streets grew darker and more silent till they came to a large building and her guide stopped. No word was spoken, but Yvonne halted also.

From within the building came the sound of music such as Yvonne had never heard, and laughter and voices now reached her, and she wanted to run away, but she could not move. She felt ill and faint, and yet she could not understand why, for this was she knew the hall of pleasure for which she had longed.

Louder and louder grew the sounds within—a very babel of confusion. Then the doors burst open and Yvonne was almost blinded by the medley of colors and lights, and by the roar of so many voices, the music and laughter.

Men and women whirled past in a dance such as she had never seen, and she shrank back terrified, just as her eyes caught sight of a tiny figure not far from the door. It was the little Child who year by year lay in the Crib in the church. Now He was hustled and jostled from side to side. His tiny feet trodden on, and His beautiful little head bleeding from the knocks He received on all sides. No one heeded Him; no one apparently saw Him. Yvonne saw that through eyes blinded by tears He seemed searching in vain for a friendly face. She tried to cry out, but her voice was dumb; then He looked at her and her heart seemed to break with sorrow and love—and somehow He was in her arms and she could feel the beat of His little Heart near hers. She bent her head as He looked up at her; she must tell Him how grieved she was, and how she had loved Him in spite of all, and wanted only Himself.

But a great sob choked her and she awoke as M. le Curé touched her gently on the shoulder, saying:

"Wake up, my child; everyone has gone but you. Are you waiting Confession?"

The girl gazed up into his kind old face, and he saw that she could not speak for her tears—but she rose up and followed him to the Confessional.

Far away, out in a lonely district in China, Sister Marie of the Divine Child toils amid the little ones of our Lord's flock. Her sisters love her for her great humility and charity, and her babies adore her, and there is one story she is never tired of telling them—all about the Holy Night of Christmas. For the little ones it is such a joyous feast that they cannot understand why Ma Soeur weeps so much as she kneels before the Crib on Christmas Eve. Her sisters wonder, too, but then they smile.

"It is her love that makes her weep—who ever had such a great devotion to the Holy Child? One would think she had seen Him; the way she talks of Him."

"Perhaps she has," added the baby of the Community, little Sister St. Agnes, not yet nineteen. "Anyway, I am going to kneel by her now, and ask the little Jesus to show Himself to me this Christmas Day. If I creep close to her, perhaps I shall see what she does."

The others laughed, I think because they were just overflowing with happiness. They hardly even wanted to see the Divine Babe, when they thought of what a few hours would bring them—His visit at their Midnight Communion.

Man never rose to greater power and honor, never "lifted his daring to the stars" in such a sublime hope as when through Christ he turned the defeat of suffering into victory and dared to creep up to the knees of God and call Him Father. To our Brother Christ be the honor and praise!

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