

LOST IN THE UNDERWORLD.

STORY OF HOW THE VICTIMS OF THE WHITE SLAVE TRAFFIC ARE KIDNAPPED—FACT, NOT FICTION.

One glorious afternoon in May, 1905, the express train from York was nearing London. It was not crowded as usual, and two sisters, girls of eighteen and nineteen, were travelling in a compartment by themselves. Both had taken off their hats, and with neatly shod feet on the opposite seat, were munching chocolates and chattering, too full of excitement and delight at this, their first visit to London, to care to read the papers and magazines with which they were surrounded.

"Aunt Agatha said she'd meet us," Margaret remarked, as she polished a bit of window with her dainty lace handkerchief. "I do hope she won't have one of her bad headaches to-day."

"Oh, well, she'd send somebody else, then." Ethel settling herself more comfortably in her corner, did not intend to worry—the round, smiling, childish face and plump little figure proclaimed that she took life easily.

Presently the train steamed into King's Cross, and the two girls, with some difficulty, elbowed their way through the crowd, at the same time looking around for their aunt's familiar face. A hand was laid on Margaret's arm.

"You were to have been met, were you not?" said a pleasant voice, and looking up, the girls met the smiling gaze of a tall, handsome woman, rather strikingly dressed.

"Yes, my aunt——" Margaret, who always took the lead, was beginning, when the stranger interrupted.

"She asked me to meet you—she is not very well to-day, and as I live near here I offered to take you home to dinner with me. You can go on to your aunt's later; you've had such a long journey already."

So, glad that they had not to find their way alone in this great bewildering city, the two little country girls followed their "aunt's" friend into a cab, and in a few minutes reached their destination.

Mrs Thomas's house was a tall, gloomy building, one of a long row all exactly alike, and the first room

into which they were taken seemed dark and stuffy, with many curtains. But a cheerful fire and an excellent cup of tea awaited them, and then, after an interval, their hostess said in her pleasant, caressing voice:

"Poor dears! I'm sure you are tired. You shall come upstairs and rest for an hour before dinner," and she preceded them to a plainly furnished but comfortable room on the first floor.

"Of course, you mustn't bother to unpack anything for the hour or two you'll be here," she continued, with a quick glance of veiled contempt at their serge coats and skirts, as she spoke, unlocking a wardrobe, "but I've got some friends coming to dinner, and I want you two pretty girls to look your best; so would you mind putting on some of these things to please me? There's sure to be something you can wear."

For an instant the visitors hesitated; then, unwilling to disappoint their beaming hostess—their aunt's "friend"—they agreed.

As the door closed behind Mrs Thomas, Ethel Erskine made a grimace, but Margaret laughed gaily.

"It's a good joke," she said. "Let us see what's here."

An hour later, when the gong sounded, they ran downstairs in pretty evening gowns, feeling rather shy, but inclined to enjoy the fun of the whole thing.

In the drawing-room, with Mrs Thomas, were four gentlemen and a lady, and as they entered, dinner was announced. During the meal the girls constantly found themselves watching the two women, who were rouged to the eyes, and wore dresses decollete in the extreme.

Presently Margaret's partner, speaking in a low tone, claimed her attention.

"Do you know our hostess well?" he asked.

"No; she is a friend of my aunt's," Margaret replied. "She met us at King's Cross this afternoon."

"Is that your sister over there?" There was something quick, imperative, in the voice of the questioner, and the girl looked at his keen, thin face in surprise, as she assented.

"Do you know what sort of house this is?" he continued, still speaking in a rapid undertone. "I see you don't. Well, if you and your sister can't escape at once you never will, and you will be ruined. Forgive me,

but this is no time to mince matters."

With an awful sense of helplessness, Margaret was for the moment dumb.

"There is only one thing to be done," her companion went on. "Immediately after dinner I will cause a diversion, and when you see you are not observed, you must run out of the front door and fetch a policeman to come back for your sister."

The girl's horrified glance wandered round the table, from her sister, chatting happily with her neighbour, to the two painted, gaudily dressed women, and back to the man at her side. Then, unsophisticated as she was, the truth flashed upon her.

"Pull yourself together, and try to talk as if you suspected nothing—but don't touch the wine," came a whisper a moment later, and with a strong effort the girl obeyed.

Presently her companion gained the attention of the whole table by announcing that he had lately developed some weird thought-reading powers.

"You must show us after dinner," Mrs Thomas remarked, and he readily agreed.

"Will any lady come out into the hall with me to act as medium?" he asked, when a little later they were all assembled in the drawing-room, and Margaret, alert for the opening, offered to accompany him.

In a dream, the girl murmured her thanks as he softly opened the front door; then she ran down the steps into the road.

For some little time she could find no policeman, and she turned into another road, to be confronted again by row after row of houses all exactly alike. Here, after five minutes' walking she saw one. Breathless, she reached him, and, telling her story, led him back in the direction of the house from which she escaped, till suddenly, sick with horror, she turned her white face to him—she could not find the house.

Four years later a girl of twenty-three might have been seen hard at work in an office on the first floor of a large, well-appointed house in Kensington. She was seated at a well-filled desk, with typewriter and rows of neatly pigeon-holed correspondence. Stacked round the walls were pamphlets, files of papers, and all the paraphernalia of business. Everything here related to one subject—a strange one to be in the hands of this