

III

They drew near and sat upon the substitutes for seats in a circle--and the fire threw up flame and made a glow in the fog hanging in the black hole of a room.

It was Glad who set the battered kettle on and when it boiled made tea. The other two watched her, being under her spell. She handed out slices of bread and sausage and pudding on bits of paper. Polly fed with tremulous haste; Glad herself with rejoicing and exulting in flavors. Antony Dart ate bread and meat as he had eaten the bread and dripping at the stall--accepting his normal hunger as part of the dream.

Suddenly Glad paused in the midst of a huge bite.

"Mister," she said, "p'raps that cove's waitin' fer yer. Let's 'ave 'im in. I'll go and fetch 'im."

She was getting up, but Dart was on his feet first.

"I must go," he said. "He is expecting me and--"

"Aw," said Glad, "lemme go along o' yer, mister--jest to show there's no ill feelin'."

"Very well," he answered.

It was she who led, and he who followed. At the door she stopped and looked round with a grin.

"Keep up the fire, Polly," she threw back. "Ain't it warm and cheerful? It'll do the cove good to see it."

She led the way down the black, unsafe stairway. She always led.

Outside the fog had thickened again, but she went through it as if she could see her way.

At the entrance to the court the thief was standing, leaning against the wall with fevered, unhopeful waiting in his eyes. He moved miserably when he saw the girl, and she called out to reassure him.

"I ain't up to no 'arm," she said; "I on'y come with the gent."

Antony Dart spoke to him.

"Did you get food?"

The man shook his head.

"I turned faint after you left me, and when I came to I was afraid I might miss you," he answered. "I daren't lose my chance. I bought some

bread and stuffed it in my pocket. I've been eating it while I've stood here."

"Come back with us," said Dart. "We are in a place where we have some food."

He spoke mechanically, and was aware that he did so. He was a pawn pushed about upon the board of this day's life.

"Come on," said the girl. "Yer can get enough to last fer three days."

She guided them back through the fog until they entered the murky doorway again. Then she almost ran up the staircase to the room they had left.

When the door opened the thief fell back a pace as before an unexpected thing. It was the flare of firelight which struck upon his eyes. He passed his hand over them.

"A fire!" he said. "I haven't seen one for a week. Coming out of the blackness it gives a man a start."

Improvident joy gleamed in Glad's eyes.

"We'll be warm onct," she chuckled, "if we ain't never warm agaen."

She drew her circle about the hearth again. The thief took the place next to her and she handed out food to him--a big slice of meat, bread, a thick slice of pudding.

"Fill yerself up," she said. "Then ye'll feel like yer can talk."

The man tried to eat his food with decorum, some recollection of the habits of better days restraining him, but starved nature was too much for him. His hands shook, his eyes filled, his teeth tore. The rest of the circle tried not to look at him. Glad and Polly occupied themselves with their own food.

Antony Dart gazed at the fire. Here he sat warming himself in a loft with a beggar, a thief, and a helpless thing of the street. He had come out to buy a pistol--its weight still hung in his overcoat pocket--and he had reached this place of whose existence he had an hour ago not dreamed. Each step which had led him had seemed a simple, inevitable thing, for which he had apparently been responsible, but which he knew--yes, somehow he KNEW--he had of his own volition neither planned nor meant. Yet here he sat--a part of the lives of the beggar, the thief, and the poor thing of the street. What did it mean?

"Tell me," he said to the thief, "how you came here."

By this time the young fellow had fed himself and looked less like a wolf. It was to be seen now that he had blue-gray eyes which were

dreamy and young.

"I have always been inventing things," he said a little huskily. "I did it when I was a child. I always seemed to see there might be a way of doing a thing better--getting more power. When other boys were playing games I was sitting in corners trying to build models out of wire and string, and old boxes and tin cans. I often thought I saw the way to things, but I was always too poor to get what was needed to work them out. Twice I heard of men making great names and for tunes because they had been able to finish what I could have finished if I had had a few pounds. It used to drive me mad and break my heart." His hands clenched themselves and his huskiness grew thicker. "There was a man," catching his breath, "who leaped to the top of the ladder and set the whole world talking and writing--and I had done the thing FIRST--I swear I had! It was all clear in my brain, and I was half mad with joy over it, but I could not afford to work it out. He could, so to the end of time it will be HIS." He struck his fist upon his knee.

"Aw!" The deep little drawl was a groan from Glad.

"I got a place in an office at last. I worked hard, and they began to trust me. I--had a new idea. It was a big one. I needed money to work it out. I--I remembered what had happened before. I felt like a poor fellow running a race for his life. I KNEW I could pay back ten times--a hundred times--what I took."

"You took money?" said Dart.

The thief's head dropped.

"No. I was caught when I was taking it. I wasn't sharp enough. Someone came in and saw me, and there was a crazy row. I was sent to prison. There was no more trying after that. It's nearly two years since, and I've been hanging about the streets and falling lower and lower. I've run miles panting after cabs with luggage in them and not had strength to carry in the boxes when they stopped. I've starved and slept out of doors. But the thing I wanted to work out is in my mind all the time--like some machine tearing round. It wants to be finished. It never will be. That's all."

Glad was leaning forward staring at him, her roughened hands with the smeared cracks on them clasped round her knees.

"Things 'AS to be finished," she said. "They finish themselves."

"How do you know?" Dart turned on her.

"Dunno 'OW I know--but I do. When things begin they finish. It's like a wheel rollin' down an 'ill." Her sharp eyes fixed themselves on Dart's.

"All of us'll finish somethin'--'cos we've begun. You will--Polly will--'e will--I will." She stopped with a sudden sheepish chuckle and dropped her forehead on her knees, giggling. "Dunno wot I 'm talking

about," she said, "but it's true."

Dart began to understand that it was. And he also saw that this ragged thing who knew nothing whatever, looked out on the world with the eyes of a seer, though she was ignorant of the meaning of her own knowledge. It was a weird thing. He turned to the girl Polly.

"Tell me how you came here," he said.

He spoke in a low voice and gently. He did not want to frighten her, but he wanted to know how SHE had begun. When she lifted her childish eyes to his, her chin began to shake. For some reason she did not question his right to ask what he would. She answered him meekly, as her fingers fumbled with the stuff of her dress.

"I lived in the country with my mother," she said. "We was very happy together. In the spring there was primroses and--and lambs. I--can't abide to look at the sheep in the park these days. They remind me so. There was a girl in the village got a place in town and came back and told us all about it. It made me silly. I wanted to come here, too. I--I came--" She put her arm over her face and began to sob.

"She can't tell you," said Glad. "There was a swell in the 'ouse made love to her. She used to carry up coals to 'is parlor an' 'e talked to 'er. 'E 'ad a wye with 'im--"

Polly broke into a smothered wail.

"Oh, I did love him so--I did!" she cried. "I'd have let him walk over me. I'd have let him kill me."

"'E nearly did it," said Glad.

"'E went away sudden an' she's never 'eard word of 'im since."

From under Polly's face-hiding arm came broken words.

"I couldn't tell my mother. I did not know how. I was too frightened and ashamed. Now it's too late. I shall never see my mother again, and it seems as if all the lambs and primroses in the world was dead. Oh, they're dead--they're dead--and I wish I was, too!"

Glad's eyes winked rapidly and she gave a hoarse little cough to clear her throat. Her arms still clasping her knees, she hitched herself closer to the girl and gave her a nudge with her elbow.

"Buck up, Polly," she said, "we ain't none of us finished yet. Look at us now--sittin' by our own fire with bread and puddin' inside us--an' think wot we was this mornin'. Who knows wot we'll 'ave this time to-morrer."

Then she stopped and looked with a wide grin at Antony Dart.

"Ow did I come 'ere?" she said.

"Yes," he answered, "how did you come here?"

"I dunno," she said; "I was 'ere first thing I remember. I lived with a old woman in another 'ouse in the court. One mornin' when I woke up she was dead. Sometimes I've begged an' sold matches. Sometimes I've took care of women's children or 'elped 'em when they 'ad to lie up. I've seen a lot--but I like to see a lot. 'Ope I'll see a lot more afore I'm done. I'm used to bein' 'ungry an' cold, an' all that, but--but I allers like to see what's comin' to-morrer. There's allers somethin' else to-morrer. That's all about ME," and she chuckled again.

Dart picked up some fresh sticks and threw them on the fire. There was some fine crackling and a new flame leaped up.

"If you could do what you liked," he said, "what would you like to do?"

Her chuckle became an outright laugh.

"If I 'ad ten pounds?" she asked, evidently prepared to adjust herself in imagination to any form of un-looked-for good luck.

"If you had more?"

His tone made the thief lift his head to look at him.

"If I 'ad a wand like the one Jem told me was in the pantermine?"

"Yes," he answered.

She sat and stared at the fire a few moments, and then began to speak in a low luxuriating voice.

"I'd get a better room," she said, revelling. "There's one in the next 'ouse. I'd 'ave a few sticks o' furnisher in it--a bed an' a chair or two. I'd get some warm petticuts an' a shawl an' a 'at--with a ostrich feather in it. Polly an' me 'd live together. We'd 'ave fire an' grub every day. I'd get drunken Bet's biby put in an 'ome. I'd 'elp the women when they 'ad to lie up. I'd--I'd 'elp 'IM a bit," with a jerk of her elbow toward the thief. "If 'e was kept fed p'r'aps 'e could work out that thing in 'is 'ead. I'd go round the court an' 'elp them with 'usbands that knocks 'em about. I'd--I'd put a stop to the knockin' about," a queer fixed look showing itself in her eyes. "If I 'ad money I could do it. 'Ow much," with sudden prudence, "could a body 'ave--with one o' them wands?"

"More than enough to do all you have spoken of," answered Dart.

"It's a shime a body couldn't 'ave it. Apple Blossom Court 'd be a different thing. It'd be the sime as Miss Montaubyn says it's goin' to

be." She laughed again, this time as if remembering something fantastic, but not despicable.

"Who is Miss Montaubyn?"

"She's a' old woman as lives next floor below. When she was young she was pretty an' used to dance in the 'alls. Drunken Bet says she was one o' the wust. When she got old it made 'er mad an' she got wusser. She was ready to tear gals eyes out, an' when she'd get took for makin' a row she'd fight like a tiger cat. About a year ago she tumbled downstairs when she'd 'ad too much an' she broke both 'er legs. You remember, Polly?"

Polly hid her face in her hands.

"Oh, when they took her away to the hospital!" she shuddered. "Oh, when they lifted her up to carry her!"

"I thought Polly 'd 'ave a fit when she 'eard 'er screamin' an' swearin'. My! it was langwich! But it was the 'orspittle did it."

"Did what?"

"Dunno," with an uncertain, even slightly awed laugh. "Dunno wot it did--neither does nobody else, but somethin' 'appened. It was along of a lidy as come in one day an' talked to 'er when she was lyin' there.

My eye," chuckling, "it was queer talk! But I liked it. P'raps it was lies, but it was cheerfle lies that 'elps yer. What I ses is--if THINGS ain't cheerfle, PEOPLE's got to be--to fight it out. The women in the 'ouse larft fit to kill theirselves when she fust come 'ome limpin' an' talked to 'em about what the lidy told 'er. But arter a bit they liked to 'ear 'er--just along o' the cheerflessness. Said it was like a pantermine. Drunken Bet says if she could get 'old 'f it an' believe it sime as Jinny Montaubyn does it'd be as cheerin' as drink an' last longer."

"Is it a kind of religion?" Dart asked, having a vague memory of rumors of fantastic new theories and half-born beliefs which had seemed to him weird visions floating through fagged brains wearied by old doubts and arguments and failures. The world was tired--the whole earth was sad--centuries had wrought only to the end of this twentieth century's despair. Was the struggle waking even here--in this back water of the huge city's human tide? he wondered with dull interest.

"Is it a kind of religion?" he said.

"It's cheerfler." Glad thrust out her sharp chin uncertainly again.

"There's no 'ell fire in it. An' there ain't no blime laid on Godamighty." (The word as she uttered it seemed to have no connection whatever with her usual colloquial invocation of the Deity.) "When a dray run over little Billy an' crushed 'im inter a rag, an' 'is mother was screamin' an' draggin' 'er 'air down, the curick 'e ses, 'It's

Gawd's will,' 'e ses--an' 'e ain't no bad sort neither, an' 'is fice was white an' wet with sweat--'Gawd done it,' 'e ses. An' me, I'd nussed the child an' I clawed me 'air sime as if I was 'is mother an' I screamed out, 'Then damn 'im!' An' the curick 'e dropped sittin' down on the curbstone an' 'id 'is fice in 'is 'ands."

Dart hid his own face after the manner of the wretched curate.

"No wonder," he groaned. His blood turned cold.

"But," said Glad, "Miss Montaubyn's lidy she says Godamighty never done it nor never intended it, an' if we kep' sayin' an' believin' 'e's close to us an' not millyuns o' miles away, we'd be took care of whilst we was alive an' not 'ave to wait till we was dead."

She got up on her feet and threw up her arms with a sudden jerk and involuntary gesture.

"I 'm alive! I 'm alive!" she cried out, "I've got ter be took care of NOW! That's why I like wot she tells about it. So does the women. We ain't no more reason ter be sure of wot the curick says than ter be sure o' this. Dunno as I've got ter choose either way, but if I 'ad, I'd choose the cheerflest."

Dart had sat staring at her--so had Polly--so had the thief. Dart rubbed his forehead.

"I do not understand," he said.

"'T ain't understanding! It's believin'. Bless yer, SHE doesn't understand. I say, let's go an' talk to 'er a bit. She don't mind nothin', an' she'll let us in. We can leave Polly an' 'im 'ere. They can make some more tea an' drink it."

It ended in their going out of the room together again and stumbling once more down the stairway's crookedness. At the bottom of the first short flight they stopped in the darkness and Glad knocked at a door with a summons manifestly expectant of cheerful welcome. She used the formula she had used before.

"'S on'y me, Miss Montaubyn," she cried out. "'S on'y Glad."

The door opened in wide welcome, and confronting them as she held its handle stood a small old woman with an astonishing face. It was astonishing because while it was withered and wrinkled with marks of past years which had once stamped their reckless unsavoriness upon its every line, some strange redeeming thing had happened to it and its expression was that of a creature to whom the opening of a door could only mean the entrance--the tumbling in as it were--of hopes realized. Its surface was swept clean of even the vaguest anticipation of anything not to be desired. Smiling as it did through the black doorway into the unrelieved shadow of the passage, it struck Antony Dart at once that it

actually implied this--and that in this place--and indeed in any place--nothing could have been more astonishing. What could, indeed?

"Well, well," she said, "come in, Glad, bless yer."

"I've brought a gent to 'ear yer talk a bit," Glad explained informally.

The small old woman raised her twinkling old face to look at him.

"Ah!" she said, as if summing up what was before her. "'E thinks it's worse than it is, doesn't 'e, now? Come in, sir, do."

This time it struck Dart that her look seemed actually to anticipate the evolving of some wonderful and desirable thing from himself. As if even his gloom carried with it treasure as yet undiscovered. As she knew nothing of the ten sovereigns, he wondered what, in God's name, she saw.

The poverty of the little square room had an odd cheer in it. Much scrubbing had removed from it the objections manifest in Glad's room above. There was a small red fire in the grate, a strip of old, but gay carpet before it, two chairs and a table were covered with a harlequin patchwork made of bright odds and ends of all sizes and shapes. The fog in all its murky volume could not quite obscure the brightness of the often rubbed window and its harlequin curtain drawn across upon a string.

"Bless yer," said Miss Montaubyn, "sit down."

Dart sat and thanked her. Glad dropped upon the floor and girdled her knees comfortably while Miss Montaubyn took the second chair, which was close to the table, and snuffed the candle which stood near a basket of colored scraps such as, without doubt, had made the harlequin curtain.

"Yer won't mind me goin' on with me bit o' work?" she chirped.

"Tell 'im wot it is," Glad suggested.

"They come from a dressmaker as is in a small way," designating the scraps by a gesture. "I clean up for 'er an' she lets me 'ave 'em. I make 'em up into anythink I can--pin-cushions an' bags an' curtings an' balls. Nobody'd think wot they run to sometimes. Now an' then I sell some of 'em. Wot I can't sell I give away."

"Drunken Bet's biby plays with 'er ball all day," said Glad.

"Ah!" said Miss Montaubyn, drawing out a long needleful of thread, "Bet, SHE thinks it worse than it is."

"Could it be worse?" asked Dart. "Could anything be worse than everything is?"

"Lots," suggested Glad; "might 'ave broke your back, might 'ave a fever,

might be in jail for knifin' someone. 'E wants to 'ear you talk, Miss Montaubyn; tell 'im all about yerself."

"Me!" her expectant eyes on him. "'E wouldn't want to 'ear it. I shouldn't want to 'ear it myself. Bein' on the 'alls when yer a pretty girl ain't an 'elpful life; an' bein' took up an' dropped down till yer dropped in the gutter an' don't know 'ow to get out--it's wot yer mustn't let yer mind go back to."

"That's wot the lidy said," called out Glad. "Tell 'im about the lidy. She doesn't even know who she was." The remark was tossed to Dart.

"Never even 'eard 'er name," with unabated cheer said Miss Montaubyn. "She come an' she went an' me too low to do anything but lie an' look at 'er and listen. An' 'Which of us two is mad?' I ses to myself. But I lay thinkin' and thinkin'--an' it was so cheerfle I couldn't get it out of me 'ead--nor never 'ave since."

"What did she say?"

"I couldn't remember the words--it was the way they took away things a body's afraid of. It was about things never 'avin' really been like wot we thought they was. Godamighty now, there ain't a bit of 'arm in 'im."

"What?" he said with a start.

"E never done the accidents and the trouble. It was us as went out of the light into the dark. If we'd kep' in the light all the time, an' thought about it, an' talked about it, we'd never 'ad nothin' else. 'Tain't punishment neither. 'T ain't nothin' but the dark--an' the dark ain't nothin' but the light bein' away. 'Keep in the light,' she ses, 'never think of nothin' else, an' then you'll begin an' see things. Everybody's been afraid. There ain't no need. You believe THAT.'"

"Believe?" said Dart heavily.

She nodded.

"'Yes,' ses I to 'er, 'that's where the trouble comes in--believin'.' And she answers as cool as could be: 'Yes, it is,' she ses, 'we've all been thinkin' we've been believin', an' none of us 'as. If we 'ad what 'd there be to be afraid of? If we believed a king was givin' us our livin' an' takin' care of us who'd be afraid of not 'avin' enough to eat?'"

"Who?" groaned Dart. He sat hanging his head and staring at the floor. This was another phase of the dream.

"'Where is 'E?' I ses. 'Im as breaks old women's legs an' crushes babies under wheels--so as they'll be resigned?' An' all of a sudden she calls out quite loud: 'Nowhere,' she ses. 'An' never was. But 'Im

as stretched forth the 'eavens an' laid the foundations of the earth,
'Im as is the Life an' Love of the world, 'E's 'ERE! Stretch out yer
'and,' she ses, 'an' call out, "Speak, Lord, thy servant 'eareth," an'
ye'll 'ear an' SEE.

"An' never you stop sayin' it--let yer 'eart beat it an' yer breath
breathe it--an' yer 'll find yer goin' about laughin' soft to yerself
an' lovin' everythin' as if it was yer own child at breast. An' no 'arm
can come to yer. Try it when yer go 'ome."

"Did you?" asked Dart.

Glad answered for her with a tremulous--yes it was a TREMULOUS--giggle,
a weirdly moved little sound.

"When she wakes in the mornin' she ses to 'erself, 'Good things is goin'
to come to-day--cheerfle things.' When there's a knock at the door she
ses, 'Somethin' friendly's comin' in.' An' when Drunken Bet's makin' a
row an' ragin' an' tearin' an' threatenin' to 'ave 'er eyes out of 'er
fice, she ses, 'Lor, Bet, yer don't mean a word of it--yer a friend to
every woman in the 'ouse.' When she don't know which way to turn, she
stands still an' ses, 'Speak, Lord, thy servant 'eareth,' an' then she
does wotever next comes into 'er mind--an' she says it's allus the
right answer. Sometimes," sheepishly, "I've tried it myself--p'raps it's
true. I did it this mornin' when I sat down an' pulled me sack over me
'ead on the bridge. Polly 'd been cryin' so loud all night I'd got a

bit low in me stummick an'--" She stopped suddenly and turned on Dart as if light had flashed across her mind. "Dunno nothin' about it," she stammered, "but I SAID it--just like she does--an' YOU come!"

Plainly she had uttered whatever words she had used in the form of a sort of incantation, and here was the result in the living body of this man sitting before her. She stared hard at him, repeating her words: "YOU come. Yes, you did."

"It was the answer," said Miss Montaubyn, with entire simplicity as she bit off her thread, "that's wot it was."

Antony Dart lifted his heavy head.

"You believe it," he said.

"I 'm livin' on believin' it," she said confidingly. "I ain't got nothin' else. An' answers keeps comin' and comin'."

"What answers?"

"Bits o' work--an' things as 'elps. Glad there, she's one."

"Aw," said Glad, "I ain't nothin'. I likes to 'ear yer tell about it. She ses," to Dart again, a little slowly, as she watched his face with curiously questioning eyes--"she ses 'E'S in the room--same as 'E's

everywhere--in this 'ere room. Sometimes she talks out loud to 'Im."

"What!" cried Dart, startled again.

The strange Majestic Awful Idea--the Deity of the Ages--to be spoken of as a mere unfeared Reality! And even as the vaguely formed thought sprang in his brain he started once more, suddenly confronted by the meaning his sense of shock implied. What had all the sermons of all the centuries been preaching but that it was Reality? What had all the infidels of every age contended but that it was Unreal, and the folly of a dream? He had never thought of himself as an infidel; perhaps it would have shocked him to be called one, though he was not quite sure. But that a little superannuated dancer at music-halls, battered and worn by an unlawful life, should sit and smile in absolute faith at such a--a superstition as this, stirred something like awe in him.

For she was smiling in entire acquiescence.

"It's what the curick ses," she enlarged radiantly. "Though 'e don't believe it, pore young man; 'e on'y thinks 'e does. 'It's for 'igh an' low,' 'e ses, 'for you an' me as well as for them as is royal fambleys. The Almighty 'E's EVERYWHERE!' 'Yes,' ses I, 'I've felt 'Im 'ere--as near as y' are yerself, sir, I 'ave--an' I've spoke to 'Im.'"

"What did the curate say?" Dart asked, amazed.

"Seemed like it frightened 'im a bit. 'We mustn't be too bold, Miss Montaubyn, my dear,' 'e ses, for 'e's a kind young man as ever lived, an' often ses 'my dear' to them 'e's comfortin'. But yer see the lidy 'ad gave me a Bible o' me own an' I'd set 'ere an' read it, an' read it an' learned verses to say to meself when I was in bed--an' I'd got ter feel like it was someone talkin' to me an' makin' me understand. So I ses, "'T ain't boldness we're warned against; it's not lovin' an' trustin' enough, an' not askin' an' believin' TRUE. Don't yer remember wot it ses: "I, even I, am 'e that comforteth yer. Who art thou that thou art afraid of man that shall die an' the son of man that shall be made as grass, an' forgetteth Jehovah thy Creator, that stretched forth the 'eavens an' laid the foundations of the earth?" an' "I've covered thee with the shadder of me 'and," it ses; an' "I will go before thee an' make the rough places smooth;" an' "'Itherto ye 'ave asked nothin' in my name; ask therefore that ye may receive, an' yer joy may be made full.'" An' 'e looked down on the floor as if 'e was doin' some 'ard thinkin', pore young man, an' 'e ses, quite sudden an' shaky, 'Lord, I believe, 'elp thou my unbelief,' an' 'e ses it as if 'e was in trouble an' didn't know 'e'd spoke out loud."

"Where--how did you come upon your verses?" said Dart. "How did you find them?"

"Ah," triumphantly, "they was all answers--they was the first answers I ever 'ad. When I first come 'ome an' it seemed as if I was goin' to be swep' away in the dirt o' the street--one day when I was near drove wild

with cold an' 'unger, I set down on the floor an' I dragged the Bible to me an' I ses: 'There ain't nothin' on earth or in 'ell as 'll 'elp me. I'm goin' to do wot the lidy said--mad or not.' An' I 'eld the book-- an' I 'eld my breath, too, 'cos it was like waitin' for the end o' the world--an' after a bit I 'ears myself call out in a 'oller whisper, 'Speak, Lord, thy servant 'eareth. Show me a 'ope.' An' I was tremblin' all over when I opened the book. An' there it was! 'I will go before thee an' make the rough places smooth, I will break in pieces the doors of brass and will cut in sunder the bars of iron.' An' I knowed it was a answer."

"You--knew--it--was an answer?"

"Wot else was it?" with a shining face. "I'd arst for it, an' there it was. An' in about a hour Glad come runnin' up 'ere, an' she'd 'ad a bit o' luck--"

"'T wasn't nothin' much," Glad broke in deprecatingly, "on'y I'd got somethin' to eat an' a bit o' fire."

"An' she made me go an' 'ave a 'earty meal, an' set an' warm meself. An' she was that cheerfle an' full o' pluck, she 'elped me to forget about the things that was makin' me into a madwoman. SHE was the answer-- same as the book 'ad promised. They comes in different wyes the answers does. Bless yer, they don't come in claps of thunder an' streaks o' lightenin'--they just comes easy an' natural--so's sometimes yer

don't think for a minit or two that they're answers at all. But it comes to yer in a bit an' yer 'eart stands still for joy. An' ever since then I just go to me book an' arst. P'raps," her smile an illuminating thing, "me bein' the low an' pore in spirit at the beginnin', an' settin' 'ere all alone by me-self day in an' day out, just thinkin' it all over--an' arstin'--an' waitin'--p'raps light was gave me 'cos I was in such a little place an' in the dark. But I ain't pore in spirit now. Lor', no, yer can't be when yer've on'y got to believe. 'An' 'itherto ye 'ave arst nothin' in my name; arst therefore that ye may receive an' yer joy be made full."

"Am I sitting here listening to an old female reprobate's disquisition on religion?" passed through Antony Dart's mind. "Why am I listening? I am doing it because here is a creature who BELIEVES--knowing no doctrine, knowing no church. She BELIEVES--she thinks she KNOWS her Deity is by her side. She is not afraid. To her simpleness the awful Unknown is the Known--and WITH her."

"Suppose it were true," he uttered aloud, in response to a sense of inward tremor, "suppose--it--were--TRUE?" And he was not speaking either to the woman or the girl, and his forehead was damp.

"Gawd!" said Glad, her chin almost on her knees, her eyes staring fearsomely. "S'pose it was--an' us sittin' 'ere an' not knowin' it--an' no one knowin' it--nor gettin' the good of it. Sime as if--" pondering hard in search of simile, "sime as if no one 'ad never knowed about

'lectricity, an' there wasn't no 'lectric lights nor no 'lectric nothin'. Onct nobody knowed, an' all the sime it was there--jest waitin'."

Her fantastic laugh ended for her with a little choking, vaguely hysteric sound.

"Blimme," she said. "Ain't it queer, us not knowin'--IF IT'S TRUE."

Antony Dart bent forward in his chair. He looked far into the eyes of the ex-dancer as if some unseen thing within them might answer him. Miss Montaubyn herself for the moment he did not see.

"What," he stammered hoarsely, his voice broken with awe, "what of the hideous wrongs--the woes and horrors--and hideous wrongs?"

"There wouldn't be none if WE was right--if we never thought nothin' but 'Good's comin'--good 's 'ere.' If we everyone of us thought it--every minit of every day."

She did not know she was speaking of a millennium--the end of the world. She sat by her one candle, threading her needle and believing she was speaking of To-day.

He laughed a hollow laugh.

"If we were right!" he said. "It would take long--long--long--to make us all so."

"It would be slow p'raps. Well, so it would--but good comes quick for them as begins callin' it. It's been quick for ME," drawing her thread through the needle's eye triumphantly. "Lor', yes, me legs is better--me luck's better--people's better. Bless yer, yes!"

"It's true," said Glad; "she gets on somehow. Things comes. She never wants no drink. Me now," she applied to Miss Montaubyn, "if I took it up same as you--wot'd come to a gal like me?"

"Wot ud yer want ter come?" Dart saw that in her mind was an absolute lack of any premonition of obstacle. "Wot'd yer arst fer in yer own mind?"

Glad reflected profoundly.

"Polly," she said, "she wants to go 'ome to 'er mother an' to the country. I ain't got no mother an' wot I 'ear of the country seems like I'd get tired of it. Nothin' but quiet an' lambs an' birds an' things growin.' Me, I likes things goin' on. I likes people an' 'and organs an' 'buses. I'd stay 'ere--same as I told YOU," with a jerk of her hand toward Dart. "An' do things in the court--if I 'ad a bit o' money. I don't want to live no gay life when I 'm a woman. It's too 'ard. Us pore uns ends too bad. Wisht I knowed I could get on some 'ow."

"Good 'll come," said Miss Montaubyn. "Just you say the same as me every mornin'--'Good's fillin' the world, an' some of it's comin' to me. It's bein' sent--an' I 'm goin' to meet it. It's comin'--it's comin'.'" She bent forward and touched the girl's shoulder with her astonishing eyes alight. "Bless yer, wot's in my room's in yours; Lor', yes."

Glad's eyes stared into hers, they became mysteriously, almost awesomely, astonishing also.

"Is it?" she breathed in a hushed voice.

"Yes, Lor', yes! When yer get up in the mornin' you just stand still an' ARST it. 'Speak, Lord,' ses you; 'speak, Lord--'"

"Thy servant 'eareth," ended Glad's hushed speech. "Blimme, but I 'm goin' to try it!"

Perhaps the brain of her saw it still as an incantation, perhaps the soul of her, called up strangely out of the dark and still new-born and blind and vague, saw it vaguely and half blindly as something else.

Dart was wondering which of these things were true.

"We've never been expectin' nothin' that's good," said Miss Montaubyn.

"We 're allus expectin' the other. Who isn't? I was allus expectin' rheumatiz an' 'unger an' cold an' starvin' old age. Wot was you lookin' for?" to Dart.

He looked down on the floor and answered heavily.

"Failing brain--failing life--despair--death!"

"None of 'em's comin'--if yer don't call 'em. Stand still an' listen for the other. It's the other that's TRUE."

She was without doubt amazing. She chirped like a bird singing on a bough, rejoicing in token of the shining of the sun.

"It's wot yer can work on--this," said Glad. "The curick--'e's a good sort an' no' 'arm in 'im--but 'e ses: 'Trouble an' 'unger is ter teach yer ter submit. Accidents an' coughs as tears yer lungs is sent you to prepare yer for 'eaven. If yer loves 'Im as sends 'em, yer 'll go there.' "Ave yer ever bin?' ses I. "Ave yer ever saw anyone that's bin? 'Ave yer ever saw anyone that's saw anyone that's bin?' 'No,' 'e ses. 'Don't, me girl, don't!' 'Garn,' I ses; 'tell me somethin' as 'll do me some good afore I'm dead! 'Eaven's too far off.'"

"The kingdom of 'eaven is at 'and," said Miss Montaubyn. "Bless yer, yes, just 'ere."

Antony Dart glanced round the room. It was a strange place. But something WAS here. Magic, was it? Frenzy--dreams--what?

He heard from below a sudden murmur and crying out in the street. Miss Montaubyn heard it and stopped in her sewing, holding her needle and thread extended.

Glad heard it and sprang to her feet.

"Somethin's 'appened," she cried out. "Someone's 'urt."

She was out of the room in a breath's space. She stood outside listening a few seconds and darted back to the open door, speaking through it. They could hear below commotion, exclamations, the wail of a child.

"Somethin's 'appened to Bet!" she cried out again. "I can 'ear the child."

She was gone and flying down the staircase; Antony Dart and Miss Montaubyn rose together. The tumult was increasing; people were running about in the court, and it was plain a crowd was forming by the magic which calls up crowds as from nowhere about the door. The child's screams rose shrill above the noise. It was no small thing which had occurred.

"I must go," said Miss Montaubyn, limping away from her table. "P'raps I can 'elp. P'raps you can 'elp, too," as he followed her.

They were met by Glad at the threshold. She had shot back to them, panting.

"She was blind drunk," she said, "an' she went out to get more. She tried to cross the street an' fell under a car. She'll be dead in five minits. I'm goin' for the biby."

Dart saw Miss Montaubyn step back into her room. He turned involuntarily to look at her.

She stood still a second--so still that it seemed as if she was not drawing mortal breath. Her astonishing, expectant eyes closed themselves, and yet in closing spoke expectancy still.

"Speak, Lord," she said softly, but as if she spoke to Something whose nearness to her was such that her hand might have touched it. "Speak, Lord, thy servant 'eareth."

Antony Dart almost felt his hair rise. He quaked as she came near, her poor clothes brushing against him. He drew back to let her pass first, and followed her leading.

The court was filled with men, women, and children, who surged about the

doorway, talking, crying, and protesting against each other's crowding. Dart caught a glimpse of a policeman fighting his way through with a doctor. A dishevelled woman with a child at her dirty, bare breast had got in and was talking loudly.

"Just outside the court it was," she proclaimed, "an' I saw it. If she'd bin 'erself it couldn't 'ave 'appened. 'No time for 'osspitles,' ses I. She's not twenty breaths to dror; let 'er die in 'er own bed, pore thing!" And both she and her baby breaking into wails at one and the same time, other women, some hysteric, some maudlin with gin, joined them in a terrified outburst.

"Get out, you women," commanded the doctor, who had forced his way across the threshold. "Send them away, officer," to the policeman.

There were others to turn out of the room itself, which was crowded with morbid or terrified creatures, all making for confusion. Glad had seized the child and was forcing her way out into such air as there was outside.

The bed--a strange and loathly thing--stood by the empty, rusty fireplace. Drunken Bet lay on it, a bundle of clothing over which the doctor bent for but a few minutes before he turned away.

Antony Dart, standing near the door, heard Miss Montaubyn speak to him in a whisper.

"May I go to 'er?" and the doctor nodded.

She limped lightly forward and her small face was white, but expectant still. What could she expect now--O Lord, what?

An extraordinary thing happened. An abnormal silence fell. The owners of such faces as on stretched necks caught sight of her seemed in a flash to communicate with others in the crowd.

"Jinny Montaubyn!" someone whispered. And "Jinny Montaubyn" was passed along, leaving an awed stirring in its wake. Those whom the pressure outside had crushed against the wall near the window in a passionate hurry, breathed on and rubbed the panes that they might lay their faces to them. One tore out the rags stuffed in a broken place and listened breathlessly.

Jinny Montaubyn was kneeling down and laying her small old hand on the muddied forehead. She held it there a second or so and spoke in a voice whose low clearness brought back at once to Dart the voice in which she had spoken to the Something upstairs.

"Bet," she said, "Bet." And then more soft still and yet more clear, "Bet, my dear."

It seemed incredible, but it was a fact. Slowly the lids of the woman's eyes lifted and the pupils fixed themselves on Jinny Montaubyn, who leaned still closer and spoke again.

"'T ain't true," she said. "Not this. 'T ain't TRUE. There IS NO DEATH," slow and soft, but passionately distinct. "THERE--IS--NO--DEATH."

The muscles of the woman's face twisted it into a rueful smile. The three words she dragged out were so faint that perhaps none but Dart's strained ears heard them.

"Wot--price--ME?"

The soul of her was loosening fast and straining away, but Jinny Montaubyn followed it.

"THERE--IS--NO--DEATH," and her low voice had the tone of a slender silver trumpet. "In a minit yer 'll know--in a minit. Lord," lifting her expectant face, "show her the wye."

Mysteriously the clouds were clearing from the sodden face--mysteriously. Miss Montaubyn watched them as they were swept away! A minute--two minutes--and they were gone. Then she rose noiselessly and stood looking down, speaking quite simply as if to herself.

"Ah," she breathed, "she DOES know now--fer sure an' certain."

Then Antony Dart, turning slightly, realized that a man who had entered the house and been standing near him, breathing with light quickness, since the moment Miss Montaubyn had knelt, was plainly the person Glad had called the "curick," and that he had bowed his head and covered his eyes with a hand which trembled.