

T.B.

BY FANNIE HURST

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The figurative underworld of a great city has no ventilation, housing or lighting problems. Rooks and crooks who live in the putrid air of crime are not denied the light of day, even though they loathe it. Cadets, social skunks, whose carnivorous eyes love darkness, walk in God's sunshine and breathe God's air. Scarlet women turn over in wide beds and draw closer velvet curtains to shut out the morning. Gamblers curse the dawn.

But what of the literal underworld of the great city? What of the babes who cry in fetid cellars for the light and are denied it? What of the Subway trackwalker, purblind from gloom; the coalstoker, whose fiery tomb is the boiler room of a skyscraper; sweatshop workers, a flight below the sidewalk level, whose faces are the color of dead Chinese; six-dollar-a-week salesgirls in the arc-lighted subcellars of six-million-dollar corporations?

This is the literal underworld of the great city, and its sunless streets run literal blood--the blood of the babes who cried in vain; the blood from the lungs of the sweatshop workers whose faces are the color of dead Chinese; the blood from the cheeks of the six-dollar-a-week salesgirls in the arc-lighted subcellars. But these are your problems and my problems and the problems of the men who have found the strength or the fear not to die rich. The babe's mother, who had never known else, could not know that her cellar was fetid; she only cried out in her anguish and hated vaguely in her heart.

Sara Juke, in the bargain basement of the Titanic Department Store, did not know that lint from white goods clogs the lungs, and that the air she breathed was putrefied as from a noxious swamp. Sometimes a pain, sharp as a hatpin, entered between her shoulder blades. But what of that? When the heart is young the heart is bold, and Sara could laugh upward with the musical glee of a bird.

There were no seasons, except the spring and fall openings and semi-annual clearing sales, in the bargain basement of the Titanic store. On a morning when the white-goods counter was placing long-sleeve, high-neck nightgowns in its bargain bins, and knit underwear was supplanting the reduced muslins, Sara Juke drew her little pink knitted jacket closer about her narrow shoulders and shivered--shivered, but smiled. "Br-r-r! October never used to get under my skin like this."

Hattie Krakow, roommate and co-worker, shrugged her bony shoulders and laughed; but not with the upward glee of a bird--downward rather, until it died in a croak in her throat. But then Hattie Krakow was ten years older than Sara Juke; and ten years in the arc-lighted subcellar of the Titanic Department Store can do much to muffle the ring in a laugh.

"Gee, you're as funny as your own funeral--you are! You keep up the express pace you're going and there won't be another October left on your calendar."

"That's right; cheer me up a bit, dearie. What's the latest style in undertaking?"

"You'll know sooner 'n me if--"

"Aw, Hat, cut it! Wasn't I home in bed last night by eleven?"

"I ain't much on higher mathematics."

"Sure I was. I had to shove you over on your side of the bed; that's how hard you was sleeping."

"A girl can't gad round dancing and rough-housing every night and work eight hours on her feet, and put her lunch money on her back, and not pay up for it. I've seen too many blue-eyed dolls like you get broken. I--"

"Amen!"

Sara Juke rolled her blue eyes upward, and they were full of points of light, as though stars were shining in them; and always her lips trembled to laugh.

"There ain't nothing funny, Sara."

"Oh, Hat, with you like a owl!"

"If I was a girl and had a cough like I've seen enough in this basement get; if I was a girl and my skirtband was getting two inches too big, and I had to lie on my left side to breathe right, and my nightie was all soaked round the neck when I got up in the morning--I wouldn't just laugh and laugh. I'd cry a little--I would."

"That's right, Hat; step on the joy bug like it was a spider. Squash it!"

"I wouldn't just laugh and laugh, and put my lunch money on my back instead of eggs and milk inside of me, and run round all hours to dance halls with every sporty Charley-boy that comes along."

"You leave him alone! You just cut that! Don't you begin on him!"

"I wouldn't get overheated, and not sleep enough; and--"

"For Pete's sake, Hat! Hire a hall!"

"I should worry! It ain't my grave you're digging."

"Aw, Hat."

"I ain't got your dolly face and your dolly ways with the boys; but I got enough sense to live along decent."

"You're right pretty, I think, Hat."

"Oh, I could daub up, too, and gad with some of that fast gang if I didn't know it don't lead nowheres. It ain't no cinch for a girl to keep her health down here, even when she does live along decent like me, eating regular and sleeping regular, and spending quiet evenings in the room, washing-out and mending and pressing and all. It ain't no cinch even then, lemme tell you. Do you think I'd have ever asked a gay bird like you to come over and room with me if I hadn't seen you begin to fade like a piece of calico, just like my sister Lizzie did?"

"I'm taking that iron-tonic stuff like you want and spoiling my teeth--ain't I, Hat? I know you been swell to me and all."

"You ain't going to let up until somebody whispers T.B. in your shell-pink ear; and maybe them two letters will bring you to your senses."

"T.B.?"

"Yes--T.B."

"Who's he?"

"Gee, you're as smart as a fish on a hook! You oughtta bought a velvet dunce cap with your lunch money instead of that brown poke bonnet. T.B. was what I said--T.B."

"Honest, Hat, I dunno--"

"For heaven's sake! *Too Berculosis* is the way the exhibits and the newspapers say it. L-u-n-g-s is another way to spell it. T.B."

"Too Berculosis!" Sara Juke's hand flew to her little breast. "Too Berculosis! Hat, you--you don't--"

"Sure I don't. I ain't saying it's that--only I wanna scare you up a little. I ain't saying it's that; but a girl that lets a cold hang on like you do and runs round half the night, and don't eat right, can make friends with almost anything, from measles to T.B."

Stars came out once more in Sara Juke's eyes, and her lips warmed and curved to their smile. She moistened with her forefinger a yellow spit curl that lay like a caress on her cheek. "Gee, you oughtta be writing scare heads for the *Evening Gazette!*"

Hattie Krakow ran her hand over her smooth salt-and-pepper hair and sold a marked-down flannellette petticoat.

"I can't throw no scare into you so long as you got him on your mind. Oh, lud! There he starts now--that quickstep dance again!"

A quick red ran up into Miss Juke's hair and she inclined forward in the attitude of listening as the lively air continued.

"The silly! Honest, ain't he the silly? He said he was going to play that for me the first thing this morning. We dance it so swell together and all. Aw, I thought he'd forget. Ain't he the silly--remembering me?"

The red flowed persistently higher.

"Silly ain't no name for him, with his square, Charley-boy face and polished hair; and--"

"You let him alone, Hattie Krakow! What's it to you if--"

"Nothing--except I always say October is my unlucky month, because it was just a year ago that they moved him and the sheet music down to the basement. Honest, I'm going to buy me a pair of earmuffs! I'd hate to tell you how unpopular popular music is with me."

"Huh! You couldn't play on a side comb, much less play on the piano like Charley does. If I didn't have no more brains than some people--honest, I'd go out and kill a calf for some!"

"You oughtta talk! A girl that ain't got no more brains than to gad round every night and every Sunday in foul-smelling, low-ceilinged dance halls, and wear paper-soled slippers when she oughtta be wearing galoshes, and cheesecloth waists that ain't even decent instead of wool undershirts! You oughtta talk about brains--you and Charley Chubb!"

"Yes, I oughtta talk! If you don't like my doings, Hattie Krakow, there ain't no law says we gotta room together. I been shifting for myself ever since I was cash-girl down at Tracy's, and I ain't going to begin being bossed now. If you don't like my keeping steady with Charley Chubb--if you don't like his sheet-music playing--you gotta lump it! I'm a good girl, I am; and if you got anything to in-sinuate; if--"

"Sara Juke, ain't you ashamed!"

"I'm a good girl, I am; and there ain't nobody can cast a reflection on--on--"

Tears trembled in her voice and she coughed from the deep recesses of her chest, and turned her head away, so that her profile was quivering and her throat swelling with sobs.

"I--I'm a good girl, I am."

"Aw, Sara, don't I know it? Ain't that just where the rub comes? Don't I know it? If you wasn't a good girl would I be caring?"

"I'm a good girl, I am!"

"It's your health, Sara, I'm kicking about. You're getting as pale and skinny as a goop; and for a month already you've been coughing, and never a single evening home to stick your feet in hot water and a mustard plaster on your chest."

"Didn't I take the iron tonic and spoil my teeth?"

"My sister Lizzie--that's the way she started, Sara; right down here in this basement. There never was a prettier little queen down here. Ask any of the old girls. Like you in looks and all; full of vim too. That's the way she started, Sara. She wouldn't get out in the country on Sundays or get any air in her lungs walking with me evenings. She was all for dance halls, too, Sara. She--she--Ain't I told you about her over and over again? Ain't I?"

"Sh-h-h! Don't cry, Hat. Yes, yes; I know. She was a swell little kid; all the old girls say so. Sh-h-h!"

"The--the night she died I--I died too; I--"

"Sh-h-h, dearie!"

"I ain't crying, only--only I can't help remembering."

"Listen! That's the new hit Charley's playin'--Up to Snuff! Say, ain't that got some little swing to it? Dum-dum-tum-tee-tum-m-m! Some little quick-step, ain't it? How that boy reads off by sight! Looka, will you? They got them left-over ribbed undervests we sold last season

for forty-nine cents out on the grab table for seventy-four. Looka the mob fighting for 'em! Dum-dum-tum-tee-tum-m-m!"

The day's tide came in. Slowly at first, but toward noon surging through aisles and round bins, upstairs and downstairs--in, round and out. Voices straining to be heard; feet shuffling in an agglomeration of discords--the indescribable roar of humanity, which is like an army that approaches but never arrives. And above it all, insistent as a bugle note, reaching the basement's breadth, from hardware to candy, from human hair to white goods, the tinny voice of the piano--gay, rollicking.

At five o'clock the patch of daylight above the red-lighted exit door turned taupe, as though a gray curtain had been flung across it; and the girls, with shooting pains in their limbs, braced themselves for the last hour. Shoppers, their bags bulging and their shawls awry, fumbled in bins for a last remnant; hatless, sway-backed women, carrying children, fought for mill ends. Sara Juke stood first on one foot and then on the other to alternate the strain; her hands were hot and dry as flannel, but her cheeks were pink--very pink.

At six o'clock Hattie Krakow untied her black alpaca apron, pinned a hat as nondescript as a bird's nest at an unrakish angle and slid into a warm gray jacket.

"Ready, Sara?"

"Yes, Hat." But her voice came vaguely, as through fog.

"I'm going to fix us some stew to-night with them onions Lettie brought up to the room when she moved--mutton stew, with a broth for you, Sara."

"Yes, Hat."

Sara's eyes darted out over the emptying aisles; and, even as she pinned on her velveteen poke bonnet at a too-swagger angle, and fluffed out a few carefully provided curls across her brow, she kept watch and, with obvious subterfuge, slid into her little unlined silk coat with a deliberation not her own. "Coming, Sara?"

"Wait, can't you? My--my hat ain't on right."

"Come on; you're dolled up enough."

"My--my gloves--I--I forgot 'em. You--you can go on, Hat." And she must burrow back beneath the counter.

Miss Krakow let out a snort, as fiery with scorn as though flames were curling on her lips.

"Hanging round to see whether he's coming, ain't you? To think they shot Lincoln and let him live! Before I'd run after any man living, much less the excuse of a man like him! A shiny-haired, square-faced little rat like him!"

"I ain't neither, waiting. I guess I got a right to find my gloves. I--I guess I gotta right. He's as good as you are, and better. I--I guess I gotta right." But the raspberry red of confusion dyed her face.

"No, you ain't waiting! No, no; you ain't waiting," mimicked Miss Krakow, and her voice was like autumn leaves that crackle underfoot. "Well, then, if you ain't waiting here he comes now. I dare you to come on home with me now, like you ought to."

"I--you go on! I gotta tell him something. I guess I'm my own boss. I got to tell him something."

Miss Krakow folded her well-worn hand bag under one arm and fastened her black cotton gloves.

"Pf-f-f! What's the use of wasting breath!"

She slipped into the flux of the aisle, and the tide swallowed her and carried her out into the bigger tide of the street and the swifter tide of the city--a flower on the current, her blush withered under the arc-light substitution for sunlight, the petals of her youth thrown to the muddy corners of the city streets.

Sara Juke breathed inward, and under her cheaply pretentious lace blouse a heart, as rebellious as the pink in her cheeks and the stars in her eyes, beat a rapid fantasia; and, try as she would, her lips would quiver into a smile.

"Hello, Charley!"

"Hello yourself, Sweetness!" And, draping himself across the white-goods counter in an attitude as intricate as the letter S, behold Mr. Charley Chubb! Sleek, soap-scented, slim--a satire on the satyr and the haberdasher's latest dash. "Hello, Sweetness!"

"How are you, Charley?"

"Here, gimme your little hand. Shake."

She placed her palm in his, quivering.

You of the classes, peering through lorgnettes into the strange world of the masses, spare that shrug. True, when Charley Chubb's hand closed over Sara Juke's she experienced a flash of goose flesh; but, you of the classes, what of the Van Ness ball last night? Your gown was low, so that your neck rose out from it like white ivory. The conservatory, where trained clematis vines met over your heads, was like a bower of stars; music; his hand, the white glove off, over yours; the suffocating sweetness of clematis blossoms; a fountain throwing

fine spray; your neck white as ivory, and--what of the Van Ness ball last night?

Only Sara Juke played her poor little game frankly and the cards of her heart lay on the counter.

"Charley!" Her voice lay in a veil.

"Was you getting sore, Sweetness?"

"All day you didn't come over."

"Couldn't, Sweetness. Did you hear me let up on the new hit for a minute?"

"It's swell, though, Charley; all the girls was humming it. You play it like lightning too."

"It must have been written for you, Sweetness. That's what you are, Up to Snuff, eh, Queenie?" He leaned closer, and above his tall, narrow collar dull red flowed beneath the sallow, and his long white teeth and slick-brushed hair shone in the arc light. "Eh, Queenie?"

"I gotta go now, Charley. Hattie's waiting home for me." She attempted to pass him and to slip into the outgoing stream of the store, but with a hesitation that belied her. "I--I gotta go, Charley."

He laughed, clapped his hat slightly askew on his polished hair and slid his arm into hers.

"Forget it! But I had you going--didn't I, sister? Thought I'd forgot about to-night, didn't you? and didn't have the nerve to pipe up. Like fun I forgot!"

"I didn't know, Charley; you not coming over all day and all. I thought maybe your friend didn't give you the tickets like he promised."

"Didn't he? Look! See if he didn't!"

He produced a square of pink cardboard from his waistcoat pocket and she read it, with a sudden lightness underlying her voice:

HIBERNIAN MASQUE AND HOP

Supper Wardrobe Free Admit Gent and Lady Fifty Cents

"Oh, gee, Charley! And me such a sight in this old waist and all. I didn't know there was supper too."

"Sure! Hurry, Sweetness, and we'll catch a Sixth Avenue car. We wanna get in on it while the tamales are hot."

And she must grasp his arm closer and worm through the sidewalk crush, and straighten her velveteen poke so that the curls lay pat; and once or twice she coughed, with the hollow resonance of a chain drawn upward from a deep well.

"Gee, I bet there'll be a jam!"

"Sure! There's some live crowd down there."

They were in the street car, swaying, swinging, clutching; hemmed in by frantic, home-going New York, nose to nose, eye to eye, tooth to tooth. Round Sara Juke's slim waist lay Charley Chubb's saving arm, and with each lurch they laughed immoderately, except when she coughed.

"Gee, ain't it the limit? It's a wonder they wouldn't open a window in this car!"

"Nix on that. Whatta you wanna do--freeze a fellow out?"

Her eyes would betray her.

"Any old time I could freeze you, Charley."

"Honest?"

"You're the one that freezes me all the time. You're the one that keeps me guessing and guessing where I stand with you."

A sudden lurch and he caught her as she swayed.

"Come, Sweetness, this is our corner. Quit your coughing there, hon; this ain't no T.B. hop we 're going to."

"No what?"

"Come along; hurry! Look at the crowd already."

"This ain't no--what did you say, Charley?"

But they were pushing, shoving, worming into the great lighted entrance of the hall. More lurching, crowding, jamming. "I'll meet you inside, kiddo, in five minutes. Pick out a red domino; red's my color."

"A red one? Gee! Looka; mine's got black pompons on it. Five minutes, Charley; five minutes!"

Flags of all nations and all sizes made a galaxy of the Sixth Avenue hall. An orchestra played beneath an arch of them. Supper, consisting of three-inch-thick sandwiches, tamales, steaming and smelling in their buckets, bottles of beer and soda water, was spread on a long picnic table running the entire length of the balcony.

The main floor, big as an armory, airless as a tomb, swarmed with dancers.

After supper a red sateen Pierrette, quivering, teeth flashing beneath a saucy half mask, bowed to a sateen Pierrot, whose face was as slim as a satyr's and whose smile was as upturned as the eye slits in his mask.

"Gee, Charley, you look just like a devil in that costume--all red, and your mouth squinted like that!"

"And you look just like a little red cherry, ready to bust."

And they were off in the whirl of the dance, except that the close-packed dancers hemmed them in a swaying mob; and once she fell back against his shoulder, faint.

"Ain't there a--a upstairs somewheres, Charley, where they got air? All this jam and no windows open! Gee ain't it hot? Let's go outside where it's cool--let's."

"There you go again! No wonder you got a cold on you--always wanting air on you! Come, Sweetness; this ain't hot. Here, lemme show you the dip I get the girls crazy with. One, two, three--dip! One, two, three--dip! Ugh!"

"Gee, ain't it a jam, though?"

"One, two, three!"

"That's swell, Charley! Quit! You mustn't squeeze me like that till--till you've asked me to be engaged, Charley. We--we ain't engaged yet, are we, Charley?"

"Aw, what difference does that make? You girls make me sick-- always wanting to know that."

"It--it makes a lot of difference, Charley."

"There you go on that Amen talk again. All right, then; I won't squeeze you no more, Stingy!"

Her step was suddenly less elastic and she lagged on his arm.

"I--I never said you, couldn't, Charley. Gee, ain't you a great one to get mad so quick. Touchy! I only said not till we're engaged."

He skirted the crowd, guiding her skillfully.

"Stingy! Stingy! I know 'em that ain't so stingy as you."

"Charley!"

"What?"

"Aw, I'm ashamed to say it."

"Listen! They're playin' the new one--Up to Snuff! Faster! Don't make me drag you, kiddo. Faster!"

They were suddenly in the center of the maze, as tight-packed as though an army had conspired to close round them. She coughed and, in her effort at repression coughed again.

"Charley, I--honest, I--I'm going to keel. I--I can't stand it packed in here--like this."

She leaned to him, with the color drained out of her face; and the crowd of black and pink and red dominos, gnomes gone mad, pressed, batted, surged.

"Look out, Sweetness! Don't give out in here! They'll crush us out. Ain't you got no nerve? Here; don't give out now! Gee! Watch out, there! The lady's sick. Watch out! Here; now sit down a minute and get your wind."

He pressed her shoulders downward and she dropped whitely on a little camp chair hidden underneath the balcony.

"I gotta get out, Charley; I gotta get out and get air. I feel like I'm going to suffocate in here. It's this old cough takes the breath out of me."

In the foyer she revived a bit and drank gratefully of the water he brought; but the color remained out of her cheeks and the cough would rack her.

"I guess I oughtta go home, Charley."

"Aw, cut it! You ain't the only girl I've seen give out. Sit here and rest a minute and you'll be all right. Great Scott! I came here to dance."

She rose to her feet a bit unsteadily, but smiling.

"Fussy! Who said I didn't?"

"That's more like it."

And they were off again to the lilt of the music but, struggle as she would, the coughing and the dizziness and the heat took hold of her and at the close of the dance she fainted quietly against his shoulder.

And when she finally caught at consciousness, as it passed and repassed her befuddled mind, she was on the floor of the cloak room, her head pillowed on the skirt of a pink domino.

"There, there, dearie; your young man's waiting outside to take you home."

"I--I'm all right!"

"Certainly you are. The heat done it. Here; lemme help you out of your domino."

"It was the heat done it."

"There; you're all right now. I gotta get back to my dance. You fainted right up against him, dearie; and I seen you keel."

"Gee, ain't I the limit!"

"Here; lemme help you on with your coat. Right there he is, waiting."

In the foyer Sara Juke met Charley Chubb shamefacedly.

"I spoilt everything, didn't I?"

"I guess you couldn't help it. All right?"

"Yes, Charley." She met the air gratefully, worming her little hand into the curve of his elbow. "Gee! I feel fine now."

"Come; here's a car."

"Let's walk up Sixth Avenue, Charley; the air feels fine."

"All right."

"You ain't sore, are you, Charley? It was so jammed dancing, anyway."

"I ain't sore."

"It was the heat done it."

"Yeh."

"Honest, it's grand to be outdoors, ain't it? The stars and--and chilliness and--and--all!"

"Listen to the garden stuff!"

"Silly!"

She squeezed his arm and drew back, shamefaced. His spirits rose.

"You're a right loving little thing when you wanna be."

They laughed in duet; and before the plate-glass window of a furniture emporium they must stop and regard the monthly-payment display, designed to represent the \$49.50 completely furnished sitting room, parlor and dining room of the home felicitous--a golden-oak room, with an incandescent fire glowing right merrily in the grate; a lamp redly diffusing the light of home; a plaster-of-Paris Cupid shooting a dart from the mantelpiece; and, last, two figures of connubial bliss, smiling and waxen, in rocking chairs, their waxen infant, block-building on the floor, completing the picture.

"Gee, it looks as snug as a bug in a rug! Looka what it says too: 'You Get the Girl; We'll Do the Rest!' Some little advertisement, ain't it? I got the girl all right--ain't I, hon?"

"Aw!"

"Look at the papa--slippers and all! And the kid! Look at the kid, Sweetness."

Her confusion nearly choked her and her rapid breath clouded the window glass.

"Yeh, Charley! Looka the little kid! Ain't he cute?"

An Elevated train crashed over their heads, drowning out her words; but her smile, which flickered like light over her face, persisted and her arm crept back into his. At each shop window they must pause, but the glow of the first one remained with her.

"Look, Sweetness--Red Swag, the Train King! Performance going on now. Wanna go in?"

"Not to-night. Let's stay outside."

"Anything your little heart de-sires."

They bought hot chestnuts, city harbingers of autumn, from a vender and let fall the hulls as they walked. They drank strawberry ice-cream soda, pink with foam. Her resuscitation was complete; his spirits did not wane.

"I gotta like a queen pretty much not to get sore at a busted evening like this. It's a good thing the ticket didn't cost me nothing."

"Ain't it, though?"

"Look! What's in there--a exhibit?"

They paused before a white-lighted store front and he read laboriously:

FREE TUBERCULOSIS EXHIBIT

TO EDUCATE PEOPLE HOW TO PREVENT CONSUMPTION

"Oh!" She dragged at his arm.

"Aw, come on, Sweetness; nothing but a lot of T.B.'s."

"Let's--let's go in. See, it's free. Looka--it's all lit up and all; see, pictures and all."

"Say, ain't I enough of a dead one without dragging me in there? Free! I bet they pinch you for something before you get out."

"Come on, Charley; I never did see a place like this."

"Aw, they're all over town."

He followed her in surlily enough and then, with a morbid interest, round a room hung with photographs of victims in various emaciated stages of the white plague.

"Oh! Oh! Ain't it awful? Ain't it awful? Read them symptoms. Almost with nothing it--it begins. Night sweats and losing weight and coughing, and--oh--"

"Look! Little kids and all! Thin as matches."

"Aw, see, a poor little shaver like that! Look! It says sleeping in that dirty room without a window gave it to him. Ugh, that old man! 'Self-indulgence and intemperance.' Looka that girl in the tobacco factory.

Oh! Oh! Ain't it awful! Dirty shops and stores, it says; dirty saloons and dance halls--weak lungs can't stand them."

"Let's get out of here."

"Aw, look! How pretty she is in this first picture; and look at her here--nothing but a stack of bones on a stretcher. Aw! Aw!"

"Come on!"

"Courage is very important, it says. Consumptives can be helped and many are cured. Courage is--"

"Come on; let's get out of this dump. Say, it's a swell night for a funeral."

She grasped at his coat sleeve, pinching the flesh with it, and he drew away half angrily.

"Come on, I said."

"All right!"

A thin line filed past them, grim-faced, silent. At the far end of the room, statistics in red inch-high type ran columnwise down the wall's length. She read, with a gasp in her throat:

1--Ten thousand people died from tuberculosis in the city of New York last year.

2--Two hundred thousand people died from tuberculosis in the United States last year.

3--Records of the Health Department show that there are 31,631 living cases of tuberculosis in the city of New York.

4--Every three minutes some one in the United States dies from consumption.

"Oh, Charley, ain't it awful!"

At a desk a young man, with skin as pink as though a strong wind had whipped it into color, distributed pamphlets to the outgoing visitors--a thin streamlet of them; some cautious, some curious, some afraid.

"Come on; let's hurry out of here, Sweetness. My lung's hurting this minute."

They hurried past the desk; but the young man with the clear pink skin reached over the heads of an intervening group, waving a long printed booklet toward the pair.

"Circular, missy?"

Sara Juke straightened, with every nerve in her body twanging like a plucked violin string; and her eyes met the clear eyes of the young clerk.

Like a doll automaton she accepted the booklet from him; like a doll automaton she followed Charley Chubb out into the street, and her limbs were trembling so she could scarcely stand.

"Gotta hand it to you, Sweetness. Even made a hit on the fellow in the lung shop! He didn't hand me out no literachure. Some little hit!"

"I gotta go home now, Charley."

"It's only ten."

"I better go, Charley. It ain't Saturday night."

At the stoop of her rooming house they lingered. A honey-colored moon hung like a lantern over the block-long row of shabby-fronted houses. On her steps and to her fermenting fancy the shadow of an ash can sprawled like a prostrate human being.

"Charley!"

She clutched his arm.

"Whatcha scared about, Sweetness?"

"Oh, Charley, I--I feel creepy to-night."

"That visit to the Morgue was enough to give anybody the blind staggers."

Her pamphlet was tight in her hand.

"You ain't mad at me, Charley?"

He stroked her arm, and the taste of tears found its way to her mouth.

"I'm feeling so sillylike to-night, Charley."

"You're all in, kiddo."

In the shadow he kissed her.

"Charley, you--you mustn't, unless we're--engaged." But she could not find the strength to unfold herself from his arms. "You mustn't, Charley!"

"Great little girl you are, Sweetness--one great little girl!"

"Aw, Charley!"

"And, to show you that I like you, I'm going to make up for this tomorrow night. A real little Saturday-night blow! And don't forget Sunday afternoon--two o'clock for us, down at Crissey's Hall. Two o'clock."

"Two o'clock."

"Good!"

"Oh, Charley, I--"

"What, Sweetness?"

"Oh, nothing; I--I'm just silly to-night."

Her hand lay on his arm, white in the moonlight and light as a leaf; and he kissed her again, scorching her lips.

"Good night, Sweetness."

"Good night, Charley."

Then up four flights of stairs, through musty halls and past closed doors, their white china knobs showing through the darkness, and up to the fourth-floor rear, and then on tiptoe into a long, narrow room, with the moonlight flowing in.

Clothing lay about in grotesque heaps--a woman's blouse was flung across the back of a chair and hung limply; a pair of shoes stood beside the bed in the attitude of walking--tired-looking shoes, run down at the heels and skinned at the toes. And on the far side of the three-quarter bed the hump of an outstretched figure, face turned from the light, with sparse gray-and-black hair flowing over the pillow.

Carefully, to save the slightest squeak, Sara Juke undressed, folded her little mound of clothing across the room's second chair, groping carefully by the stream of moonlight. Severe as a sibyl in her straight-falling night-dress, her hair spreading over her shoulders, her bare feet pattered on the cool matting. Then she slid into bed lightly, scarcely raising the covers. From the mantelpiece the alarm clock ticked with emphasis.

An hour she lay there. Once she coughed, and smothered it in her pillow. Two hours. She slipped from under the covers and over to the littered dresser. The pamphlet lay on top of her gloves; she carried it to the window and, with her limbs trembling and sending ripples down her night robe, read it. Then again, standing there by the window in the moonlight, she quivered so that her knees bent under her.

After a while she raised the window slowly and without a creak, and a current of cool air rushed in and over her before she could reach the bedside.

On her pillow Hattie Krakow stirred reluctantly, her weary senses battling with the pleasant lethargy of sleep; but a sudden nip in the air stung her nose and found out the warm crevices of the bed. She stirred and half opened her eyes.

"For Gawd's sake, Sara, are you crazy? Put that window down! Tryin' to freeze us out? Opening a window with her cough and all! Put it down! Put--it--down!"

Sara Juke rose and slammed it shut, slipping back into the cold bed with teeth that clicked. After a while she slept; but lightly, with her mouth open and her face upturned. And after a while she woke to full consciousness all at once, and with a cough on her lips. Her gown at

the yoke was wet; and her neck, where she felt it, was damp with cold perspiration.

"Oh--oh--Hattie! Oh--oh!"

She burrowed under her pillow to ease the trembling that seized her. The moon had passed on, and darkness, which is allied to fear, closed her in--the fear of unthinking youth who knows not that the grave is full of peace; the fear of abundant life for senile death; the cold agony that comes in the night watches, when the business of the day is but a dream and Reality visits the couch.

Deeper burrowed Sara Juke, trembling with chill and night sweat.

Drowsily Hattie Krakow turned on her pillow, but her senses were too weary to follow her mind's dictate.

"Sara! 'Smatter, Sara? 'Smat-ter?" Hattie's tired hand crept toward her friend; but her volition would not carry it across and it fell inert across the coverlet. "'Smatter, dearie?"

"N-nothin'."

"'Smat-ter, dear-ie?"

"N-nothin'."

* * * * *

In the watches of the night a towel flung across the bedpost becomes a gorilla crouching to spring; a tree branch tapping at the window an armless hand, beckoning. In the watches of the night fear is a panther across the chest sucking the breath; but his eyes cannot bear the light of day, and by dawn he has shrunk to cat size. The ghastly dreams of

Orestes perished with the light; phosphorus is yellowish and waxlike by day.

So Sara Juke found new courage with the day, and in the subbasement of the Titanic store the morning following her laughter was ready enough. But when the midday hour arrived she slipped into her jacket, past the importunities of Hattie Krakow, and out into the sun-lashed noonday swarm of Sixth Avenue.

Down one block--two, three; then a sudden pause before a narrow store front liberally placarded with invitatory signs to the public, and with a red cross blazoning above the doorway. And Sara Juke, whose heart was full of fear, faltered, entered.

The same thin file passed round the room, halting, sauntering, like grim visitors in a grim gallery. At a front desk a sleek young interne, tiptilted in a swivel chair, read a pink sheet through horn-rimmed glasses.

Toward the rear the young man whose skin was the wind-lashed pink sorted pamphlets and circulars in tall, even piles on his desk.

Round and round the gallery walked Sara Juke; twice she read over the list of symptoms printed in inch-high type; her heart lay within her as though icy dead, and her eyes would blur over with tears. Once, when she passed the rear desk, the young man paused in his stacking and regarded her with a warming glance of recognition.

"Hello!" he said. "You back?"

"Yes." Her voice was the thin cry of a quail.

"You must like our little picture gallery, eh?"

"Oh! Oh!" She caught at the edge of his desk and tears lay heavy in her eyes.

"Eh?"

"Yes; I--I like it. I wanna buy it for my yacht."

Her ghastly simulacrum of a jest died in her throat; and he said quickly, a big blush suffusing his face:

"I was only fooling, missy. You ain't got the scare, have you?"

"The scare?"

"Yes; the bug? You ain't afraid you've ate the germ, are you?"

"I--I dunno."

"Pshaw! There's a lot of 'em comes in here more scared than hurt, missy. Never throw a scare till you've had a examination. For all you know you got hay fever, eh! Hay fever!" And he laughed as though to salve his words.

"I--got all them things on the red-printed list, I tell you. I--I got 'em all, night sweats and all. I--I got 'em."

"Sure you got 'em, missy; but that don't need to mean nothin' much."

"I got 'em, I tell you."

"Losin' weight?"

"Feel."

He inserted two fingers in her waistband.

"Huh!"

"You a doctor?"

He performed a great flourish.

"I ain't in the profesh, missy. I'm only chief clerk and bottle washer round here; but--"

"Where is the doctor? That him reading down there? Can I ask him--I--
-Oh! Ain't I scared!"

He placed his big, cool hand over her wrist and his face had none of its smile.

"I know you are, little missy. I seen it in you last night when you and--
and--"

"My--my friend."

"--your friend was in here. There's thousands come in here with the scare on, and most of 'em with a reason; but I picked you out last night from the gang. Funny thing, but right away I picked you. 'A pretty little thing like her'--if you'll excuse me for saying it--'a pretty little thing like her,' I says to myself. 'And I bet she ain't got nobody to steer her!'"

"Honest, did you?"

"Gee, it ain't none of my put-in; but when I seen you last night--funny thing--but when I seen you, why, you just kinda hit me in the eye; and, with all that gang round me, I says to myself: 'Gee, a pretty little thing like her, scared as a gazelle, and so pretty and all; and no one to give her the right steer!'"

"Aw, you seen me?"

"Sure! Wasn't it me reached out the pamphlet to you? You had on that there same cutey little hat and jacket and all."

"Does it cost anything to talk to the doctor down there?"

"Forget it! Go right down and he'll give you a card to the Victoria Clinic. I know them all over there and they'll look you over right, little missy, and steer you. Aw, don't be scared; there ain't nothing much wrong with you--maybe a sore spot, that's all. That cough ain't a double-lunger. You run over to the clinic."

"I gotta go back to the store now."

"After store, then."

"Free?"

"Sure! Old Doc Strauss is on after five too. If I ain't too nervy I'm off after six myself. I could meet you after and we could talk over what he tells you--if I ain't too nervy?"

"I--"

"Blaney's my name--Eddie Blaney. Ask anybody round here about me. I--I could meet you, little missy, and--"

"I can't to-night, Mr. Blaney. I gotta go somewheres."

"Aw!"

"I gotta."

"To-morrow? To-morrow's Sunday, little missy. There's a swell lot of country I bet you ain't never seen, and Old Doc Strauss is going to tell you to get acquainted with it pretty soon."

"Country?"

"Yes. That's what you need, outdoors; that's what you need, little missy. You got a color like all indoors--pretty, but putty."

"You--you don't think there's nothing much the matter with me, do you, Mr. Blaney?"

"Sure I don't. Why, I got a bunch of Don'ts for you up my sleeve that'll color you up like drug-store daub."

Tears and laughter trembled in her voice.

"You mean that the outdoor stuff will do it, Mr. Blaney?"

"That's the talk!"

"But you--you ain't the doctor."

"I ain't, but I ain't been deaf and dumb and blind round here for three years. I can pick 'em every time. You're taking your stitch in time, little missy. You ain't even got a wheeze in you. Why, I bet you ain't never seen red!"

"No!" she cried, with quick comprehension.

"Sure you ain't!"

More tears and laughter in her voice.

"I'm going to-night, then--at six, Mr. Blaney."

"Good! And to-morrow? There's a lot of swell country and breathing space round here I'd like to introduce you to. I bet you don't know whether Ingleside Woods is kindling or a breakfast food--now do you?"

"No."

"Ever had a chigger on you?"

"Huh?"

"Ever sleep outdoors in a bag?"

"Say, whatta you think I am?"

"Ever seen the sun rise, or took the time to look up and see several dozen or a couple of thousand or so stars glittering all at once?"

"Aw, come off! We ain't doing teamwork in vaudeville."

"Gee, wouldn't I like to take you out and be the first one to make you acquainted with a few of the things that are happening beyond Sixth Avenue--if I ain't too nervy, little missy?"

"I gotta go somewheres at two o'clock to-morrow afternoon, Mr.--Mr. Blaney; but I can go in the morning--if it ain't going to look like I'm a freshie."

"In the morning! Swell! But where--who--" She scribbled on a slip of paper and fluttered it into his hand. "Sara Juke! Some little name. Gee! I know right where you live. I know a lot of cases that come from round there. I used to live near there myself, round on Henry Street. I'll call round at nine, little missy. I'm going to introduce you to the country, eh?"

"They won't hurt at the clinic, will they, Mr. Blaney? I'm losing my nerve again."

"Shame on a pretty little thing like you losing her nerve! Gee! I've seen 'em come in here all pale round the gills and with nothing but the whooping cough. There was a little girl in here last week who thought she was ready for Arizona on a canvas bed; and it wasn't nothing but her rubber skirt-band had stretched. Shame on you, little missy! Don't you get scared! Wait till you see what I'm going to show you out in the country to-morrow--leaves turning red and all. We're going to have a heart-to-heart talk out there--eh? A regular lung-to-lung talk!"

"Aw, Mr. Blaney! Ain't you killing!"

She hurried down the room, laughing.

* * * * *

At Sharkey's on Saturday night the entire basement cafe and dance hall assumed a hebdomadal air of expectancy; extra marble-topped tables were crowded about the polished square of dancing space; the odor of hops and sawdust and cookery hung in visible mists over the bar.

Girls, with white faces and red lips and bare throats, sat alone at tables or tete-a-tete with men too old or too young, and ate; but drank with keener appetite.

A self-playing piano performed beneath a large painting of an undraped Psyche; a youth with yellow fingers sang of Love. A woman whose shame was gone acquired a sudden hysteria at her lone table over her milky-green drink, and a waiter hustled her out none too gently.

In the foyer at seven o'clock Sara Juke met Charley Chubb, and he slid up quite frankly behind her and kissed her on the lips. At Sharkey's a miss is as good as her kiss!

"You--you quit! You mustn't!"

She sprang back, quivering, her face cold-looking and blue; and he regarded her with his mouth quirking.

"Huh! Hoity-toity, ain't you? Hoity-toity and white-faced and late, all at once, ain't you? Say, them airs don't get across with me. Come on! I'm hungry."

"I didn't mean to yell, Charley--only you scared me. I thought maybe it was one of them fresh guys that hang round here; all of 'em look so dopey and all. I--you know I never was strong for this place, Charley."

"Beginning to nag, are you?"

"No, no, Charley. No, no!"

They drew up at a small table.

"No fancy keeling act to-night, kiddo. I ain't taking out a hospital ward, you know. Gad, I like you, though, when you're white-looking like this! Why'd you dodge me at noon to-day and to-night after closing? New guy? I won't stand for it, you know, you little white-faced Sweetness, you!"

"I hadda go somewheres, Charley. I came near not coming to-night, neither, Charley."

"What'll you eat?"

"I ain't hungry."

"Thirsty, eh?"

"No."

He regarded her over the rim of the smirchy bill of fare.

"What are you, then, you little white-faced, big-eyed devil?"

"Charley, I--I got something to--to tell you. I--"

"Bring me a lamb stew and a beer, light. What'll you have, little white-face?"

"Some milk and--"

"She means with suds on, waiter."

"No--no; milk, I said--milk over toast. Milk toast--I gotta eat it. Why don't you lemme talk, Charley? I gotta tell you."

He was suddenly sober.

"What's hurting you? One milk toast, waiter; tell them in the kitchen the lady's teeth hurt her. What's up, Sweetness?" And he must lean across the table and imprint a fresh kiss on her lips.

"Don't--don't--don't! For Gawd's sake, don't!" She covered her face with her hands; and such a trembling seized her that they fell pitifully away again and showed her features, each distorted, "You mustn't, Charley! Mustn't do that again, not--not for three months--you--you mustn't."

He leaned across the table; his voice was like sleet--cold, thin, cutting:

"What's the matter--going to quit?"

"No--no--no!"

"Got another guy you like better?"

"Oh! Oh!"

"A queenie can't quit me first and get away with it, kiddo. I may be a soft-fingered sort of fellow, but a queenie can't quit me first and get away with it. Ask 'em about me round here; they know me. If anybody in this little duet is going to do the quitting act first it ain't going to be you. What's the matter? Out with it!"

"Charley, it ain't that--I swear it ain't that!"

"What's hurting you, then?"

"I gotta tell you. We gotta go easy for a little while. We gotta quit doing the rounds for a while till--only for a little while. Three months he said would fix me. A grand old doc he was!

"I been to the clinic, Charley. I hadda go. The cough--the cough was cuttin' me in two. It ain't like me to go keeling like I did. I never said much about it; but, nights and all, the sweats and the cough and the shooting pains was cutting me in two. We gotta go easy for a while, Charley; just--"

"You sick, Sara?" His fatty-white face lost a shade of its animation.
"Sick?"

"But it ain't, Charley. On his word he promised it ain't! A grand old doc, with whiskers--he promised me that. I--I am just beginning; but the stitch was in time. It ain't a real case yet, Charley. I swear, on my mother's curl of hair, it ain't."

"Ain't what? Ain't what?"

"It ain't! Air, he said, right living--early hours and all. I gotta get out of the basement. He'll get me a job. A grand old man! Windows open; right living. No--no dancing and all, for a while, Charley. Three months only, Charley; and then--"

"What, I say--"

"It ain't, Charley! I swear it ain't. Just one--the left one--a little sore down at the base--the bottom. Charley, quit looking at me like that! It ain't a real case--it ain't; it ain't!"

"It ain't what?"

"The--the T.B. Just the left one; down at--"

"You--you--" An oath as hot as a live coal dropped from his lips and he drew back, strangling. "You--you got it, and you're letting me down easy. You got it, and it's catching as hell! You got it, you white devil, and--and you're tryin' to lie out of it--you--you--"

"Charley! Charley!"

"You got it, and you been letting me eat it off your lips! You devil, you! You devil, you! You devil, you!"

"Charley, I--"

"I could kill you! Lemme wash my mouth! You got it; and if you got it I got it! I got it! I got it! I--I--"

He rushed from the table, strangling, stuttering, staggering; and his face was twisted with fear.

For an hour she sat there, waiting, her hands folded in her lap and her eyes growing larger in her face. The dish of stew took on a thin coating of grease and the beer died in the glass. The waiter snickered. After a while she paid for the meal out of her newly opened wage envelope and walked out into the air.

Once on the street, she moaned audibly into her handkerchief. There is relief in articulation. Her way lay through dark streets, where figures love to slink in the shadows. One threw a taunt at her and she ran. At the stoop of her rooming house she faltered, half fainting and breathing deep from exhaustion, her head thrown back and her eyes gazing upward.

Over the narrow street stars glittered, dozens and myriads of them.

* * * * *

Literature has little enough to say of the heartaches and the heartburns of the Sara Jukes and the Hattie Krakows and the Eddie Blaneys. Medical science concedes them a hollow organ for keeping up the circulation. Yet Mrs. Van Ness' heartbreak over the death of her Chinese terrier, Wang, claims a first-page column in the morning edition; her heartburn--a complication of midnight terrapin and the strain of her most recent role of corespondent--obtains her a suite de luxe in a private sanitarium.

Vivisectionists believe the dog is less sensitive to pain than man; so the social vivisectionists, in problem plays and best sellers, are more concerned with the heartaches and heartburns of the classes. But analysis would show that the sediment of salt in Sara Juke's and Mrs. Van Ness' tears is equal.

Indeed, when Sara Juke stepped out of the street car on a golden Sunday morning in October, her heart beat higher and more full of

emotion than Mrs. Van Ness could find at that breakfast hour, reclining on her fine linen pillows, an electric massage and a four-dollar-an-hour masseuse forcing her sluggish blood to flow.

Eddie Blaney gently helped Sara to alight, cupping the point of her elbow in his hand; and they stood huddled for a moment by the roadway while the car whizzed past, leaving them in the yellow and ochre, saffron and crimson countryside.

"Gee! Gee-whiz!"

"See! I told you. And you not wanting to come when I called for you this morning--you trying to dodge me and the swellest Indian summer Sunday on the calendar!"

"Looka!"

"Wait! We ain't started yet, if you think this is swell."

"Oh! Let's go over in them woods. Let's." Her lips were apart and pink crept into her cheeks, effacing the dark rims of pain beneath her eyes. "Let's hurry."

"Sure; that's where we're going--right over in there, where the woods look like they're on fire; but, gee, this ain't nothing to the country places I know round here. This ain't nothing. Wait!"

The ardor of the inspired guide was his, and with each exclamation from her the joy of his task doubled itself.

"If you think this is great, wait--just you wait. Gee, if you like this, what would you have said to the farm? Wait till we get to the top of the hill."

Fallen leaves, crisp as paper, crackled pleasantly under their feet; and through the haze that is October's veil glowed a reddish sun, vague as an opal. A footpath crawled like a serpent through the woods and they followed it, kicking up the leaves before them, pausing, darting, exclaiming.

"I--Honest, Mr. Blaney, I--"

"Eddie!"

"Eddie, I--I never did feel so--I never was so--so--Aw, I can't say it." Tears sprang to her eyes.

"Sure, you never was. I never was, neither, before--before--"

"Before what?"

"Before I had to."

"Had to?"

"Yeh; both of them. Bleedin' all the time. Didn't see nothing but red for 'leven months."

"You!"

"Yeh; three years ago. Looked like Arizona on a stretcher for me."

"You--so big and strong and all!"

He smiled at her and his teeth flashed.

"Gad, little girl, if you got a right to be scared, whatta you think I had? I seen your card over at the clinic last night, and you ain't got no right to have that down-and-out look on you had this morning. If you think

you got something to be scared at you looka my old card at the clinic some day; they keep it for show. You oughtta seen me the day I quit the shipping room, right over at the Titanic, too, and then see whether you got something to be scared at."

"You--you used to work there?"

"Six years."

"I--I ain't scared no more, Eddie; honest, I ain't!"

"Gee, I should say not! They ain't even sending you up to the farm."

"No, no! They're going to get me a job. A regular outdoor, on-the-level kind of a job. A grand old doc, with whiskers! I ain't a regular one, Eddie; just the bottom of one lung don't make a regular one."

"Well, I guess not, poor little missy. Well, I guess not."

"Three months he said, Eddie. Three months of right livin' like this, and air and all, and I'll be as round as a peach, he said. Said it hisself, without me asking--that's how scared I was. Round as a peach!"

"You can't beat that gang over there at the clinic, little missy. They took me out of the department when all the spring water I knew about ran out of a keg. Even when they got me out on the farm--a grown-up guy like me--for a week I thought the crow in the rooster was a sidewalk faker. You can't beat that, little missy."

"He's a grand old man, with whiskers, that's going to get me the job. Then in three months I--"

"Three months nothing! That gang won't let you slip back after the three months. They took a extra shine to me because I did the prize-pupil stunt; but they won't let anybody slip back if they give 'em half a

chance. When they got me sound again, did they ship me back to the shipping department in the sub-basement? Not muchy! Looka me now, little missy! Clerk in their biggest display; in three months a raise to ninety dollars. Can you beat it? Ninety dollars would send all the shipping clerks of the world off in a faint."

"Gee, it--it's swell!"

"And--"

"Look! Look!"

"Persimmons!" A golden mound of them lay at the base of a tree, piled up against the hole, bursting, brown. "Persimmons! Here; taste one, little missy. They're fine."

"Eat 'em?"

"Sure!"

She bit into one gently; then with appetite.

"M-m-m! Good!"

"Want another?"

"M-m-m--my mouth! Ouch! My m--mouth!"

"Gee, you cute little thing, you! See, my mouth's the same way too. Feels like a knot. Gee, you cute little thing, you--all puckered up and all."

And he must link her arm in his and crunch-crunch over the brittle leaves and up a hillside to a plateau of rock overlooking the flaming

country; and from the valley below, smoke from burning mounds of leaves wound in spirals, its pungency drifting to them.

"See that tree there? It's a oak. Look; from a little acorn like this it grew. See, this is a acorn, and in the start that tree wasn't no bigger than this little thing."

"Quit your kiddin'!" But she smiled and her lips were parted sweetly; and always unformed tears would gloze her eyes.

"Here, sit here, little lady. Wait till I spread this newspaper out. Gee! Don't I wish you didn't have to go back to the city by two o'clock, little lady! We could make a great day of it here, out in the country; lunch at a farm and see the sun set and all. Some day of it we could make if--"

"I--I don't have to go back, Eddie."

His face expanded into his widest smile.

"Gee, that's great! That's just great!"

Silence.

"What you thinking of, little lady, sitting there so pretty and all?"

"N-nothing."

"Nothing? Aw, surely something!"

A tear formed and zigzagged down her cheek.

"Nothing, honest; only I--I feel right happy."

"That's just how you oughtta feel, little lady."

"In three months, if--aw, ain't I the nut?"

"It'll be a big Christmas, won't it, little missy, for both of us? A big Christmas for both of us; you as sound and round as a peach again, and me shooting up like a skyrocket on the pay roll."

A laugh bubbled to her lips before the tear was dry.

"In three months I won't be a T.B., not even a little bit."

"Sh-h-h! On the farm we wasn't allowed to say even that. We wasn't supposed to even know what them letters mean."

"Don't you know what they mean, Eddie?"

"Sure I do!" He leaned toward her and placed his hand lightly over hers. "T.B.--True Blue--that's what they mean, little lady."

She could feel the veins in his palm throbbing.