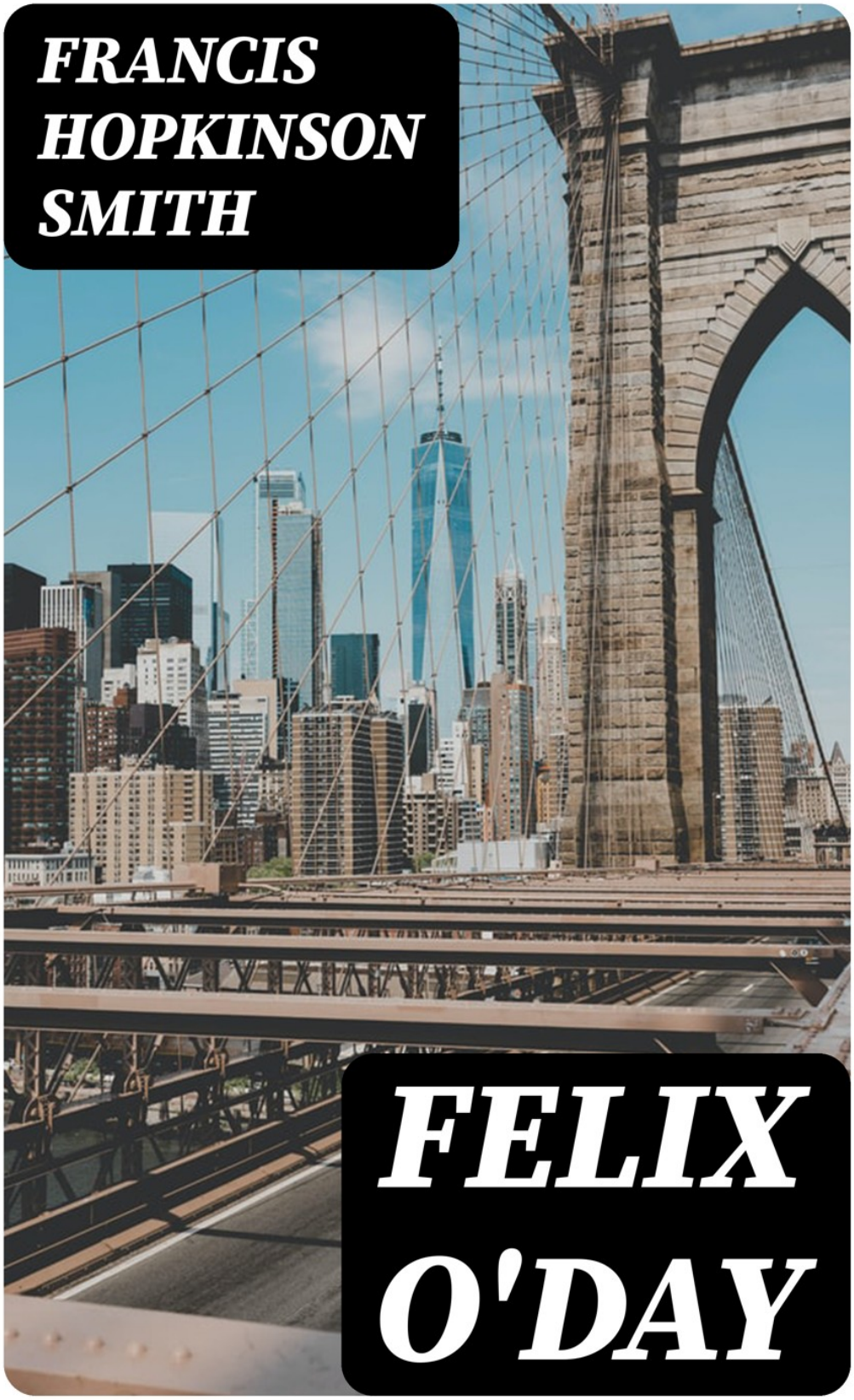
FRANCIS HOPKINSON SMITH

FELIX O'DAY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Chapter I

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Broadway on dry nights, or rather that part known as the Great White Way, is a crowded thoroughfare, dominated by lofty buildings, the sky-line studded with constellations of colored signs pencilled in fire. Broadway on wet, rain-drenched nights is the fairy concourse of the Wonder City of the World, its asphalt splashed with liquid jewels afloat in molten gold.

Across this flood of frenzied brilliance surge hurrying mobs, dodging the ceaseless traffic, trampling underfoot the wealth of the Indies, striding through pools of quicksilver, leaping gutters filled to the brim with melted rubies—horse, car, and man so many black silhouettes against a tremulous sea of light.

Along this blinding whirl blaze the playhouses, their wide portals aflame with crackling globes, toward which swarm bevies of pleasure-seeking moths, their eyes dazzled by the glare. Some with heads and throats bare dart from costly broughams, the mountings of their sleek, rain-varnished horses glittering in the flash of the electric lamps. Others spring from out street cabs. Many come by twos and threes, their skirts held high. Still others form a line, its head lost in a small side door. These are in drab and brown, with worsted shawls tightly drawn across thin shoulders. Here, too, wedged in between shabby men, the collars of their coats muffling their chins, their backs to the grim policeman, stand keen-eyed newsboys and ragged street

urchins, the price of a gallery seat in their tightly closed fists.

Soon the swash and flow of light flooding the street and sidewalks shines the clearer. Fewer dots and lumps of man, cab, and cart now cross its surface. The crowd has begun to thin out. The doors of the theatres are deserted; some flaunt signs of “Standing Room Only.” The cars still follow their routes, lunging and pausing like huge beetles; but much of the wheel traffic has melted, with only here and there a cab or truck between which gold-splashed umbrellas pick a hazardous way.

With the breaking of the silent dawn, shadowed in a lonely archway or on an abandoned doorstep the wet, bedraggled body of a hapless moth is sometimes found, her iridescent wings flattened in the mud. Then for a brief moment a cry of protest, or scorn, or pity goes up. The passers-by raise their hands in anger, draw their skirts aside in horror, or kneel in tenderness. It is the same the world over, and New York is no better and, for that matter, no worse.

On one of these rain-drenched nights, some ten years or more ago, when the streets were flooded with jewels, and the sky-line aflame, a man in a slouch hat, a wet mackintosh clinging to his broad shoulders, stood close to the entrance of one of the principal playhouses along this Great White Way. He had kept his place since the doors were opened, his hat-brim, pulled over his brow, his keen eye searching every face that passed. To all appearances he was but an idle looker-on, attracted by the beauty of the women, and yet during all that time he had not moved, nor had he been in

the way, nor had he been observed even by the door man, the flap of the awning casting its shadow about him. Only once had he strained forward, gazing intently, then again relaxed, settling into his old position.

Not until the last couple had hurried by, breathless at being late, did he refasten the top button of his mackintosh, move clear of the nook which had sheltered him, and step out into the open.

For an instant he glanced about him, seemed to hesitate, as does a bit of driftwood blocked in the current; then, with a sudden straightening of his shoulders, he wheeled and threaded his way down-town.

At Herald Square, he mounted with an aimless air a flight of low steps, peered though the windows, and listened to the crunch of the presses chewing the cud of the day's news. When others crowded close he stepped back to the sidewalk, raising his hat once in apology to an elderly dame who, with head down, had brushed him with her umbrella.

By the time he reached 30th Street his steps had become slower. Again he hesitated, and again with an aimless air turned to the left, the rain still pelting his broad shoulders, his hat pulled closer to protect his face. No lights or color pursued him here. The fronts of the houses were shrouded in gloom; only a hall lantern now and then and the flare of the lamps at the crossings, he alone and buffeting the storm —all others behind closed doors. When Fourth Avenue was reached he lifted his head for the first time. A lighted window had attracted his attention—a wide, corner window filled with battered furniture, ill-assorted china, and dented

brass—one of those popular morgues that house the remains of decayed respectability.

Pausing automatically, he glanced carelessly at the contents, and was about to resume his way when he caught sight of a small card propped against a broken pitcher. “Choice Articles Bought and Sold—Advances Made.”

Suddenly he stopped. Something seemed to interest him. To make sure that he had read the card aright, he bent closer. Evidently satisfied by his scrutiny, he drew himself erect and moved toward the shop door as if to enter. Through the glass he saw a man in shirt-sleeves, packing. The sight of the man brought another change of mind, for he stepped back and raised his head to a big sign over the front. His face now came into view, with its well-modelled nose and square chin—the features of a gentleman of both refinement and intelligence. A man of forty—perhaps of forty-five—clean-shaven, a touch of gray about his temples, his eyes shadowed by heavy brows from beneath which now and then came a flash as brief and brilliant as an electric spark. He might have been a civil engineer, or some scientist, or yet an officer on half pay.

“Otto Kling, 445 Fourth Avenue,” he repeated to himself, to make sure of the name and location. Then, with the quick movement of a man suddenly imbued with new purpose, he wheeled, leaped the overflowed gutter, and walked rapidly until he reached 13th Street. Half-way down the block he entered the shabby doorway of an old-fashioned house, mounted to the third floor, stepped into a small, poorly furnished bedroom lighted by a single gas-jet, and closed the door behind him. Lifting his wet hat from his well-

rounded head, with its smoothly brushed, closely trimmed hair—a head that would have looked well in bronze—he raised the edge of the bedclothes and from underneath the narrow cot dragged out a flat, sole-leather trunk of English make. This he unlocked with a key fastened to a steel chain, took out the tray, felt about among the contents, and drew out a morocco-covered dressing-case, of good size and of evident value, bearing on its top a silver plate inscribed with a monogram and crest. The trunk was then relocked and shoved under the bed.

At this moment a knock startled him.

“Come in,” he called, covering the case with a corner of the cotton quilt.

A bareheaded, coarse-featured woman with a black shawl about her shoulders stood in the doorway. “I've come for my money,” she burst out, too angry for preliminaries. “I'm gittin' tired of bein' put off. You're two weeks behind.”

“Only two weeks? I was afraid it was worse, my dear madame,” he answered calmly, a faint smile curling his thin lips. “You have a better head for figures than I. But do not concern yourself. I will pay you in the morning.”

“I've heard that before, and I'm gittin' sick of it. You'd 'a' been out of here last week if my husband hadn't been laid up with a lame foot.”

“I am sorry to hear about the foot. That must be even worse than my being behind with your rent.”

“Well, it's bad enough with all I got to put up with. Of course I don't want to be ugly,” she went on, her fierceness dying out as she noticed his unruffled calm, “but these

rooms is about all we've got, and we can't afford to take no chances.”

“Did you suppose I would let you?”

“Let me what?”

“Let you take chances. When I become convinced that I cannot pay you what I owe you, I will give you notice in advance. I should be much more unhappy over owing you such a debt than you could possibly be in not getting your money.”

The answer, so unlike those to which she had been accustomed from other delinquents, suddenly rekindled her anger. “Will some of them friends of yours that never show up bring you the money?” she snapped back.

“Have you met any of them on the stairs?” he inquired blandly.

“No, nor nowhere else. You been here now goin' on three months, and there ain't come a letter, nor nothin' by express, and no man, woman, or child has asked for you. Kinder queer, don't you think?”

“Yes, I do think so; and I can hardly blame you. It IS suspicious—VERY suspicious—alarmingly so,” he rejoined with an indulgent smile. Then growing grave again: “That will do, madame. I will send for you when I am ready. Do not lose any sleep and do not let your husband lose any. I will shut the door myself.”

When the clatter of her rough shoes had ceased to echo on the stairs he drew the dressing-case from its hiding-place, tucked it inside his mackintosh, turned down the gas-jet, locked the door of the room, retracing his steps until he

stood once more in front of Kling's sign. This time he went in.

“I am glad you are still open,” he began, shaking the wet from his coat. “I hoped you would be. You are Mr. Kling, are you not?”

“Yes, dot is my name. Vot can I do for you?”

“I passed by your window a short time ago, and saw your card, stating that advances were made on choice articles. Would this be of any use to you?” He took the dressing-case from under his coat and handed it to Kling. “I am not ready to sell it—not to sell it outright; you might, perhaps, make me a small loan which would answer my purpose. Its value is about sixty pounds—some three hundred dollars of your money. At least, it cost that. It is one of Vickery's, of London, and it is almost new.”

Kling glanced sharply at the intruder. “I don't keep open often so late like dis. You must come in de morning.”

“Cannot you look at it now?”

Something in the stranger's manner appealed to the dealer. He lowered his chin, adjusted his spectacles, and peered over their round silver rims—a way with him when he was making up his mind.

“Vell, I don't mind. Let me see,” and opening the case he took out the silver-topped bottles, placing them in a row on the counter behind which he stood. “Yes, dot's a good vun,” he continued with a grunt of approval. “Yes—dot's London, sure enough. Yes, I see Vickery's name—whose initials is on dese bottles? And de arms—de lion and de vings on him—dot come from somebody high up, ain't it? Vhere did you get 'em?”

“That is of no moment. What I want to know is, will you either pay me a fair price for it or loan me a fair sum on it?”

“Is it yours to sell?”

“It is.” There was no trace of resentment in his voice, nor did he show the slightest irritation at being asked so pointed a question.

“Vell, I don't keep a pawn-shop. I got no license, and if I had I vouldn't do it—too much trouble all de time. Poor vomans, dead-beats, suckers, sneak-thieves—all kind of peoples you don't vant, to come in the door vhen you have a pawn-shop.”

“Your sign said advances made.”

“Vich vun?”

“The one in the window, or I would not have troubled you.”

“Vell, dot means anyting you please. Sometimes I get olt granfadder vatches dot vay, and olt Sheffield plate and tings vich olt families sell vhen everybody is gone dead. Vy do you vant to give dis away? I vouldn't, if I vas you. You don't look like a man vot is broke. I vill put back de bottles. You take it home agin.”

“I would if I had any home to take it to. I am a stranger here and am two weeks behind in the rent of my room.”

“Is dot so? Vell, dot is too bad. Two weeks behint and no home but a room! I vouldn't think dot to look at you.”

“I would not either if I had the courage to look at myself in the glass. Then you cannot help me?”

“I don't say dot I can't. Somebody may come in. I have lots of tings belong to peoples, and ven other peoples come in, sometimes dey buy, and sometimes dey don't.

Sometimes only one day goes by, and sometimes a whole year. You leave it vid me. I take care of it. Den I get my little Masie—dat little girl of mine vot I call Beesvings—to polish up all de bottles and make everyting look like new."

"Then I will come in the morning?"

"Yes, but give me your name—someting might happen yet, and your address. Here, write it on dis card."

"No, that is unnecessary. I will take your word for it."

"But vere can I find you?"

"I will find myself, thank you," and he strode out into the rain.

Chapter II

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In the days when Otto Kling's shop-windows attracted collectors in search of curios and battered furniture, “The Avenue,” as its denizens always called Fourth Avenue between Madison Square Garden and the tunnel, was a little city in itself.

Almost all the needs of a greater one could be supplied by the stores fronting its sidewalks. If tea, coffee, sugar, and similar stimulating and soothing groceries were wanted, old Bundleton, on the corner above Kling's, in a white apron and paper cuffs, weighed them out. If it were butter or eggs, milk, cream, or curds, the Long Island Dairy—which was really old man Heffern, his daughter Mary, and his boy Tom—had them in a paper bag, or on your plate, or into your pitcher before you could count your change. If it were a sirloin, or lamb-chops, or Philadelphia chickens, or a Cincinnati ham, fat Porterfield, watched over from her desk by fat Mrs. Porterfield, dumped them on a pair of glittering brass scales and sent them home to your kitchen invitingly laid out in a flat wicker basket. If it were fish—fresh, salt, smoked, or otherwise—to say nothing of crabs, oysters, clams, and the exclusive and expensive lobster—it was Codman, a few doors above Porterfield's, who had them on ice, or in barrels, the varnished claws of the lobsters thrust out like the hands of a drowning man.

Were it a question of drugs, there was Pestler, the apothecary, with his four big green globes illuminated by four big gas-jets, the joy of the children. A small fellow this

Pestler, with a round head and up-brushed hair set on a long, thin stem of a neck, the whole growing out of a pair of narrow shoulders, quite like a tulip from a glass jar.

And then there were Jarvis, the spectacle man, and that canny Scotchman Sanderson, the florist, who knew the difference between roses a week old and roses a day old, and who had the rare gift of so mixing the two vintages that hardly enough dead stock was left over for funerals including those presided over by his fellow conspirator Digwell, the undertaker, who lived over his mausoleum of a back room.

And, of course, there were the bakeshop emitting enticing smells, mostly of currants and burnt sugar, and the hardware store, full of nails and pocket-knives, and old Mr. Jacobs, the tailor, who sat cross-legged on a wide table in a room down four stone steps from the sidewalk, and the grog-shops—more's the pity—one on every corner save Kling's.

Hardly a trace is now left of any one of them, so sudden and overwhelming has been the march of modern progress. Even the little Peter Cooper House, picked up bodily by that worthy philanthropist and set down here nearly a hundred years ago, is gone, and so are the row of musty, red-bricked houses at the lower end of this Little City in Itself. And so are the tenants of this musty old row, shady locksmiths with a tendency toward skeleton keys; ingenious upholsterers who indulged in paper-hanging on the sly; shoemakers who did half-soling and heeling, their day's work set to dry on the window-sill, not to mention those addicted to the use of the

piano, banjo, or harp, as well as the wig and dress makers who lightened the general gloom.

And with the disappearance of these old landmarks—and it all took place within less than ten years—there disappeared, also, the old family life of “The Avenue,” in which each home shared in the good-fellowship of the whole, all of them contributing to that sane and sustaining stratum, if we did but know it, of our civic structure—facts that but few New Yorkers either recognize or value.

On the block below Kling's in those other days was the quaint Book Shop owned by Tim Kelsey, the hunchback, a walking encyclopaedia of knowledge, much of it as musty and out of date as most of his books; while overtopping all else in importance, so far as this story is concerned, was the shabby, old-fashioned two-story house known the town over as the Express Office of John and Kitty Cleary, sporting above its narrow street-door a swinging sign informing inquirers that trunks were carried for twenty-five cents.

And not only trunks, but all of the movable furniture up and down the avenue, and most of that from the adjacent regions, found their way in and out of the Cleary wagons. Indeed Otto Kling's confidence in Kitty—and Kitty was really the head of the concern—was so great that he always refused to allow any of her rivals to carry his purchases and sales, even at a reduced price, a temptation seldom resisted by the economical Dutchman.

Nor did the friendly relations end here. Not only did Kitty's man Mike hammer up at night the rusty iron shutters protecting Kling's side window, clean away the snow before his store, and lend a hand in the moving of extra-heavy

pieces, but he was even known to wash the windows and kindle a fire.

That Mike had delayed or entirely forgotten to hammer up these same iron shutters when the stranger brought in the dressing-case accounted for the fact of Otto Kling's shop having been kept open until so late. It also accounted for the fact that when the same stranger appeared early the next morning (Mike was tending the store) and made his way to where the Irishman sat he found him conning the head-lines of the morning paper. That worthy man-of-all-work, never having laid eyes on him before, at once made a mental note of the intruder's well-cut English clothes, heavy walking-shoes, and short brier-wood pipe, and, concluding therefrom that he was a person of importance, stretched out his hand toward the bell-rope in connection with the breakfast-room above, at the same time saying with great urbanity: “Take a chair, or, if yer cold, come up near the stove. Mr. Kling will be down in a minute. He's up-stairs eatin' his breakfast with his little girl. I'm not his man or I'd wait on ye meself. A little fresh, ain't it, after the wet night we had?”

“I left a dressing-case here last night,” ventured the intruder.

Mike's chin went out with a quick movement, his face expressive of supreme disgust at his mistake. “Oh, is it that? Somethin' ye had to sell? Well, then, maybe you'd better call durin' the day.”

“No, I will wait—you need not ring. I have nothing else to do, and Mr. Kling may have a great deal. I take it you are

from the north of Ireland, either Londonderry or near there. Am I right?”

“I'm from Lifford, within reach of it. How the divil did ye know?”

“I can tell from your brogue. How long have you been in this country?”

“About five years—going on six now. How long have you been here?”

“How long? Well—” Here he bent over the table against which he had been leaning, selected a cup from a group of china, turned it upside down in search of the mark, and then, as if he had momentarily forgotten himself, answered slowly: “Oh, not long—a few months or so. You do not object to my looking these over?” he asked, this time reversing a plate and subjecting it to the same scrutiny.

“No, so ye don't let go of 'em. Fellow come in here last week and broke a teapot foolin' wid it.”

The visitor, without replying, continued his cool examination of the collection, consisting of articles of different makes and colors. Presently, gathering up a pair of cups and saucers, he said: “These should be in a glass case or in the safe. They are old Spode and very rare. Ah, here is Mr. Kling! I have amused myself, sir, in looking over part of your stock. You seem to have undervalued these cups and saucers. They are very rare, and if you had a full set of them they would be almost priceless. This is old Spode,” he continued, pointing to the cipher on the bottom of each cup.

“Vell, I didn't tink dot ven I bought it.”

There was no greeting, no reference to their having met before. One might have supposed that their last talk had

been uninterrupted.

“It vas all in a lump, and der vas a soup tureen in de lot—I don't know vot I did vid it. I tink dat's up-stairs. Mike, you go up and ask my little girl Masie if she can find dot big tureen vich I bought from old Mrs. Blobbs who keeps dot old-clothes place on Second Avenue. And you vas sure about dis china?”

“Very sure.”

“How do you know?”

“From the mark.”

“Vot's it vorth?”

“The cups and saucers would bring about two pounds apiece in London. If there were a full dozen they would bring a matter of fifteen or twenty pounds—some hundred dollars of your money.”

Kling stepped nearer and peered intently at the stranger. “You give dot for dem?”

The man's eyebrows narrowed. “I am not buying cups at present,” he answered, with quiet dignity, “but they are worth what I tell you.

“And now tell me vot dis tureen is vorth?” he asked as Mike reappeared and set it on the table, backing away with the remark that he'd go now, Mrs. Cleary would be wantin' him. Kling moved the relic toward the expert for closer examination.

“Don't trouble yourself, Mr. Kling; I can see it. All I can say is that the old lady must have known better days and must have been terribly poor to have parted with it. What, if I may ask, did you pay her for this?”

“Two dollars. Vas it too much?” The stranger had suddenly become an important personage.

“No—too little. It is old Lowestoft, and”—here he took the lid from the dealer's hand—“yes, without a crack or blemish—yes, old Lowestoft—worth, I should say, ten or more pounds. They are giving large sums for these things in London. Perhaps you have not made a specialty of china.”

Otto had now forgotten the tureen and was scrutinizing the speaker, wondering what kind of a man he really was—this fellow who looked and spoke like a person of position, knew the value of curios at sight, and yet who had confessed the night before to being behind with his rent and anxious to sell his belongings to keep off the street. Then the doubt, universal in the minds of second-hand dealers, arose. “Come along vid me and tell me some more. Vot is dot chair?” and he drew out a freshly varnished relic of better days.

The man seized the chair by the back, canted it to see all sides of it, and was about to give his decision when the laughter of a child and the sharp, quick bark of a dog caused him to pause and raise his head. A white fox-terrier with a clothes-pin tail, two scissored ears, and two restless, shoe-button eyes, peering through button-hole lids, followed by a little girl ten or twelve years of age, was regarding him suspiciously.

“He won't hurt you,” cried the child. “Come back, you naughty Fudge!”

“I do not intend he shall,” said the man, reaching down and picking the dog up bodily by the scruff of his neck. “What is the matter, old fellow?” he continued, twisting the

dog's head so that he could look into his eyes. “Wanted to make a meal of me?—too bad. Your little daughter, of course, Mr. Kling? A very good breed of dog, my dear young lady—just a little nervous, and that is in his favor. Now, sir, make your excuses to your mistress,” and he placed the terrier in her arms.

The child lifted her face toward his in delight. Most of the men whom Fudge attacked either shrunk out of his way or replied to his attentions with a kick.

“You love dogs, don't you, sir?” she asked. Fudge was now routing his sharp nose under her chin as if in apology for his antics.

“I am afraid I do, and I am glad you do—they are sometimes the best friends one has.”

“Yes,” broke in Kling, “and so am I glad. Dot dog is more as a brudder to my Masie, ain't he, Beesvings? And now you run avay, dear, and play, and take Fudge vid you and say 'Good morning' to Mrs. Cleary, and maybe dot fool dog of Bobby's be home.” He stooped and kissed her, caressing her cheek with his thumb and forefinger, as he pushed her toward the door, and again turned to the stranger. “And now, vot about dot chair you got in your hand?”

“Oh, the chair! I had forgotten that you had asked. Your little daughter drove everything else out of my head. Let me have a closer look.” He swung it round to get a nearer view.

“The legs—that is, three of them—are Chippendale. The back is a nondescript of something—I cannot tell. Perhaps from some colonial remnant.”

“Vot's it vorth?”

“Nothing, except to sit upon.”

Otto laughed—a gurgling, chuckling laugh, his pudgy nose wrinkling like a rabbit's.

“Ain't dot funny!” and he rubbed his fat hands. “Dot's true. Yes, I make it myselluf—and five oders, vich vas sold out of a lot of olt furniture. I got two German men down-stairs puttin' in new legs and new backs; dey can do anyting. Nobody but you find dot out. I guess you know 'bout dot china—I must look into dot. Maybe some mens on Fifth Avenue buy dot china—dey never come in here because dey tink dey find only olt furniture. And now about dot dressing-case. Don't you sell it. I find somebody pay more as I can give, and you pay me for my trouble. I lend you tventy—yes, I lend tventy-five dollars on it. Vill dot be enough?”

“That will be enough for a week, after I pay what I owe.”

“Vell, den, ven dot is gone ve tink out someting else, don't ve? I look it all over last night. It is all right—no breaks anyvere. And dot tventy-five only last you a veek! Vy is dot? Vot board do you pay?” His interest in the visitor was increasing.

“Eight dollars with my meals, whenever my landlady is on time.”

“Eight dollars! Dot voman's robbin' you. Eight dollars! She is a skin!”

“It was the best I could do,” he replied simply.

“Vot does she give you?”

“A small bedroom, my coffee in the morning, and my dinner—both served in my room on a tray.”

“Yes, I see; dot's it. She charge about tree dollars for de tray. I find you someting better as dot. Kitty Cleary has a

room—you don't know Kitty? Vell, you ought to begin right avay. Dot's vun voman you don't ever see again. She vas in here last night, after you left, looking for her man Mike. She take you for five dollars a veek, maybe, and you get good tings to eat and you get Kitty besides, and dot is vorth more as ten dollars. She lives across de street—you can see one of her vagons—dot big vite horse is hers, and she love dot horse as much as she love her husband John and her boy Bobby, all but dot fool dog of Bobby's, she don't love him. You go over dere and tell her I sent you."

The stranger had relighted his pipe, and was watching the dealer clutching nervously at his spectacles, pushing them far up on his forehead, only to readjust them again on his nose. He had begun to detect behind the fat, round face of the thrifty shopkeeper a certain kindly quality. "And who may this remarkable lady be, this Mrs. Cleary?" he inquired.

"She ain't no lady. She is better as a hundert ladies—she is joost a plain vomans who keeps a express office over dere—Cleary's Express. You don't know it? Vell, dot's your fault. Dot's her boy Bobby outside de door. He has been up vid his fadder to de Grand Central for some sideboards and sofas I been buyin'. You vant to look at 'em ven dey git unloaded. They joost ready to fall to pieces, and if I patch 'em up nobody don't buy 'em. Vot I do is to leave 'em out on de sidewalk for a veek or two and let de dirt and rain get on 'em, den somebody come along and say: 'Dot is genuine. You can see right avay how olt dot is. Dot is because de bottom is out of de sofas, and de back of de behind of de sideboard is busted. So den I get fifty dollars more for repairin' my own furniture. Ain't dot funny? And ven I send it

home dey say: 'Oh, ain't dot beautiful! You ought to have seen dot ven I bought it of old Kling! You vouldn't give two dollars for it. All he did vas to scrape it down and revarnish it—and now it is joost as good as new.' Ain't dot funny? Vy, sometimes I have to holt on to my sides for fear dey vill split vid my laughter, and my two German mens dey stuff dere fingers in dere mouths so de customers can't hear. And all de backs new, and de legs made outer udder legs, and de handles I get across at de hardvare store! Oh, I tell you, it's funny! But you know all about it. Maybe you vunce keep a place yourself?"

"No, never."

"VOT!"

"No, I have never been in your line of trade."

"Vell, how do you know so much?"

"I know very little, but I have always enjoyed such things."

"Vell, dot's more funny yet. You vould make a lot of money if you did. Ven you get someting for nudding you know it—I don't. You see dem—vot you call 'em—Spodes—and dot tureen, dot—"

"Lowestoft?" suggested the stranger, adjusting the mouthpiece of his pipe.

"Yes, dot Lowestoft. If you come in yesterday and say, 'Have you any olt cups and saucers and olt soup tureens?' I say: 'Yes—help yourselluf. Take your pick for tventy-five cents each for de cups and saucers.' You see, I pay nudding and I get nudding. Dot give me an idea! How vould you like to go round de store vid me and pick out de good vuns? Dot von't take you long—vait a minute—I give you dat money."

“I should not be of the slightest value, and if you are loaning me the twenty-five dollars on any other basis than the worth of the dressing-case, I would rather not take it.”

“Oh, I have finished vid de loan. Vot I say I say.” He thrust his hand into a side pocket, from which he drew a flat wallet. “And dere is de money. I give you a receipt for de case.”

“No, I do not want any receipt. I am quite willing you should keep it until I can either pay this back or you can loan me some more on it.”

“Vell, den, I don't vant no receipt for de money. Here comes a customer. Don't you go yet. I know her. She comes most every day. She only vants to look around. Such a lot of peoples only vants to look around. Dey don't know vat dey vant and you never have it. No, it ain't no customer—it's Bobby.”

The door was burst open, and a boy in a blue jumper, his cap thrust so far back on his head that it was a wonder it didn't fall off, cried out:

“Say! One of the sideboards is stuck on the iron railing and we can't get it furrards or back. Them two weiss-beers ye got down-stairs can't lift nothin' but full mugs. Send somebody to help.” And the door went to with a bang.

Kling was about to call for assistance when Hans—one of the maligned—shuffled in from the rear of the store, carrying a wooden image very much in want of repair.

“Oh, dots awful good you brought dot! Set it here on dis chair—now you go avay and help vid dem sideboards. See here vunce, mister. You see, dey vas makin' de altar over new, and one of de mens come to me last week and he says: 'Mister Kling, come vid me and buy vot ve don't vant.

De school is too small, and some of de children got no place to sit down in. Ve got to sell sometings, and maybe now ve don't vant dem images.' And so I buy dem two and some olt vestments dat my Masie make so good as new, vid patches. Now, vot can I do vid dis—?”

Again the door was burst open, shutting off all possibility for conversation. Bobby's voice had now reached the volume of a fog-horn. “What do ye take us fur out here—lobsters? Dad and I can't wait all day. He's got to go down to Lafayette Place for a trunk.”

Kling looked at his companion, as if to see what effect the talk had had upon him, and broke out into a suffocating chuckle. “Dot's vot it is all day long—don't you yonder I go crazy? First it is sideboards and den it is vooden saints. Here you, Bobby! Come inside vunce! I vant to ask you sometings.”

“Say the rest, Skeesicks,” returned the boy, eying the stranger.

“Has your mudder got empty dot room yet?”

“Yep—the shyster got to swearin', and the mother wouldn't stand for it and she fired him. We ain't keepin' no house o' refuge nor no station parlor fer bums. Holy Moses! look at the guy that's been robbin' a church! And see the nose on him all busted! Have ye started them mugs?”

Kling cleared the air with his fat hands as the boy made for the door, and turned to his visitor once more. “Dot boy make me deaf vid his noise like a fire-engine! Now, vunce more. Vat shall I do vid dis image?”

“I give it up,” observed the stranger, passing his hand over the head and down its side. “I am not very much on

saints—wooden ones, I mean. He seems a good deal out of place here. Why buy such things at all, and why sell them? But that, of course, is not your point of view. I would send it back to the good father, if I were you, and have him put it behind the altar if he is ashamed to put it in front. Holy things belong to holy places. But I am already taking up too much of your time. Thank you very much for the money. It comes at an opportune moment. I shall come in once in a while to see you and, if you are willing, to talk to you."

"But you don't say nudding about Kitty's room. Vait till—oh, dere you are, you darlin' girl! You mind de store, Masie. Now you come vid me and I show you de finest vomans you never see in your whole life!"

Chapter III

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Kitty Cleary's wide sidewalk, littered with trunks, and her narrow, choked-up office, its window hung with theatre bills and chowder-party posters, all of which were in full view of Kling's doorway, was the half-way house of any one who had five minutes to spare; it was inside its walls that closer greetings awaited those who, even with the thinnest of excuses, made bold to avail themselves of her hospitality. Drivers from the livery-stable next door, where Kitty kept her own two horses; the policeman on the beat; the night-watchman from the big store on 28th Street, just off duty, or just going on; the newsman in the early morning, who would use her benches on which to rearrange his deliveries—all were welcome as long as they behaved themselves. When they did not—and once or twice such a thing had occurred—she would throw wide the door and, with a quick movement of her right thumb, order them out, a look in her eye convincing the culprits at once that they might better obey.

Never a day passed but there was a pot of coffee simmering away at the back of the kitchen stove. Indeed, hot coffee was Kitty's standby. Many a night when she was up late poring over her delivery book, getting ready for the next day's work, a carriage or cab would drive into the livery-stable next door, and she would send her husband out to bring in the coachman.

“Half froze, he is, waitin' outside Sherry's or Delmonico's, and nobody thinkin' of what he suffers. Go, git him, John, dear, and I'll stir up the fire. They ought to be ashamed of

themselves, dancin' till God knows when—and here it is two o'clock and a string of cabs out in the cold. Thank ye, John. In with ye, my lad, and get something to warm ye up," and then the rosy-cheeked, deep-breasted, cheery little woman—she was under forty—her eyes the brighter for her thought, would begin pulling down cups and saucers from her dresser, making ready not only for the "lad," but for John and herself—and anybody else who happened to be within call.

The hospitalities of her family sitting-room, opening out of the kitchen, were reserved for her intimates. These she welcomed at any hour of the day or night, from sunrise to sunset, and even as late as two in the morning, if either business or pleasure necessitated such hours.

Tim Kelsey, the hunchback, often dropped in. Otto Kling, after Masie was abed; Digwell, the undertaker, quite a jolly fellow during off hours; Codman and Porterfield, with their respective wives; and, most welcome of all, Father Cruse, of St. Barnabas's Church around the corner, the trusted shepherd of "The Avenue"—a clear-skinned, well-built man, barely forty, whose muscular body just filled his black cassock so that it neither fell in folds nor wrinkled crosswise, and whose fresh, ruddy face was an index of the humane, kindly, helpful life that he led. For him Kitty could never do enough.

The office, sitting-room, and kitchen, however, were not all that the expressman and his wife possessed in the way of accommodations. Up-stairs were two front bedrooms, one occupied by John and Kitty, and the other by their boy Bobby, while in the extreme rear, over the kitchen, was a

single room which was let to any respectable man who could pay for it. These rooms were all reached by a staircase ascending from a narrow hall entered by a separate street-door adjoining that of the office. The door and staircase were convenient for the lodger wishing to stumble up to bed without disturbing his hosts—an event, however, that seldom happened, as Kitty was generally the last person awake in her house.

The horses, as has been said, were kept in the livery-stable next door—the brown mare, a recent purchase, and the old white horse, Jim, the pride of Kitty's heart, in a special stall. The wagons were either backed in the shed in the rear or left overnight close to the curb, with chains on the hind wheels. This was contrary to regulations, and would have been so considered but for the fact that the captain of the precinct often got his coffee in Kitty's back kitchen, as did Tom McGinniss, the big policeman, whose beat reached nearly to the tunnel, both men soothing their consciences with the argument that Kitty's job lasted so late and began so early, sometimes a couple of hours or so before daylight, that it was not worth while to bother about her wagons, when everybody else was in bed, or ought to be.

She was smoothing old Jim's neck, crooning over him, talking to him in her motherly way, telling him what a ruffian he was and how ashamed she was of him for getting the hair worn off under his collar, and he a horse old enough to know better, Bobby's “Toodles,” an animated doormat of a dog, sniffing at her skirt, when Otto and his friend hove in sight.