

To pay off her debt to Trenor, Lily has started working as a hat trimmer and living in a board house. She has trouble sleeping and needs to take a sleeping drug.



The clerk had read the prescription without comment; but in the act of handing out the bottle he paused. "You don't want to increase the dose, you know," he remarked. Lily's heart contracted. What did he mean by looking at her in that way? "Of course not," she murmured, holding out her hand. "That's all right: it's a queer-acting drug. A drop or two more, and off you go--the doctors don't know why."

The dread lest¹ he should question her, or keep the bottle back, choked the murmur of acquiescence in her throat; and when at length she emerged safely from the shop she was almost dizzy² with the intensity of her relief. The mere³ touch of the packet thrilled her tired nerves with the delicious promise of a night of sleep, and in the reaction from her momentary fear she felt as if the first fumes of drowsiness⁴ were already stealing over her.

In her confusion she stumbled against a man who was hurrying down the last steps of the elevated station. He drew back, and she heard her name uttered with surprise. It was Rosedale⁵, fur-coated,

¹ fear

² Light headed

³ simple

⁴ sleepiness

⁵ A very rich man Lily has refused to marry because she despises him

glossy and prosperous--but why did she seem to see him so far off, and as if through a mist of splintered crystals?

"Why, what's the matter, Miss Lily? You're not well!" he exclaimed; and she forced her lips into a pallid smile of reassurance.

"I'm a little tired--it's nothing. Stay with me a moment, please," she faltered. That she should be asking this service of Rosedale! He glanced at the dirty and unpropitious comer on which they stood, with the shriek of the "elevated" and the tumult of trams and waggons contending hideously in their ears.

"We can't stay here; but let me take you somewhere for a cup of tea. The Longworth is only a few yards off, and there'll be no one there at this hour."

A cup of tea in quiet, somewhere out of the noise and ugliness, seemed for the moment the one solace⁶ she could bear. A few steps brought them to the ladies' door of the hotel he had named, and a moment later he was seated opposite to her, and the waiter had placed the tea-tray between them.

"Not a drop of brandy or whiskey first? You look regularly done up⁷, Miss Lily. Well, take your tea strong, then; and, waiter, get a cushion for the lady's back."

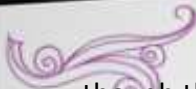
Lily smiled faintly at the injunction to take her tea strong. It was the temptation she was always struggling to resist. Her craving for the keen stimulant was forever conflicting with that other craving for sleep--the midnight craving which only the little phial in her hand could still⁸. But today, at any rate, the tea could hardly be too strong: she counted on it to pour warmth and resolution into her empty veins.

As she leaned back before him, her lids drooping in utter lassitude,

⁶ relief

⁷ Extremely tired and ill

⁸ calm



though the first warm draught already tinged her face with returning life, Rosedale was seized afresh by the poignant surprise of her beauty. The dark pencilling of fatigue under her eyes, the morbid blue-veined pallour of the temples, brought out the brightness of her hair and lips, as though all her ebbing vitality were centred there. Against the dull chocolate-coloured background of the restaurant, the purity of her head stood out as it had never done in the most brightly-lit ball-room. He looked at her with a startled uncomfortable feeling, as though her beauty were a forgotten enemy that had lain in ambush and now sprang out on him unawares.

To clear the air he tried to take an easy tone with her. "Why, Miss Lily, I haven't seen you for an age. I didn't know what had become of you."

Lily, to whom the tea had restored her usual clearness of mind, saw what was in his thoughts and said with a slight smile: "You would not be likely to know about me. I have joined the working classes." He stared⁹ in genuine¹⁰ wonder. "You don't mean ? Why, what on earth are you doing?"

"Learning to be a milliner--at least trying to learn," she hastily qualified the statement.

Rosedale suppressed a low whistle of surprise. "Come off--you ain't serious, are you?"

"Perfectly serious. I'm obliged to work for my living."


"Good Lord--you? But what for? I knew your aunt had turned you down¹¹: Mrs. Fisher told me about it. But I understood you got a legacy from her----"

"I got ten thousand dollars; but the legacy is not to be paid till next

⁹ Looked hard

¹⁰ true

¹¹ Mrs Peniston has disinherited Lily after the rumours she heard about her.



summer."

"Well, but--look here: you could borrow on it any time you wanted."

She shook her head gravely. "No; for I owe¹² it already."

"Owe it? The whole ten thousand?"

"Every penny." She paused, and then continued abruptly, with her eyes on his face: "I think Gus Trenor spoke to you once about having made some money for me in stocks."


She waited, and Rosedale, congested with embarrassment, muttered that he remembered something of the kind.

"He made about nine thousand dollars," Lily pursued, in the same tone of eager communicativeness. "At the time, I understood that he was speculating with my own money: it was incredibly stupid of me, but I knew nothing of business. Afterward I found out that he had not used my money--that what he said he had made for me he had really given me. It was meant in kindness, of course; but it was not the sort of obligation one could remain under¹³. Unfortunately I had spent the money before I discovered my mistake; and so my legacy will have to go to pay it back. That is the reason why I am trying to learn a trade."

She made the statement clearly, deliberately, with pauses between the sentences, so that each should have time to sink deeply into her hearer's mind. She had a passionate desire that some one should know the truth about this transaction, and also that the rumour of her intention to repay the money should reach Judy Trenor's ears. And it had suddenly occurred to her that Rosedale, who had surprised Trenor's confidence, was the fitting person to receive and transmit her version of the facts. She had even felt a momentary exhilaration at the thought of thus relieving herself of her detested

¹² I have a debt

¹³ accept



secret; but the sensation gradually faded¹⁴ in the telling, and as she ended her pallour was suffused with a deep blush of misery.

Rosedale continued to stare at her in wonder; but the wonder took the turn she had least expected.

"But see here--if that's the case, it cleans you out altogether?"

"Altogether--yes," she calmly agreed.

He sat silent, his thick hands clasped on the table, his little puzzled eyes exploring the recesses of the deserted restaurant.

"See here--that's fine," he exclaimed abruptly.

Lily rose from her seat with a deprecating laugh. "Oh, no--it's merely a bore," she asserted, gathering together the ends of her feather scarf.

"Thank you." She held out her hand. "Your tea has given me a tremendous backing. I feel equal to anything now."

Her gesture seemed to show a definite intention of dismissal, but her companion had tossed a bill to the waiter, and was slipping his short arms into his expensive overcoat.

"Wait a minute--you've got to let me walk home with you," he said.

Lily uttered no protest, and when he had paused to make sure of his change they emerged from the hotel and crossed Sixth Avenue again. As she led the way westward past a long line of areas which, through the distortion of their paintless rails, revealed with increasing candour the disjecta membra of bygone dinners, Lily felt that Rosedale was taking contemptuous¹⁵ note of the neighbourhood; and before the doorstep at which she finally paused he looked up with an air of incredulous disgust.

"This isn't the place? Some one told me you were living with Miss Farish."

"No: I am boarding here. I have lived too long on my friends."

He continued to scan the blistered brown stone front, the windows

¹⁴ disappeared

¹⁵ disdainful

draped with discoloured lace, and the Pompeian decoration of the muddy vestibule; then he looked back at her face and said with a visible effort: "You'll let me come and see you some day?"

She smiled, recognizing the heroism of the offer to the point of being frankly touched by it. "Thank you--I shall be very glad," she made answer, in the first sincere words she had ever spoken to him.

Reading Guide

- ❧ How is Lily different from her description in the first chapter?
- ❧ In a few lines, sum up what happened to her and the consequences it had.
- ❧ In a few words, imagine the end of the story.