"If you ain't a sight for sore eyes!"

and I hope it'll be soon coming. Why, Birdie, the price of things is awful! And of course I've got to keep Katy in school for years yet before she can be a stenographer and earn her keep. You know, I took the thousand dollars' insurance poor Edward—the Lord have mercy on him!—left in the Modern Woodmen and the money I got from the railroad and put it into a building and loan association that pays me six per cent. But what's that with three children to feed? And of course I get the rent for the barn from Mr. Kimonsky, the peddler, besides Packey's money, or I couldn't get along at all, my dear. Here he is now. Packey, here's Birdie McMullen waiting for you this last hour."

PACKEY slipped into the room, slender, quick, and furtive-eyed. A boy in years, he had a shrewdness of expression that comes only from contact with the streets, and now he looked over and beyond the visitor as though he half suspected she had not come alone.

"Waiting for me?" he repeated.

"Hello, Packey! I want you to do something for me," Birdie said. "You know Rothman, the florist on Halsted street, don't you?"

"Sure I do," Packey returned with an evident air of relief. "I used to play ball with him. I know him well."

"Will you take a stroll over to his place and introduce me?" she went on. "I want to break some news to him that may make us both a million dollars or so. I'm getting to be a regular little business woman, Mrs. Dwyer."

"Wait until I get my hat and coat," Packey suggested. "I'll go right over with you. If you can worry any coin out of that Dutchman, you're certainly entitled to it. There isn't a lad around these corners more wad-shy than Rothman. I hope you land him."

He went back upstairs with a jauntier step. Katy had gone to look after the youngest of the flock, and the two women were alone for a moment. Miss McMullen rose and stood waiting near the door.

"You won't mind if I tell you the one thing you need most here, will you?" she asked.

The widow looked at her wide-eyed. "Of course not, *claire*. I'd be glad to know," she declared.

"A husband," Birdy said impressively. "That's what you're short right now, and you'll never get things going smoothly until you have somebody at the head of the table carving the duck and keeping these kids under his thumb."

"Ooh-hoh! Will ye listen to her!" Mrs. Dwyer exclaimed, rosy with embarrassment, but smiling nevertheless over the suggestion. "Go along with you, Birdie! I had the best man that ever lived—I'd never do with another."

"Maybe not," Miss McMullen cheerily admitted; "but you keep thinking it over just the same. It's pretty soft to have a nice fat pay envelop come into the house every month the same day you get the rent bill. It keeps you from having those nervous jumps every time you hear the doorbell ring. Do you ever see Andy Larkin these days?"

"Andy Larkin?" the widow repeated. "The policeman, you mean? Why, I haven't seen him in months. I don't think—why, Birdie McMullen! The idea! You ought to be—why, I never heard such talk in all my life!"

Packey looked in, smiling. "All ready," he said. "Us for the big street."

"You just keep that in mind, my lady," Birdie murmured, leaning toward the older woman. "He thinks a lot of you, at that, if you only knew it. It was some things he said that made me think of it."

Mrs. Dwyer pushed her away playfully. "Run along with your talk!" she laughed. "An old woman like me! Why, you have me blushing here! Goodnight, Birdie. Don't stay too late, Packey. You might miss your train."

WHEN they were alone in the street Miss McMullen walked on beside the youth in silence for a few moments. She was not quite sure of the best method of broaching what was on her mind. Indeed, she did not know whether Packey had learned that he was under suspicion; though his preparations for leaving town indicated that he knew discovery could not be long averted. And as usual she decided that directness had all the advantages. At the corner she turned to him with a grave face.

"We're not going to Rothman's, Packey," she said. "I just said that in front of your mother to get you out of the house and have a little chatter with you. What about this forty-five dollars you've held out on your collections for Larrimer's?"

The boy jumped away from her instinctively, almost as though she had told him he was under arrest; but as Birdie tucked her hand through his arm and gave him a comforting little pat he turned a drawn, scared face toward her.

"Where did you hear that?" he demanded.

"Never mind, Son. I hear a lot of loose gabble around these corners," she returned. "Tell me about it. I want to help you."

The arm on which her hand rested for a moment was trembling. Packey tried to speak once or twice; but his lips were suddenly too dry. Panic held him in its grip.

"Say, tell me where you heard this, won't you?" he gasped. "Do they know about it? Are—are they coming for me already?"

"I guess the best thing for you is to hear just what's going on," Miss McMullen returned. "Just walk along here with me, and don't act as if you had a stick of dynamite in your pocket with the fuse lit. I got this from a certain gumshoe copper that's carrying a warrant for you. He happens to be a friend of your family, and he didn't see any need for jumping you the minute he got the papers, and it happened that he told me about it. I asked him to hold off for a day or two—and now I want to know how about it. Did you take the money, Packey?"

The youth had withdrawn his arm when they turned into crowded Halsted street under the arc lights. To be seen in that intimate relationship with a young woman approached the compromising too closely to be approved by Packey's social circle. And now that she put the question so bluntly he took a deep breath, clenched his fists, and turned to her.

"Yes, I took it!" he muttered. "I had to have it. It was goin' to cost me my job if I didn't. But as sure as there's a God in Heaven I was goin' to make it good before the end of the week! And now I s'pose they'll get me and I'll be put away!" he concluded savagely.

"Wait until we get to that part of it before you throw up your hands," Birdie advised. "Just now I want to get the straight of all this. What was the big idea of your having to dig up forty-five dollars all at once? You'd better tell me all about it, Packey, and don't lie. That would only tangle things up in a bigger knot."

"I'll tell you," the boy exclaimed earnestly, "I'll tell you all about it, Birdie. There's no use holding anything back now. I had to have the money for Barstow, the loan man. He was going to Larrimer's to attach my salary next payday, and that would have been the finish for me. They've got a rule there that any fellow that gets mixed up with a loan agent is let out. And you know I couldn't stand for that on account of my mother and the kids. I was up against it!"

YOU sure were if that human crab had his grip on you, Packey," Miss McMullen returned. "How on earth did you get into the hands of a loan shark? They've been telling me you are the model boy of the ward,—chip in all your salary except carfare to the family pocketbook, and side-step lunch three times a week to get the folks icecream on Sundays. What was the trouble, Son?"

"Oh, I don't know just how it started," Packey said in a troubled tone. "I guess this tango business had something to do with it. I got to going around to dances pretty much the last few months, and you can't do that on nothing a week. And most of the fellows I run with went into this Mohegan Club that's been started; so I went in, and it took a little coin there right along. And I didn't have it."

"So you went to Barstow and borrowed it, eh?" Birdie said. "Foolish boy! You had as much chance to get out as if you had started here to wade across the lake. You get in deeper every move you make."

"Don't I know it?" Packey bitterly retorted. "I started in by getting ten from him. Now I've just paid him thirty-five out of that money I took out of my collections, and I still owe him twenty!"

"Fine work!" Miss McMullen said. "If you lived long enough and kept out of the penitentiary, you'd be supporting Barstow in his old age. But how did you get him to start you in? That's what I can't figure, Packey, on your salary. Your mother says you give her eight out of your ten."

The lad had halted with her on a busy street corner and stood twining his hands together nervously. His confession was not yet complete, and he hesitated to bare his soul completely to a girl, even though she might help him in his dire extremity.

"Well, I'll tell you how that was—but I wouldn't want my mother to know it," he said miserably. "I've been getting twelve a week since the first of the year. I didn't tell her about my raise, because I figured I needed that extra two dollars for myself, and I didn't want to ask her for it. That's where I made my first break, I guess. And then I took a girl to a dance one night a couple of months ago—"

"I was waiting for some female person to come out on the screen and do an act or two," Birdie interrupted. "That's where your troubles really began to rise up and bow to you every morning when you opened your eyes."

"Well, I needed some money," he went on in the same tired tone, "and one of the fellows introduced me to

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"This is an outrage!" shouted the loan shark.