

## At the Poor-house Door

By NANCY HAZLIP

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"I don't see why you would name a girl child Jessica—you might 'a' know she'd grow up so prim and high headed and hateful no man in his senses 'd ever want to marry her, and, land knows, women that don't marry have a hard time." Grandma Cole said to her son's meek widow.

Mrs. Cole answered a little tremulously. "But, mother, they do want to marry her. Jessy might 'a' had four proposals last year, if only she'd 'a' gone and let the men speak out."

"And who were the men, I'd like to know?" Grandma puffed, her throat swelling visibly. "Widderwers with a'v'e children, or else one foot in the grave, or cranky old bachelors, or maybe even preachers. Besides, how can you know even a preacher wants to marry you unless he ups and says so? I never did hold with this way of makin' out every man that went to a house or even rode past it had a notion of goin' there courtin'."

She paused in breathless triumph. If Mrs. Lem Cole had been wise she would have held her peace. Grandma bore contradicting very ill indeed, and to prove her in the wrong was to risk everything. Mrs. Lem knew that very well, but a goaded woman is often a desperate one. Therefore she burst out: "Well! Three of the men—and they weren't widowers nor preachers, but real good chances—asked me to ask Jessy if she'd listen to 'em. And the other one—"

"There wasn't any other one. Maria, I don't believe one word you're sayin'." Grandma broke out furiously. "Four proposals indeed! Why, Ann 'Liza didn't have but three in the whole of last year and the beaux around her all the time like bees around a honey pot."

"The other one was Jimmy Wakefield. And he wouldn't be stopped. Just up and asked Jessy like a man." Mrs. Lem said, not meekly, but with such red spots in her cheeks she looked almost as young as her daughter.

"Get out of here, you!" Grandma panted. "Jimmy Wakefield, indeed! Why he's never had a notion to anybody but Ann 'Liza. And she's goin' to take him, too, when she gets good and ready. Don't you dare talk of him wantin' that stick of a Jessy. If I thought there was any truth in what you've said I'd send you straight out of the house."

"Then we'll go without waiting to be sent," Jessy burst out from the doorway. She had been standing just outside, feeling somehow that her dear patient mother might need her help and countenance. "I don't like to tell, to say such things," she went on, "but mammy told the truth, nothing but the truth. And she shan't stay here to be insulted. Unless you ask her pardon we'll go away."

"Where? To the county poorhouse? I don't know any other chance for ye," Grandma said, white faced, her eyes flashing.

She was an imperious old lady, nobly partial to her namesake and favorite grandchild, Ann Eliza Wicks, partly because Ann Eliza was pretty and taking and impertinent, partly also because she had money enough of her own to be entirely independent.

Grandfather Cole had left everything to his wife. She held on to it with a grip of iron. All her five children had prospered except luckless Lemuel. He had left wife and daughter little except his ill luck. It had followed them so throughout the three years since his death they had at last been forced to accept the shelter Grandma had grudgingly offered.

"Teach school! You know I won't have that," grandma had said to Jessy's plan. "No, missy, I'll marry you off in a year. Then you can take your mother home with you. Remember beggars mustn't be choosers. You ain't quite a beggar. You'll get something when I die, of course. But I ain't going to see my husband's money wasted as long as I can help it, even if I had any to spare, which I haven't. It costs such a lot to do things. Why, just even half livin' nearly bankrupts me. Ann 'Liza has to have things. She's got a delicate appetite, and so naturally. She can afford to be, because she can keep on havin' what she wants when she comes to spendin' her own money. You've got no money to spend, so you'd better learn economy every way."

Jessy had been for going away then, but her mother's timorous fears had prevailed on her to stay. Jessy was not strictly pretty. Her eyes were too serious, her lips too severe. She had a good chin, fine and clean cut, and a lovely neck below it. Her hair was flaxen, her eyes a water blue.

Ann Eliza had black eyes and hair and very high color. Grandma thought her the prettiest creature in the world. She likewise thought Jessica hardly

passable. But now as she faced her grandchild she saw a Jessica new and strange, one whose cheeks were damask roses.

The change startled her. She turned half about, saying in a grumbling voice: "Maria, you oughtn't to provoke me so. Go out in the garden. I'm comin' pretty shortly. And you, Jessy, tell the boy to bring round the buggy. I want you and Ann 'Liza to drive over to the store for me."

"I'm sorry, but I can't go," Jessy said, holding tight to her mother's hand. "I shall be busy—packing up and finding out how we can best get away."

"Oh, shut up! Stop your foolish talk!" grandma commanded fretfully.

Ann Eliza came in from the garden, both her hands full of dewy roses. "Here! Take these and fix the parlor vases," she commanded Jess.ca.

Jessica shook her head and turned toward the door. Grandma had weakened sensibly; she was on the point of mumbling out an apology. But as Ann Eliza cried pettishly, "I wish you'd look at that; I told you what would come of setting beggars on horseback!" her anger flamed up hotter than ever.

"You do as you're told," she cried, catching Jessica by the shoulders and trying to shake her. "You say you want to work for a livin'; prove it by waitin' on your betters."

Jessica set her teeth hard, broke from the quavery hold and rushed away. At the steps she stopped, smiled bitterly and shook the dust from her feet. Over her shoulder she called clearly, "Mother, meet me at the big gate in an hour; by then I shall know exactly what we can do."

Ten minutes later she stood in the Wakefield yard facing Jimmy, with her heart beating so it half suffocated her. She had so dreaded to tell what must be told—to ask the help that was imperative. It was not much, only to carry her mother and their scant belongings to the poorhouse. Any shelter would be better than the Cole roof. There was nobody else she could ask. Jimmy was the only friend within walking distance—moreover, the single person to whom she could bring herself to make such appeal. She was, in a way, bound to make it. She had promised, when she denied him that dearer promise, to call on him if she found herself in need of him. Now she was blessing him silently that he had not asked anything; had listened only to what she cared to tell and said afterward, with a little soothing touch on her hand: "You did right to come to me, Jessy. Of course I'll take you anywhere you may want to go."

"You, you must only send us. Black Billy can take us in the wagon. Grandma will be so angry if she knows you helped us escape," Jessica had answered, but at that Jimmy only smiled.

Very shortly he made her sit down on the bench under the big elm and went away whistling, to reappear, all in a whiffet, driving a spanking pair, which drew a double seated vehicle spick and span.

"I think we'd better make the trip a quick one," was all he said in answer to Jessy's expostulation.

Almost before she knew it she was sitting beside him, bowling along the turnpike at the team's best pace. As quickly her mother was gathered up, and, the hand luggage properly bestowed, Jimmy amazed Jessy by bidding her sit behind, adding, "I want to talk to turnmy—and these horses don't let me turn my head for any considerable time."

Jessy began to feel desperately lonely—she could not even divert herself by watching the dazzle of the flying spokes as the wheels spun round. Jimmy was driving very fast, and keeping to the turnpike. It must be he meant to take them through town—that, no doubt, accounted for his choice of a rig. She knew he hated a shabby outfit—especially upon Saturdays and court days. It might be he had business that could not wait—but somehow she felt that he was unkind to think of anything but her extremity. Then she sank into a sort of daze, wondering dully how it would seem to find herself a pauper, duly committed. She had not thought of that before—of course there were legal forms before they could claim the last refuge of the destitute, and would not the authorities get back at grandma? She had a dim idea that well to do folk had to answer for their near kin.

No doubt that was what Jimmy was speaking about—he was talking low and eagerly to mamma. Yes, he was turning the horses toward the court-house square. In a wink they drew up there, and Jimmy, springing down, held out his arms to her. "You know there are arrangements—will you trust me to make them?" he asked very low. Jessica could only bow her head; speech was beyond her. Jimmy looked at her, his eyes tender, yet mischievous. "I want to commit you for life to a poorhouse of which I am keeper," he whispered. "Mamma is willing. What do you say?"

"Nothing," Jessica said, but as she said it she laid her hand in Jimmy's strong clasp, and dropped her long lashed lids to veil a rush of happy tears.

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He was a fine old man who had been to South America, but who was devoting his old age to acting as the works of the clock in the piazza in Capri. It was he who rang those many, many bells we heard and puzzled over. Some forty rapid, high pitched bells at 12:42, seven bells of deeper tone at 3:06, and so on.

Adelaide had asked Archangelo, the old man's son, to explain these seeming irregularities and had learned that the bells were only intended to approximate the hour; that his father was old and occasionally forgot and rang too little or too much; also that he was but a man and that hunger sometimes came gnawing at his vitals at, say, 11:45, whereupon he rang for 12 o'clock and wandered home to his spaghetti. His appetite also accounted for occasional delays in the bell for 1 o'clock. Suppose Archangelo's mother was late in the cooking of the midday meal, could his father return to the piazza without his luncheon? And what does a quarter of an hour matter after all? In Capri it is truly dolce far niente.—Scribner's.

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### In His Enthusiasm.

Judge (to prisoner)—Why did you take only the money and leave the basket of silver? Prisoner—Because it was too heavy. Judge (astonished)—Aren't you ashamed of yourself, you lazy man?—Flegende Blätter.

### An Appreciation.

Marian—Now, there is Algy Van PIP Begilder, for instance—June 4th, he is so haughtily stentorian that I have often wondered if he can really be so kish on the bottoms of his feet as the common people—Watson's Magazine.