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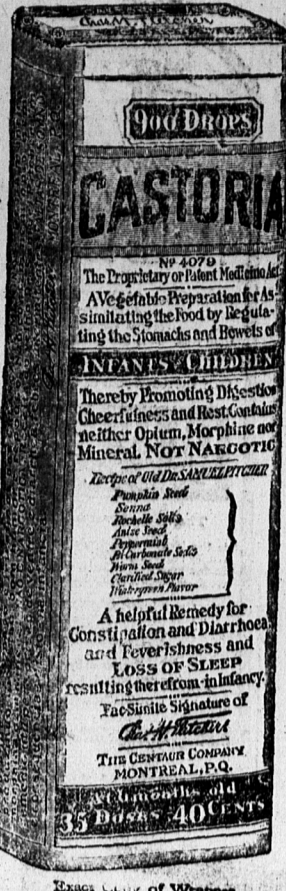
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THE CASTORIA COMPANY, NEW YORK CITY.



JUST A GIRL
BY JANE PHELPS

"DANDERINE"
Stops Hair Coming Out; Doubles Its Beauty.

A SHOP GIRL
CHAPTER 45

I had had my trunk brought to Mrs. Lynch's. I saw no prospect that I should be able to pay more for a room—if I could pay what she asked, I would be thankful. So I spent the evening getting ready for the morning.

I found some sheer linen collars and cuffs in the trunk, plainly hemstitched. They would do nicely, I thought, as I basted them in the dress—that they cost more than I could earn in a week's hard work, never occurred to me, or that the other girls, as well as my customers, would know what they did.

One article of my wardrobe worried me—shoes. All my footwear had been of the smartest kind. High heels were not comfortable either to stand in all day, or to walk in, as I had learned. I made up my mind to be very economical until I could purchase a pair of more comfortable shoes—although I had noticed that most of the young shop girls wore high heels.

I reported for duty promptly the next morning. That I could do any way, I thought when a feeling of incompetency came over me. I could be prompt, and faithful. I would try so hard to please that they would be patient with me.

"Get onto the new girl," I heard one of the clerks at the counter with me say to another. "Why don't she comb her hair?"

I had worn my hair as I always had, as Dad liked it—drawn softly back from my face and twisted in a knot low in my neck. I had quantities of dark brown hair which waved naturally.

"Don't she look old-timey tho'?" the one addressed answered. "She won't be here long before she'll catch on. Guess she's from the country." Then the befuddled girl turned to wait upon a customer.

I felt my cheeks burn, yet I couldn't help smiling. They thought me from the country? Well, I almost felt that New York was another, foreign country. What difference did their remarks make to me? I never dreamed. Or that one poor wage-earner had it in her power to make another poor wage-earner so utterly miserable as those two girls made me.

The waists were all marked in plain figures. The sizes were supposed to be also. Yet often they were not marked correctly and I would come in for a terrible talking from some doughty customer or who had bought one, only to find it was either too large or too small.

The jam about the counter was something dreadful. The women would try on the waists, expecting us to help them, watch their bags, and coats, etc. We had no time to do this as women were eagerly waiting their turn, and the number of waists we sold meant a better standing with the floor walkers, and with the manager of the department.

Sometimes the waists were torn in the women's endeavour to pull them from each other. At night if torn ones were found, it worked against us. We should watch our stock more carefully, they said.

"I'll bet the new girl's hair don't know how to handle them," I overheard one of the girls, Maud Wakefield, tell the manager.

"She looks like a nice girl."

"She's nice all right! Too nice. Have you noticed the king of cloth as she wears? Gee, I'd like a set of collars and cuffs like she wears to work, for my best. It would take a week's wages to earn them."

The manager made no reply, but the next time she came to the counter, I felt her sharp eyes were taking in every detail of my appearance. She said nothing, but I had caught an ominous glitter in her eyes that frightened me.

It was a day or two before she spoke to me.

"Come to my office at noon, Miss Stewart," she said and passed on.

"I'll bet the new girl is going to be bounced," Maud told her chum.

"Why?"

"Miss Marvin just told her to."

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I bathed my face. And feeling faint as I walked around the room, I recalled that I had eaten nothing all day save a roll and cup of tea in the morning. I had so little money—I must not get sick. So with a feeling of nausea at the thought of food, I went to a delicatessen and bought a bottle of milk and drank it.

I fell asleep the moment I touched the bed. My intense emotion, the giving way to hysterical dejection, had left me exhausted.

In the morning I could not rise. I felt as if a leaden weight were upon me, holding me down. I decided to remain in bed and try and think what I should do.

"Ain't you goin' to work Miss Zena?" Mrs. Lynch asked. She had climbed all those long stairs when the maid told her I was not up.

"No, I do not feel able to get up."

"Then, 'til just lie here and rest today. I'll be all right tomorrow."

"I hope so, you look mighty peaked though," and she left me, only to return with a plate of toast and some tea. The kindly act brought the tears again. Not everybody was unkind.

A NEW FRIEND
CHAPTER 48

"There's a new girl moved in," Mrs. Lynch informed me, as she rested a moment from her climb. She was terribly fat, and usually it made me smile to see how she blew and puffed when climbing the stairs. But now I had no wish to smile. Even though she looked irresistibly funny sitting on the edge of the chair, blowing like a porpoise.

"Yes," I had no interest in new girls. I was too depressed, too heart-broken over being considered a thief to care about anything.

"She looks sort of lonesome, the poor thing. I thought—maybe you'd speak to her a bit, and cheer her up."

"I couldn't cheer anyone today, Mrs. Lynch, but I will see her tomorrow."

Yet after Mrs. Lynch had left me, and I had finished the tea and toast, the thought of the new girl kept recurring to me. Perhaps she was lonely and discouraged too. No one but a poor working girl—or some one out of work—would ever choose Mrs. Lynch's as a home.

Late in the afternoon I got up and dressed. I heard sounds indicative of setting across the hall and I tapped on the door.

"Come in!" a loud hearty sort of a voice called.

I pushed the door open and went in.

"I am Zena Stewart. My room is across the hall. I thought perhaps I might help you."

"Well, I call that mighty kind of you! There ain't no need of helpin' but if you'd talk to a fellow a bit, it would be real nice. I'm tired to death of my own company. Then, 'My name is Mary Murphy—not quite so swell as yours, is it?"

"I think it a nice name."

"My name's swell too, ain't you? Do you live here all the time or are you just visitin'?" Evidently Mary considered the letter "g" as a useless member of the alphabet.

"I live here," replied, amused in spite of my unhappiness. Mary was a tall girl with a large frame, big hands and feet. But her eyes were a lovely clear blue—honest looking eyes; and she had a nice smile, and perfect teeth. Her hair was wavy, a sort of dead looking flax. Her hands were rough and red, and her shoes gaped at the top for lack of buttons.

"Well, I swan! No one'd ever believe it. You must have a dandy job or else someone has left you money." Her bright eyes travelled over me from tip to toe.

"No, Mary. I haven't any job. And I have no money." I had not intended to tell anyone I was out of work. I thought I would surely find another place in a few days, doing something and that was unnecessary to tell of my discharge.

"Gee! How do you do it?"

"My father was a rich man. Mary—we all thought he was. When he died, there were business troubles, and there was nothing left for us—Mother and me. I had lots of good clothes, and that was all. They have made me a lot of trouble, too."

"I never heard that good clothes were a trouble before," she said. "I'd like a few such troubles myself."

"They are a trouble in this way. I can't get work—I mean some of the places I have tried to get have told me I dressed too well. They don't give me time to explain, and hint terrible things—that I come by them."

"Oh, don't I know just what that things are they would say! I wasn't born yesterday nor day before, if I do look green. But don't you care? You're educated—I can tell by your talk. You'll find something pretty soon."

"Oh, comforted me to hear Mary talk. She was just a girl, too, and about my age. I felt as if I had found a friend at once in her. And I needed a friend if ever a girl did."

I hadn't asked any questions of Mary. One did not have to. Those honest blue eyes were so comforting. So I listened to her chatter while she unpacked her few possessions, hung her two extra dresses in the closet, and laid her cheap toilet articles on the bureau. Then I said:

"I haven't had any dinner yet, Mary. I go to a little place near here. Don't you want to go with me?"

"You bet I do! Don't I talk awful? I ain't had no education like you. We'll go Dutch tho'."

"All right. That's the way we girls at home used to go."

"I didn't think swell girls done such things."

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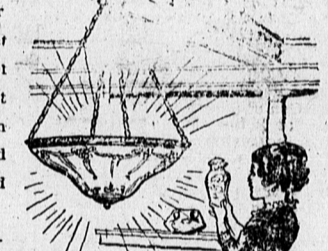
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FIRE
CHAPTER 47

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