

“Sisters Under Their Skins”

BY BRANDER MATTHEWS

THE light March rain, which had been intermittent all the morning, ceased falling before Minnie Henryson and her mother had reached Sixth Avenue. The keen wind sprang up again, and a patch of blue sky appeared here and there down the vista of Twenty-third Street, as they were walking westward. There was even a suggestion of sunshine far away over the Jersey hills.

The two ladies closed their umbrellas, which the west wind had made it hard for them to hold.

“I believe that we are going to have a pleasant afternoon, after all,” said Mrs. Henryson. “Perhaps we had better lunch down here and get all our shopping done to-day.”

“Just as you say, mamma,” the daughter answered, a little listlessly, accustomed to accept all her mother’s sudden changes of plan.

They turned the corner and went a little way down the avenue, as the brakes of an up-town train scraped and squeaked when it stopped at the station high above their heads.

Mrs. Henryson paused to look into one of the broad windows of a gigantic store.

“Minnie,” she said, solemnly, “I don’t believe hats are going to be any smaller this summer, in spite of all they say in the papers.”

“It doesn’t seem like it,” responded her daughter, perfunctorily. She had already bought her own hat for the spring, and just then her mind was wandering far afield. She was dutifully accompanying her mother for a morning’s shopping, although she would rather have had her time to herself, so that she could think out the question that was puzzling her.

Her mother continued to peer into the window, comparing the hats with one another, and Minnie’s attention was arrested by a little girl of eight who stopped almost at her side and stamped

three times on the iron cover of an opening in the sidewalk, nearly in front of the window where the two ladies were standing. After giving this signal the child drew back; and in less than a minute the covers opened wide, and then an elevator began to rise, bringing up a middle-aged man begrimed with oil and coal-dust.

“Hello, dad!” cried the child.

“Hello, kid!” he answered. “How’s mother?”

“She’s better,” the girl answered.

“Not so much pain.”

“That’s good,” the man responded.

“An’ the doctor’s been, an’ he says she’s doin’ fine,” the child continued. “Maybe she can get up for good next week.”

“That ’ll be a sight for sore eyes, won’t it, kid?” the father asked. “What you got for me to-day?”

Minnie was listening, although she was apparently gazing intently at the shop-window. Out of the corner of her eye she saw the child hand a tin dinner-pail to the man who had arisen from the depths below. Then she heard the young voice particularize its contents.

“There’s roast-beef sandwiches—I made ’em myself—and pie, apple pie—I got that at the bakery—and coffee.”

“Coffee, eh?” said the man. “That’s what I want most of all. My throat’s all dried up with the dust. Guess I’d better begin on that now.” He opened the dinner-pail and took a long drink out of it. “That’s pretty good, that coffee. That went right to the spot!”

“I made it,” the child explained, proudly.

“Did you now?” he answered. “Well, it’s as good as your mother’s.” Then a bell rang down below; he pulled on one of the chains and the elevator began to go down slowly.

“So long, kid,” he called, as his head sank to the level of the sidewalk.

"Good-by, dad," she answered, leaning forward; "come home as early as you can. Mother 'll be so glad to see you."

The child waited until the covers had again closed over her father, and then she started away. Minnie Henryson turned and watched her as she slipped across the avenue, avoiding the cars and the carts with the skill born of long experience.

At last Mrs. Henryson tore herself away from the window with its flamboyant head-gear. "No," she said, emphatically, "I don't really believe they're going to be any smaller."

The daughter did not answer. She was thinking of the little domestic episode she had just witnessed; and her sympathy went out to the sick woman, laid up in some dark tenement and waiting through the long hours for her husband's return. Her case was sad; and yet she had a husband and a child and a home of her own: her life was fuller than the empty existence of a girl who had nothing to do but to go shopping with her mother and to gad about to teas, with now and then a dinner or a dance or the theatre. A home of her own, and a husband!—what was a woman's life without them? And so it was that what Minnie had just seen tied itself at once into the subject of her thoughts as she walked silently down the avenue by the side of her mother.

The trains rattled and squeaked on the Elevated almost over their heads; the clouds scattered and a faint gleam of pale March sunshine at last illumined the grayness of the day. The noon-hour rush was at its height, and the sidewalks were often so thronged that mother and daughter were separated for a moment as they tried to pick their way through the crowd.

When they came to the huge department store they were seeking, Mrs. Henryson stood inside the vestibule as though deciding on her plan of campaign.

"Minnie," she promulgated at last, "you had better try and match those ribbons, and I'll go up and pick out the rug for your father."

"Shall I wait for you at the ribbon-counter?" the daughter asked.

"Just sit down and I'll come back as soon as I can. You look a little tired this morning, anyhow."

"I'm not the least tired, I assure you—but I didn't sleep well last night," she answered, as she went with her mother to the nearest elevator.

When she was left alone, she had a little sigh of relief, as though she was glad to be able to let her thoughts run where they would without interruption. She walked slowly to the ribbon-counter in a far corner of the store, unconscious of the persons upon whom her eyes rested. She was thinking of herself and of her own future. She wondered whether that future was then hanging in the balance.

She had early discovered that she was not very pretty, although her mother was always telling her that she had a good figure; and she had reached the age of twenty-two without having had any particular attention from any man. She had begun to ask herself whether any man ever would single her out and make her interested in him and implore her to be his wife. And now in the past few months it seemed to her as if this dream might come true. There was no doubt that Addison Wyngard had been attentive all through the winter. Other girls had noticed it too, and had teased her about it. He had been her partner three times at the dances of the Cotillion of One Hundred. And when some of the men of that wide circle had got up the Thursday Theatre Club, he had joined only after he had found out that she was going to be a member. She recalled that he had told her that he did not care for the theatre, and that he was so busy he felt he had no right to go out in the evening. The managing-clerk of a pushing law firm could not control his own time even after office hours; and there had been one night when he was to be her escort at the Theatre Club a box of flowers had come at six o'clock, with a note explaining that unexpected business forced him to break the engagement. And the seat beside her had been vacant all the evening.

Even when she came to the ribbon-counter she did what she had to do mechanically, with her thoughts ever straying from her duty of matching widths and tints. Her mind kept escaping from the task in hand and persisted in recalling the incidents of her intimacy with him.

After she had made her purchases, she took a seat at the end of the counter, which happened to be more or less deserted just then. Three shop-girls, who had gathered to gossip during the noon lull in trade, looked at her casually as she sat down, and then went on with their own conversation, which was pitched in so shrill a key that she could not help hearing it.

"She says to him, she says, 'Willy, I'll report you every time I catch you, see?' and she's reported him three times this morning already. That ain't what a real lady ought to do, I don't think."

"Who'd she report him to?" one of the other "salesladies" asked.

"Twice to Mr. Maguire. Once she reported him to Mr. Smith, and he didn't take no notice. He just laughed. But Mr. Maguire, he talked to Willy some-thin' fierce. And you know Willy's got to stand it, for he's got that cross old mother of his to keep; he has to get her four quarts of paralyzed milk every day, Sundays too."

Then the third of the group broke in: "Mr. Maguire tried it on me once, but I gave it to him back, straight from the shoulder. I ain't going to have him call me down; not much. I know my business, don't I? I don't need no little snip of a red-headed Irishman to tell me what to do. I was born here, I was, and I'm not taking any back talk from him, even if he has a front like the court-house!"

The second girl, whose voice was gentler, then remarked: "Well, I wouldn't be too hard on Mr. Maguire to-day. I guess he's got troubles of his own."

"What's that?" cried the first of the three, whose voice was the sharpest. "Has Sadie Jones thrown him down again?"

"I didn't know a thing about it till this mornin', when I saw the ring on her other finger," the second saleslady explained, delighted to be the purveyor of important information. "Mazie says Sadie didn't break it off again till last night after he'd brought her back from the Lady Dazzlers' Mask and Civic. And she waited till they got into the trolley comin' home. An' he'd taken her in to supper, too."

"That's so," the third girl said, "and

Mr. Maguire's takin' it terrible. He came across the street this morning just before me, and he had his skates on. I was waitin' to see him go in the mud-gutter. Then he saw the copper on the beat, and he made an awful brace. Gee, but I thought he was pinched sure!"

"Mr. Smith caught on to him," said the first, with her sharp voice, "and Willy heard him say he'd be all right again, and he had only the fill of a pitcher."

"And Sadie's goin' to keep the ring, too. She says she earned it trying to keep him straight," the third girl went on. "It's a dead ringer for a diamond, even if it ain't the real thing. He says it is."

Two customers came up at this juncture, and the group of salesladies had to dissolve. A series of shrill whistles came in swift succession, and a fire-engine rushed down the avenue, followed by a hook-and-ladder truck; and the girl with the kindly voice went over toward the door to look at them, leaving Minnie Henryson again to her own thoughts.

She asked herself if she was really getting interested in Addison Wyngard. And she could not answer her own question. Of course it had been very pleasant to feel that he was interested in her. And she thought he really was interested. He had told her that he did not like his position with Smyth, Mackellar & Hubbard, and a classmate at Columbia had offered him a place with a railroad company down in Texas. But he had said that he hated to give up the law and to leave New York—and all his friends. And as he said that, he looked at her. She had felt that he was implying that she was the reason why he was unwilling to go. She remembered that she had laughed lightly as she rejoined that she would feel homesick herself if she went out of sight of the Madison Square Tower. He had answered that there were other things in New York besides the Diana, things just as distant and just as unattainable. And to that she had made no response.

Then he had told her that he had another classmate in the office of the Corporation Counsel, Judge McKinley; there was a vacancy there, and his name had been suggested to the judge. She had

smiled and expressed the hope that he might get the appointment. And now, as she sat there alone, with the stir and bustle of the department store all about her, she felt certain as never before that if he did get the place he would be assured that he had at last money enough to marry on, and that he would ask her to be his wife. If she accepted him, she would have a husband and a home of her own. She would have her chance for the fuller life that can come to a woman only when she is able to fulfil her destiny.

Later he had found a chance to say that he was going to stick it out in New York a little longer—and then, if the Texas offer was still open, he'd have to take it. He had paused to hear what she would say to that. And all she had said was that Texas did seem a long way off. She had given him no encouragement; she had been polite, nothing more. If he did ever propose and if she should refuse him, he could never reproach her for having lured him on.

Suddenly it seemed to her that this chilly attitude of hers was contemptible. The man wanted her—and for the first time she began to suspect that all the woman in her wanted him to want her. She hated herself for having been so unresponsive, so discouraging, so cold. She knew that he was a man of character and of ability, a clean man, a man his wife might be proud of. And she had looked ahead sharply and realized how desolate the Cotillion of One Hundred and the Thursday Theatre Club would be for her if Addison Wyngard should go to Texas, after all. She began to fear that if he did decide to leave New York, he would never dare to ask her to marry him.

Then she looked around her and began to wonder what could be keeping her mother so long. She happened to see the door of the store open, as a tall girl came in with a high pompadour and an immense black hat adorned with three aggressive silver feathers.

The newcomer advanced toward the ribbon-counter, where she was greeted effusively by two of the salesladies.

"For pity's sake," cried one of them, "I ain't seen you for a month of Sundays!"

"Addie Brown!" said the other. "And

you haven't been back here to see us old friends since I don't know when."

"Addie Cameron now, if you please," and the newcomer bridled a little as she gave herself her married name. "An' I was comin' in last Saturday, but I had to have my teeth fixed first, and I went to dentist after dentist and they were all full, and I was tired out."

"Well, it's Addie, any way you fix it," responded one of the salesladies, "and we're glad to see you back, even if we did think you'd shook us for keeps. Is this gettin' married all it's cracked up to be?"

"It's fine," the bride replied, "an' I wouldn't never come back here on no account. Not but what things ain't what I'd like altogether. I went to the Girls' Friendly last night, and there was that Miss Van Antwerp that runs our class, and she was so interested, for all she's one of the Four Hundred. An' she wanted to know about Sam, an' I told her he was a good man an' none better, an' I was perfectly satisfied. 'But, Miss Van Antwerp,' I says to her, I says, 'don't you never marry a policeman—their hours are so inconvenient. You can't never tell when he's comin' home.' That's what I told her, for she's always interested."

The other two salesladies laughed, and one of them asked, "What did Miss Van Antwerp say to that?"

"She just said that she wasn't thinkin' of gettin' married, but she'd remember my advice."

"I ain't thinkin' of gettin' married, either," said one of the salesladies, the one with the gentler voice, "but I've had a dream an' it may come true. I dreamed there was a young feller, handsome he was too, and the son of a charge customer. You've seen her, the old stiff with those furs and the big diamond earrings, that's so fussy always and so partie'lar, for all she belongs to the Consumers' League."

"I know who you mean; horrid old thing she is, too," interrupted the other; "but I didn't know she had a son."

"I don't know it, either," was the reply. "But that's what I dreamed—and I dreamed it three nights runnin', too. Fierce, wasn't it? An' he kept hangin' round and wantin' to make a date to take me to the opera. Said he could talk French an' he'd tell me what it was all about. An'—"

Just then the floor-walker called "Forward!" as a customer came to the other end of the counter; and the girl with the gentle voice moved away.

Minnie Henryson wondered whether this floor-walker was Mr. Maguire or Mr. Smith. Under the suggestion of his stare, whichever he was, Addie Cameron and the other shop-girl moved away toward the door, and the rest of their conversation was lost to the listener.

She did not know how long she continued to sit there, while customers loitered before the ribbon-counter and fingered the stock and asked questions. She heard the fire-engines come slowly back; and above the murmur which arose all over the store she caught again the harsh grinding of the brakes on the Elevated in the avenue. Then she rose, as she saw her mother looking for her.

"I didn't mean to keep you waiting so long," Mrs. Henryson explained; "but I couldn't seem to find just the rug I wanted for your father. You know he's always satisfied with anything, so I have to be particular to get something he'll really like. And then I met Mrs. McKinley, and we had to have a little chat."

Minnie looked at her mother. She had forgotten that the wife of the Corporation Counsel was a friend of her mother's; and she wondered whether she could get her mother to say a good word for Addison Wyngard.

Mother and daughter threaded their way through the swarm of shoppers toward the door of the store.

"By the way, Minnie," said her mother, just as they came to the entrance, "didn't you tell me that young Mr. Wyngard sat next you at the theatre the other night at that Thursday Club of yours? That's his name, isn't it?"

"Mr. Wyngard did sit next to me one evening," the daughter answered, not looking up.

"Well, Mrs. McKinley saw you, and so did the judge. He says that this young Wyngard is a clever lawyer—and he's going to take him into his office."

And then they passed out into the avenue flooded with spring sunshine.

Minnie took a long breath of fresh air and she raised her head. It seemed to her almost as though she could already feel a new ring on the third finger of her left hand.

The Schooling of Typhœus

BY ARTHUR STRINGER

'T WAS he who mocked, this many a year:
 "If Ye who hide and hold aloof
 Are Gods indeed, I curse Ye here,
 That death may bring its proof!"

"So strike, Most High, whom now I curse!
 Strike, Gods! Your vengeance I invite,
 That in my heart some proof I nurse
 As Ye abstain, or smite!"

*And by the hand and riven veil,
 The grim bolt from the open day,
 He, when his gift could not avail,
 Dead in his wisdom lay!*