

Easy

By Ethel Watts Mumford

Big Jim Glaive came slowly out from the yawning door of the East River electric powerhouse, stuffing his pay envelope under the flap of his flannel shirt pocket. He blinked at the moist sun of a Saturday afternoon in April; shifted his heavy boots restlessly on the cobbles; and turned to sniff the river-front smells.

Rough pavement led up a steep incline from the runway, disappeared under a stone arch, and eventually tapped the transverse arteries of the city. To the right the street led straight to a stubby wharf, built to withstand the onslaught of surging currents. In the crowded channel tugs snorted and churned, wide-winged sloops and schooners slid, dipped and tacked. Stately white passenger steamers glided by. Rusty black freighters, showing raw red stripes above the water, nosed ahead like busy hounds on a fresh scent. Barges, out of ballast, threaded together like giant, oblong beads, wallowed in the wake of a disgruntled, puffing guide. The wind was strong and salt, savoured and spiced with odours of tar and pitch, scents of strange cargoes, mixed with the acrid smells of factories. Across the narrow reach of rushing waters loomed the grim prison buildings of the city-owned Island, grey edifices, giving from behind their barred windows no sign of life in all the moving pageant of pleasure and profit.

Jim sniffed the wind. Contented, in an indifferent sort of way, when once inside his workshop, the call of the water-way “got him” night and morning. There was always a sullen hunching of his shoulders as day in and day out he turned his back on the lure of the out-path, and plodded homeward over the uneven pavements, the rhythm of his step growing ever slower as he neared the Second Avenue flat, where Ellen and the kids awaited his return. To-day the misty gold of spring hung over the face of the river.

Its soiled waters seemed clean and inviting. Big Jim was very loath to leave the roll and swirl, and face the grind and jar. He stood so long that the throng of his fellow workers had been engulfed in the shadows under the arch, and he was left alone on the threshold of the shop.

“Hi!—Hey, there, Jim! You—Jim Glaive, you old — — —!” and there followed a string of the glowing insults wherewith they that go down to the sea in the ships greet one another.

Jim turned, his sullen face brightened; a slow grin pulled his huge mouth askew. “By Cripes!” he exclaimed. “If it ain’t Whispy Lungen. You old sinner, where away from? you — — —!” and he countered with another string of opprobrious epithets in a tone of unaffected heartiness.

The two men clapped hands, as giants meet, in a bone-crushing spasm of reunion.

“Ten year,” bellowed ‘Whispy,’ who topped his tall friend by several inches. “All of ten year, you old steer-jostler. What ye doin’ down here, hangin’ on the edge of this here juice factory?”

Jim felt suddenly ashamed of his job. His tone was apologetic as he answered, “Work here. Always was strong with the juice, holding down a good thing, too, Whispy, big pay, steady work.”

“Gawd!” exploded Lungen. “Settled down to a steady job! G’wan! How do ye do it? I’ve been round the world a dozen times, since the night you was sandbagged in Seattle. What the hell do ye see in this dump to keep ye here? Chuck it, Jim, chuck it. Say, I got a grand little thing on, and you’re just the lad I’m lookin’ fer. If you want to fiddle with the juice, I can fix ye fer that and deep-sea, too. Come along wid me, Glaive, and I’ll soak out yer dried up hide. You—in them shops! Aw, hell!”

Every atom of desire awoke in Jim at the picture the words evoked. He stared at his old bunkmate. What wouldn't he give for the freedom Whispy offered! Yet the routine of his present life had been sweet once. Once it had been as if the storm-battered ship had struggled to snug anchorage in a safe harbour. But ships were made to sail again. Now—he was a hulk rotting at an ignominious wharf where children played, children. He looked with burning eyes at the former companion of many a rough adventure. The giant frame was unchanged in the ten years that had elapsed since the Seattle carouse, that had come so near to a fatal ending. But Whispy's face was altered. Two new scars, one fresh healed, adorned his left cheek, his square jaw was leaner; the furrows between the horizon-searching eyes were deeper, the puckers at the corners heavy, like the mouth of a corded purse; the lines from nose to mouth were gashes, slashed deep by violent emotions and crude dissipation. But about the man was an air of gay effrontery and self-confidence that lent him a certain coarse glamour, a certain rakish attraction. Glaive's gaze travelled down and fixed on his friend's hands. They were huge and rough, calloused white in spots, red as beef at wrist and knuckles. Slowly Jim lifted his own and looked at them. They were grimed by black smears, but in shape and texture they were the hands of an artisan.

“Bah!” he said.

Lungen slapped him hard on the back. “Well, me Bucko, we'll fix them mawlers. Couldn't handle a tarred rope now, hey? We all gets soft, lyin' in port. Veer about and ye'll be a man again. Lord; but it's grand to see yer! I never found a better lad than you, from Fiji to Toosko Sound. D'ye mind when we went on the rocks in that old hulk of a beef roller, and the steers broke loose? Why, man, if I live to be a hundred I'll never forget the wallop you fetched that gorin' skewbald with the pen billet. Gosh, it about saved my gizzard! And the typhoon we weathered goin' down to Chili on the old *Mariposa*, do ye remember? Some blow, hey? And, say, do ye mind that harpahaoeli girl on Maui? Some looker, what! For two cents you'd a set up housekeeping with that Kanaka, only fer me haulin' you off. She's married now, to the white superintendent of the Maunakala Plantation. Reed told me. Frank Reed, you remember? Neiman Company's copra hound.”

Jim Glaive nodded. Memories came crowding, of charging, bellowing steers in the narrow runways of a listing cattle ship. The roar of a water spout whirling not half a mile from a helpless, wallowing square rigger. The shriek of the coming tornado; wrecks and wrecks, flotsam and jetsam; blows struck and given. Aye, and kisses given and implored—black-eyed Haiiaka of Maui—and Ratu of Tahiti, with her blue tattaa, and others and others. And now he was on his way home to Ellen and the children, Mamie and Louie, whining Jane-Elizabeth, ailing Bobbie and the squealing, rolling, bubbling, sniffling infant, with its eternal whimper and red, puffy lids! A wave of loathing swept over him, of resentment against Ellen. Why in hell was she eternally having the damned kids, and why, if she *had* to have 'em, couldn't she keep 'em decent? Hadn't he taken pride in his first-born, Mamie, even lugging her around in her baby carriage? Mamie had been a good-lookin' baby. Ellen was forever slickin' her up, with ribbons and starch, to make the neighbours jealous—jealous—huh!—jealous!

His silence evidently puzzled Lungen. “What's chawin' yer? What's the grouch? Say, come along wid me. Come on to the Dock Rat, and have a snoot o' grog for old time's sake. You sure are a sight for sore eyes!”

The words 'sore eyes' decided Glaive; they brought the baby clearly before him. He knew Ellen would be anxiously watching the clock. She wanted, he knew, to go to see her sister in the hospital—but, hell! couldn't he never have a minute off for himself? Christ! what a fool a man

was to marry! He fumed, shook himself, threw his disagreeable thoughts into the discard, and turned to Lungen with his slow-stretching smile.

“Go to it, you old soused mackerel,” he said. “I’m game for a little has-been talk. There’s them at home as can wait.”

Lungen looked at him sharply. “Don’t tell me you’re spliced!” he exclaimed.

Glaive nodded. “Huh, huh.” He did not dare look at his companion, he knew of old that expression of disgusted mirth.

“You boob, you poor, ordinary boob! So one of ’em pinched yer, did she? The way they hooks on and drags a feller out is worse’n one of them cargo derricks grabbin’ a bale out of the hold. You simp—you poor simp! I should have stayed ’longside of yer and saved yer, so I should. Hurry along, the drinks is on me. You sure do need a little getaway, you poor, ordinary simp!” he reiterated.

“She’s a grand good looker.” Glaive tried to appear proud and satisfied. The attempt was not convincing.

“I don’t say she ain’t,” Lungen came back, “but, *marry*—what’s the use when you’re a live man? Not that I haven’t been let in myself. I’ve a widder in San Francisco—got a feller to write her how I was washed overboard from the *Powhatan*. And there’s a wife Nagasaki-way. But, say, how long’s this been goin’ on?”

“Eight years,” Glaive admitted reluctantly.

“Eight years—*eight* years! Why, man, ye must be dead. Kids, I suppose?”

“Five of ’em,” said the electrician; “oldest seven, youngest six months—both kinds,” he laughed grimly.

“Whew!” whistled Lungen. “Well, it’s *your* life you’re livin’—not mine—five kids! and in a city, too! Well, here we are, and after the earful you just give me, I’m needin’ several pegs o’ the hard.”

He led the way through the green-slatted door of a corner dive that hung at an angle over the water.

Glaive licked dry lips reminiscently. Ellen kept tight hold of his pay envelope and saw to it that very little went to the Mikes and Jerrys who tended bar in the neighbourhood. He thought angrily that he hadn’t stood up to a glass and a free lunch since the souse he had acquired on Jane-Elizabeth’s birthday, a month before. Ellen had given him such ‘what for’ then that he hadn’t wanted to, it wasn’t worth while. What a sight she had looked, with her hair in wisps hanging about her narrow shoulders, the tears dripping thick down her cheeks, her mouth contorted, her lean arm tense; and her red, suds-slicked hand gripping the rolling-pin that she shook at him as she croaked with fury. “Good looker,” he had called her! “Gawd! how could any woman let herself go that way? There had been excuse for his infatuation when he had met her—trim and neat figured, ripe checked, and with eyes that glittered at you. Yes, she had been pretty enough, and smart enough to hold many a man’s eyes and thought. And she hadn’t hooked him like a cargo derrick, either, though he dearly wished he could blame her for the whole mishap of marriage. But she hadn’t liked him at first; was repelled, wouldn’t give to his eager love-making; which had only driven his passion the more, till he had *made* her marry him. Well, she had had it out of him. Gawd! she was even with him now! He clinked his glass against Lungen’s with unnecessary violence—a defiance directed at Ellen. His mental processes were wholly personal. He never for one moment realised the raw-rubbed life of his overworked, exhausted wife. His resentment against her, against the children, against the inevitable ugliness and wear of the crowded home was the same instinct in the male that forces the wild female animal to drive her

mate from her, that her young may be safe. Imaginatively sensitive to the new and strange, he was totally without constructive imagination of the Usual. He could enter into no life save his own, and what made that distasteful be hated.

“Drink hearty!” said Lungen, and Big Jim Glaive drank.

Ellen Glaive sat at the window of her flat, the sore-eyed baby on her knees. For the moment the place was quiet. Jane-Elizabeth and Louie were in charge of Mamie, and Robbie had gone over to the Park to play with the Maxwitz children from across the hall. Mrs. Maxwitz, moreover, promised to keep an eye on the baby when Jim should come back to go with her to the hospital on Saint Mark’s Square. She glanced angrily at the cheap alarm clock on the mantelpiece. Hadn’t he no better sense than to take overtime work on this day of all days—when her sister?—but overtime was double pay, and there’d be need of the extra money. He couldn’t be much longer now. She put the baby down on a soiled pillow, where it promptly bent itself into an arc and began a hoarse, angry wailing. She turned to the kitchen. *If* she stayed at the hospital, if she should *have* to stay, dinner must be ready for Jim and the children. She’d send Jim back in good time. Mamie could tend to the serving, and could be trusted to know when the stew was stewed. She fussed about the kitchen, anxiously listening all the while for his familiar step on the landing. The baby continued to cry. She shrugged her lean shoulders angrily. Oh, the everlasting grind of it all—over and over again! She fingered a heap of newly washed infant belongings, and noted the dilapidation of the little dresses with a sigh. But what could you expect? They had been handed along from one to another of the brood, until now William’s inheritance was sorely tattered. There were some of the best ones still in the trunk. Those she had made when she was expecting Mamie, had stitched herself with such excited, thrilling fingers; yes, and embroidered them, too. Poor William! It was precious little time she had now to lavish, even on his wants. “Might as well use thin up!” she said aloud, downing the inward protest that wanted to retain the little garments as keepsakes—keepsakes of what? Of a few happy years. “Use thim up,” she repeated, “what’s the use?”

She entered the inner bedroom and turned on the gas. But getting no responsive gleam, she crossed fretfully to the bureau, and taking a quarter from her lean purse, grudgingly fed the meter box. The light blazed up weakly. Then she removed the damaged, red plush curtain that disguised the trunk, and lifting the lid, stood looking down at the revealed contents. In one corner lay a neat, crisp pile of tiny clothes. She did not look at them, but at a framed photograph of herself and Jim in their wedding finery. She had taken it off the mantelpiece and thrown it into the trunk in anger, that time Jim had come home speechless and reeling on Mamie’s birthday. The photograph brought back the, by no means unusual, episode with fresh force. Suppose that was what kept him now. He had his pay. “Huh!” she sneered savagely, “he’d not dare. Sure, if he does!”—surge after surge of anger coursed in her blood. She picked up the picture and looked at it with aching eyes. She’d been like that once, eight years ago. And now, what with childbearing and work, and always more work, and less strength to work with.—She glanced in the looking glass over the dresser.—She was a rag! a dish-mop—and she not thirty! She glowered back at the photograph, her likeness of eight years before, trim and trig, with smooth, round cheeks and black eyes that glittered; heavy brown hair that coiled and recoiled around her head, and a pompadour that had needed no fluffing. She had paid twenty-five cents to the hair-dresser for fixing it for the wedding, and how well it had held her veil. And her dress—a bought bride’s dress, it was, from Fourteenth Street—none of your made-at-home things. And how well it showed up in the picture, a sharp white shine on each angular fold. And Jim—Au, he was a fine

figure of a man, she conceded resentfully. *He* had not suffered, nor worked his hands off, nor endured bitter weariness, sickness and pain, and forever the rack of child-bearing. *He* hadn't sacrificed anything, not he. His home was made comfortable for him, and the best of everything was for him. Mended and tended and fed, he was, happy as a king should be. And him comin' home soused, a dozen times in the year, wastin' his money, *her* money, the children's money. How could a man let himself go like that? Hadn't she told him when she said she'd marry him, that he'd have to leave the drink alone? Hadn't he bullied her and harried her into marrying? Hadn't she turned him down many's the time? Ah, well, he was even with her now. He had taken it out of her. A woman was a fool to marry when there's good positions to be had, and fair play, and independence. Would he help her out when he came home? Not he! He acted as if comin' home at all was a favour. Would he mind the baby? Not he! Or help straighten the place a bit, or put his hand to a dish, except to eat his fill and quarrel with the food. And if she said a word, sure, it was up and out for him to play pinochle with Maxwitz; or go over to the Morris Sullivan Political Headquarters. Dumb fury shook her at the thought. Did *she* ever have a moment's freedom?—never! not even when it was a necessity that called her out—and he all day long outside to himself, with plenty of company and all the fun of factory life. Were his hands torn and rough and cracked like hers—no fear! And here she was, shamed with the looks of her own children; hating the young woman in the flat below, flaunting her one clean baby. Gawd!—wait, just wait till the children come one after another, without rest between. Give her two years, three—Ah, the kill of it all! She'd learn that life's a hell, all right, when ye can't live like humans! Five kids, and the pay envelope that thin! Savagely she gloated over her neighbour's future misery. Work, work, work, work—how could any one keep a brood clean and mended and decent with no help at all? Didn't a man owe it to his wife to help, when she'd mothered his children and made his home? She who'd got nothing in return for all her giving except a roof over her head, and a crust to eat herself when the children were half-fed. And what had Jim Glaive ever given up for her? His gaddin'—nothing but his *gaddin'*! And what was there in that? The right to turn longshoreman or tramp; the right to go dirty and sleep on the docks; the right to get poisoned by vile liquor, and cussed at by wharf-saloon hussies. And here was Saturday night comin' on, and him not home. There was Maria in the hospital, and the surgeons cuttin' her that very day, and her own sister not able to get over to be on hand if they killed her. Ellen straightened her bent back, threw down the photograph and slammed the trunk lid, forgetful of the little heap of clean dresses.

The wailing baby gagged and coughed. The gasping breath sent a stab of fright to her heart. Her experiences had been many and terrifying with her sickly brood. She hurried to the front room, caught up the infant and patted it quickly, crooning the while. Tears poured from its eyes; its mouth was fixed in a stiffened square from which no sound issued. Then it yelled, choked and flipped itself like a piece of animated whalebone.

The door opened without the ceremony of knocking, and Mrs. Maxwitz came in, wiping her hands on her blue apron.

“Say, Mrs. Klaive, dot's a bad holler the baby got. Ain't the man home already yet?”

“No, he ain't,” snapped Ellen, looking at the alarm clock with vicious eyes. “There, there,” she hummed, patting the baby's back, “that's the boy.” The baby's congested face paled to its normal shade, the coughing ceased.

Mrs. Maxwitz crossed to her neighbour's side and looked at the child with sharp, diagnosing eyes. “He don't look just right, I don't think so. You leave 'em and go to the hospital. Dr. Forbling by an' by come to see Maxwitz's rheumacks. I show him the baby then. I leave the door

open so I hear when he come, your man. I tell your man you gone by the hospitals. If you want to get back by tinner yet, you bedder go now.”

Ellen nodded sullen thanks, and handed over the baby. Mrs. Maxwitz laid the infant across her ample front, after the manner of a plaster, and broke into a high-pitched, nasal chant, rocking herself from side to side rhythmically, as she watched Ellen Glaive throw on the long grey raglan that covered her soiled and faded dress, and thrust her feet into rubbers. The soles of her shoes were worn in holes, but she had neither the time nor the energy to go out and buy herself a new pair. With a last look at the slow-simmering stew-pot, Ellen turned away, clumped down the narrow stairs to the street, and headed toward the hospital.

Her mind still boiling with resentment, she was hardly aware of the soft air of Spring or the warm afternoon light that beautified even the city’s ugliness.

Why were things so hard? Why was the world so hateful? Why were men so worthless and selfish? Why was the lure of youth and spring, and that thing called ‘love’—Ah, yes—she had known it once—why was its deadly sweetness nothing but a poison? Why was her man impatient of the children? Why must she keep on having them, since they meant nothing but want and ill will? She did not formulate the hundred questions that beset her, rather they seethed, each an impulse of anger, making her cast black looks at man and maid, as they passed by in the Saturday evening stir of humanity released from work. Before the hospital she stopped short, gazing up at its imposing front with a look of frightened awe. She had all the tenement house woman’s fear of The Institution. Anything like a public building frightened her, were it Court, Library, Museum, Orphan Asylum or Hospital, she was afraid. Each typified strange doings and goings on that were regulated by unfeeling human machines. To go to the hospital meant death at the hands of doctors, unaccountable even to God, who pried into people’s innards for their own pleasure or information. Asylums meant either insanity or the kidnapping of children delivered into bondage—better *death than that!* Courts were openings into prisons. Prisons were pesthouses of disgrace.

She shuddered as she looked up at the grey façade before her, and compelled her unwilling limbs to mount the short steps of the entrance. She had a creeping feeling that she would be set upon from behind, benumbed with gas, carried off to some terrible room and cut open.

And Jim, who should have been there to protect her, hadn’t come home.

She clutched her coat about her, and walked down the echoing corridor to the desk, timidly whispering her request for information to the uniformed official. In dazed fear and anxiety she took her seat in the waiting-room. Her anger against Jim and Life in general faded before the white tiled, strange smelling imminence of Death.

“Mrs. Glaive?” called a voice.

Ellen looked up into cold grey eyes, and beheld a young woman in white, one of those iron-hearted nursing women, who starve the sick; and themselves eat the good pigs’ feet and stewed tripe brought by anxious relatives.

“Your sister is doing very well,” the nurse said briskly. “We won’t know, of course, for a few days. No, you can’t see her. Visitors’ hours eleven to twelve. Ward 10.”

She was gone before Ellen could formulate any of the questions that trembled on her lips. Then she fled, fled to the safety of the street, blind and dumb with the horror of those cavernous, destroying wards of The Institution. She shivered—if ever it came to that for her—for the kids—no—never—never! What was the river for, anyway? It was big enough for all of ’em. She stumbled in her haste. Jim—Jim—where in the name of Gawd was Jim?

“Drink hearty!” said Lungen, and Big Jim Glaive drank. He had ceased to count the number of his drinks. The pay envelope had been opened. One bill had shrunk to a few bits of ‘change.’ The envelope no longer lay secure under the buttoned flap of his shirt breast pocket, but was thrust carelessly into his trousers. His great frame rested in the chair, relaxed and loose-jointed. His face was flushed, and a little dew of perspiration showed at the roots of the strong, upthrusting hair upon his forehead. His eyes sparkled, his slow smile was fixed, yet the liquor had not taken full hold upon him. He was perfectly clear of eye, head and speech; but he had thrown back ten years. Under the magic of this unexpected reunion he was again the reckless roustabout, self-confident Jack-of-all-trades of his youth. Responsibility had slipped from him. He was no longer a member of the community, having a stake in its welfare and future. With a shake of his huge shoulders, he had dismissed the whole thing. Group consciousness and Responsibility have to be bred in the bone, ingrained in childhood, established in manhood, if it is to exist at all. Glaive had no group consciousness. The responsibilities he had assumed existed only as a hindering harness he had put on, not consciously feeling that he might at any moment throw it off, but with the under, subconscious regardlessness that had never allowed him to accept the yoke and strain at traces and collar.

“Ye see,” Lungen was saying, “it’s a big deal. Big chances, too; but what’s that to men like you and me? We’ve shipped on munition ships before, haven’t we? And sailed with picric acid in bum containers, ain’t we? Well, what if this *is* fihihusterin’? That’s none of our lookout, except that we draw down the big pay. And, believe me, you with your juice—why, to get an electrician on this trip, one that I’ll O. K.—they’ll have to come across. And, say, Old Timer, what won’t we do to one of them tropic jamborees? Ever dance them ‘merangues’ in Hayti? Say, now, call it ‘done’ and I’ll wise the owners of this expedition that they’ve got a first-class man, and’ll have to pay for him.”

Glaive hesitated, his eyes on the saloon clock had shocked him with the lateness of the hour, and the recollection of Ellen waiting for him to take her over to the hospital.

Lungen saw and interpreted the look. “Cut it, Glaive. Don’t let that wife-and-kids bunk get you. She’ll forage along without you better’n with you. She’ll get on the city pay roll all right, all right. Are you goin’ to spend yer life hangin’ around a skirt? Cut it, I say, cut it out. What’s Institutions for, I ask you, except for women and kids? That’s what all them boobs up on Fi’t Avenoo are taxed for, ain’t it? Well, there you are. And if you want to send ’em a slice of yer pay now an’ again, what’s to stop yer? My Gawd! this juice factory stuff of yours—seven to five—steady work and overtime! *That* ain’t livin’, an’ you know it!”

Big Jim rose from his chair and shook himself.

“Where’ll I meet you?” he said.

“*Meet* me!” Lungen slapped his recruit on the shoulder, bodily jamming him back into his chair. “No, you don’t! You come along wid me. You don’t go back and have no riot with your old woman, and go soft on me and back out. That ain’t the way to do it *Just don’t show up*. If I can’t hide yer till sailin’ time, then I’m a simp. Just don’t show up—that’s the dope.”

A stubborn light came into Glaive’s eyes, and Lungen was wise enough to cease insisting.

“Nope,” Jim said, “I ain’t goin’ to have no riot, not me. But I’m goin’ to leave her what’s here,” (he struck the pay envelope in his pocket,) “and I’m goin’ to tell her I’ll be out late. If I don’t, she’ll be over to the factory and jolt up the watchman; and how’d I know she won’t find out and foller? You don’t know her. Where’ll I meet you?”

“Know Crandes, across from the Canal basin?” inquired Lungen. “All right, I’m goin’ straight there. You follow me as soon as you get loose. Needn’t ask for me, my room’s right at the top of

the first stair. You're a fool to go back to yer dump, but you was a fool to ever get into it. *And don't you turn soft on me.*"

"I won't," said Glaive, and banged out through the swinging saloon door.

Lungen had been right to warn against his return home. It was a shred of decency, of "softness" that still held and drew Jim, and, once unaccompanied and in the open street, a vague feeling of shame began to nag at him. After all it was a pretty raw deal to give Ellen. Ellen would miss him. Ellen loved him—but so had many women in the past, and he had left them behind without a thought to haunt him, or a regret for their absence. But eight years of habit and life are not to be thrust aside thus lightly, and it was habit that drew him now, in this small matter of the customary return at the end of the day, the turning over of the week's pay, even though it was his intention to break away utterly. But as his feet walked on automatically, his unwilling mind was busy. Time had turned his hour-glass. The sands were rising the other way. He was his old irresponsible self again. The call of Duty, the very demands of the flesh and blood he had helped to create, seemed illusion. Only the future, the future of adventure, and danger, of high pay, long chances and violent changes, was real. He paused before the narrow entrance of the tenement that was his home. On the right a grocery store spread faded, limp vegetables to the dust of the street, and flowered its fly-specked window display with highly coloured posters of food products. A dingy entry led to Maxwitz's cobbler shop on the left, Maxwitz with whom he played pinochle. Glaive shrugged and sneered. That a life for a Man—huh! Across the street a gaily-lettered sign on the second floor declared the rooms "The Morris Sullivan Club." Down the street, gilding the drab corner, was "Jerry's Saloon." These, and the narrow entrance before him, had been his life for eight years! With an uplift of rebellion Jim's hate of Ellen rushed back to him. Eight years thrown away, wasted—all for what? That ill-tempered, sickly slattern. He drew himself up proudly, conscious of his great height and bulk, his powerful shoulders, and whip cord thews. Yah! whose fault was it the blamed kids were sickly? Not *his*, anyway. With a snort of relief he threw the blame of his actions, past and future, on his forlorn partner. What had made her a sickly slattern, he did not ask himself. She *was* one, and that was enough.

What he was going to do would serve her right, and if the haul was too hard, she could get on the city's pay roll. That was what Institutions were for; Lungen had said it. Then Habit took him bodily and forced him up the stairs. At the door he hesitated. Ellen would raise a row at his late arrival. Well, let her, he could afford to stand it, it would be the last time. The door to the flat opposite opened with a jerk, and Mrs. Maxwitz spoke sharply in a tense, sibilant whisper.

"Come by here."

Mechanically he obeyed, chilled by something ominous in her tone.

"You put us now all in a fine blace," she complained. "Look what you gettin', you an' your wife. You don't come home an' I gotter mind the baby. Like I ain't got enough trouble by me now already. Dr. Forbhing come by-an-by for Maxwitz' rheumack, an' say your baby got bad throught—sick—dif—dif—fiffentheria, he say it. See, you got sign on door—nobody go out—nobody come in—or go hospital, I dunno. He come back. What for you not come home when you got time? Your wife gone to sister. Now I gotter get thissen sick for me an' my man an' my child!"

"Diphtheria!" exclaimed Glaive, a mixture of fury and relief rising in him. "Wouldn't you know Ellen's kids would go and get some damned thing like that, wouldn't yer!" his mind was saying, while his evil desires prodded. "You got the excuse to beat it and get a good start!" Aloud he said sharply to the wailing neighbour, "Look here, Mrs. Maxwitz, you tell Ellen it won't do for me to hang around no ketchin'-sick kid. I'd lose my job—see? I'll go and get a

room somewheres. Tell her she ain't to worry if she don't hear from me—see? They wouldn't keep me at the shops if they thought I was round with nothin' like that. I gotter stay away. And, say, you tell that doctor to keep an eye on Ellen and the kids; and if things gets bad, *he'll* know about the hospitals all right. I ain't no good in this sort of thing. And, say, here's the pay envelope. Give her that." He scooped up the small change in his pocket and added it, dribbling into Mrs. Maxwitz's extended hand. "Tell her I had to break a bill—to——pay back a feller I owed. Tell her to talk it over with that doctor of yours. I gotter beat it an' get a room somewhere. Tell her she ain't to worry." He ran downstairs and out into the street. "Gee! that was easy!" he exclaimed aloud as he turned the corner and dove into a side street. With hands crammed in empty pockets, head held high, and nostrils that sniffed the evening wind, he turned into First Avenue and began to plod steadily south to Crandes' by the Canal basin. "Easy," he repeated, "dead easy!"

Easy?—

Early in the morning, five days after Jim's desertion, a policeman pushed roughly through the group of excited people jammed in the hall before the door of the Glaives' tenement.

"Hey! Stand back there! Get out, or I'll club some of ye!"

The crowd of frightened women and children fell back, clutching one another, as they were forced up and down the narrow stairs, by those who scrouged hastily away from the threatening presence of Rounds-man Brady, their familiar street-corner standby.

"Mein Gott! Mein Gott!" Mrs. Maxwitz's voice was raised in a shriek of appeal. "Qvick, Meester Braty!"

The policeman set his shoulder against the closed door, brought back his body with a jerk, and landed his full weight above the lock. There was a splintering crash. The inner bolt still held, but through the broken panel, a seepage of ominous vapour fouled the already gas-laden air of the passage. Brady coughed, bent low, and again flung himself against the door. It burst inward; with cries of fright the crowd pushed further back from the noxious fumes.

The officer dashed across the room; tore out the strips of cotton cloth, that sealed the ill-fitting sash, and jerked up the window. For some minutes he leaned far over the sill, while the rush of gas swept by him. Then he turned and looked at the cloth still in his hand. It was the remnant of a baby's dress. The tatters of other tiny garments had been thrust into every crevice of the door and window.

"Plugged the whole place up with 'em," he said aloud. "Her baby's clothes! Well, that's a new wrinkle, anyway."

Dropping the torn strips, he tied his handkerchief across nose and mouth, and ran into the dark and silent bedroom. He turned off the open jet, and raised the single window that gave upon the narrow air shaft.

Upon the bed lay the Glaive children in a row, arranged with care and order, the smallest near the foot, the largest near the scarred headboard. Ellen knelt before them, her stretched arms touching each one of the still bodies, her head fallen upon the child in the centre of that lifeless line; self-crucified, after what a Gethsemane, God alone could know and pity.

In a vain search for a living heart-beat, Brady bent over one small body after another; he lifted, at last, Ellen Glaive's stiffened hand and let it fall with a shrug. Then he turned to confront an intruder. Mrs. Maxwitz stood alone in the middle of the front room, braving the still deadly air. She beat her breast with clenched fists. Between each word of her lament the gas caught and choked her.

“Ach, dat loafer! Dat verdampfer husban’! Id was him dat kill her! Das ist murder, I say id! I say id!”

“Hey, what d’yer mean, murder?” demanded the law’s representative with suddenly sharpened interest.

The woman continued to stare at the cracked and blackened ceiling and cry her vengeance.

“Ach Gott! Vill you led ’im ged away mit id? He leave her, her husban’ go vay! She no want dat hosbitals geds her baby! Dose charities de childrens geds. Und for her, I ask id, vot? Again, I ask id—vot?”

“Aw, cut out that stuff!” The guardian of the public peace moved forward and faced the crowd, pushing through the door.

“He kill her! He kill de babies!” the woman wailed. Then with a louder shriek: “*Und me!* I didn’t know, und I help ’im!” With a wild gesture of tragic grief, she ripped her thin, print wrapper from throat to hem. “*Me—Me*, id was, wat loan id her—a qvater!”