

PAGES FROM THE LIFE OF LUCY NEWCOME

I



AS Lucy Newcome walked down the street, with the baby in her arms, her first sensation was one of thankfulness, to be out of the long, blank, monotonous hospital, where she had suffered obscurely ; to be once more free, and in the open air. How refreshing it is to be out of doors again ! she said to herself. But she had not walked many steps before the unfamiliar morning air made her feel quite light-headed ; for a moment she fancied she was going to faint ; and she leant against the wall, closing her eyes, until the feeling had passed. As she walked on again, things still seemed a little dizzy before her eyes, and she had to draw in long breaths, for fear that curious cloudy sensation should come into her brain once more. She held the baby carefully, drawing the edges of the cloak around its face, so that it should not feel cold and wake up. It was the first time she had carried the baby out of doors, and it seemed to her that everyone must be looking at her. She was not much afraid of being recognized, for she knew that she had altered so much since her confinement ; and for that reason she was glad to be looking so thin and white and ill. But she felt sure that people would wonder who she was, and why such a young girl was carrying a baby ; perhaps they would not think it was hers ; she might be only carrying it for some married woman. And she let her left hand, on which there was no wedding-ring, show from under the shawl in which it had been her first instinct to envelope it. Many thoughts came into her mind, but in a dull confused way, as she walked slowly along, feeling the weight of the baby dragging at her arms. At last they began to ache so much that she looked around for somewhere to sit down. She had not noticed where she had been going ; why should she ? where was there for her to go ? and she found herself in one of the side streets, at the end of which, she remembered, was the park. There, at all events, she could sit down ; and when she had found a seat, she took the baby on her knees, and lay back in the corner with a sense of relief.

At first she did not try to think of plans for the future. She merely resigned herself, unconsciously enough, to the vague, peaceful, autumn sadness of the place and the hour. The damp smell of the earth, sharp and comforting, came to her nostrils; the leaves, smelling a little musty, dropped now and then past her face on to the shawl in which the baby was wrapt. There was only enough breeze to make a gentle sighing among the branches overhead; and she looked up at the leafy roof above her, as she had looked up so often when a child, and felt better for being there. Gradually her mind began to concentrate itself: what am I to do, she thought, what am I to do?

Just then the little creature lying on her knees stirred a little, and opened its blue eyes. She caught it to her breast with kiss after kiss, and began to rock it to and fro, with a passionate fondness. "Mammy's little one," she said; "all Mammy's, Mammy's own;" and began to croon over it, with a sort of fierce insistence. Yes, she must do something, and at once, for the child's sake.

But the more she tried to find some plan for the future, the more hopeless did the task seem to become. There was her aunt, whom she would never go back to, whom she would never see again; never. There was her cousin, who had cast her off; and she said to herself that she hated her cousin. All her aunt's friends were so respectable: they would never look at her; and she could never go to them. Her cousin's friends were like himself, only worse, much worse. No, there was nowhere for her to look for help; and how was she to help herself? She knew nothing of any sort of business, she had no showy accomplishments to put to use; and besides, with a baby, who would give her employment? Oh, why had she ever listened to her cousin, why had she been such a fool as to have a baby? she said to herself, furiously; and then, feeling the bundle stir in her arms, she fell to hugging and kissing it again.

As she lifted up her face, a woman who was passing half paused, looking at her in a puzzled way, and then, after walking on a little distance, turned and came back, hesitatingly. Lucy knew her well: it was Mrs. Graham, her aunt's laundress, with whom she had had to settle accounts every week. She had never liked the woman, but now she was overjoyed at meeting her; and as Mrs. Graham said, questioningly, "Miss Lucy? Lord, now, it isn't you?" she answered, "Yes, it's me; don't you know me, Mrs. Graham?"

"Well," the woman said, "I wasn't sure; how you have changed, miss I asked Mrs. Newcome where you was, and she said you was gone abroad."

The woman stopped and looked curiously at the baby. She had taken

in the situation at a glance ; and though she was rather surprised, she was not nearly so much surprised as Lucy had expected, and she seemed more interested than shocked.

"Pretty baby, miss," she said, stooping down to have a closer look.

"Yes," said Lucy, in a matter of fact way, "it's my baby. I've been very unhappy."

"Have you now, miss?" said Mrs. Graham, sitting down by her side, and looking at her more curiously than ever. "Well, you do look ill. But where have you been all this time, and where are you living now?"

"I'm not living anywhere," said Lucy ; "I only came out of hospital to-day and I've nowhere to go."

"You don't mean to say that!" said Mrs. Graham ; "but," she added, looking at the baby, "his father . . ."

"He has left me," said Lucy, as quietly as she could.

At this Mrs. Graham glanced at her in a somewhat less favourable way. She did not disapprove of people running away from home and getting children as irregularly as they liked ; but she very much disapproved of their being left.

"I haven't a penny in the world," Lucy went on ; "at least, I have only a little more than two shillings ; and I don't know what I am going to do."

"Oh dear now, oh dear!" said Mrs. Graham, rather coldly, "that's very sad, it is. I do say that's hard lines. And so you was left without anything. That's very hard lines."

"I'm so glad I met you, Mrs. Graham," said Lucy. "Perhaps you can help me. Oh, do try to help me if you can! I haven't anybody, really, to look to, and I haven't a roof to shelter me. I can't stay in the streets all day. I'm so afraid the baby will take cold, or something. It isn't for myself I mind so much. What shall I do?"

While Lucy spoke, Mrs. Graham was considering matters. Without being exactly hard-hearted, she was not naturally sympathetic, and, while she felt sorry for the poor girl, she was not at all carried away by her feelings. But she did not like to leave her there as she was, and an idea had occurred to her which made her all the more ready to act kindly towards a creature in distress. So she said, after a moment's pause, "Well, you'd better come along with me, miss, and have a rest, anyway. Shan't I carry the baby?"

"Oh, you are good!" cried Lucy, seizing her hand, and almost crying as she tried to thank her. "No, no, I'll carry the baby! And may I really come in with you? You don't mind? You don't mind being seen?"

"Oh, no, *I* don't mind!" said Mrs. Graham, a little loftily. "It's this way, miss."

And they began to walk across the park. Lucy felt so immensely relieved that she was almost gay. She gave up thinking of what was going to happen, and trudged along contentedly by the side of the older woman. After they had left the park and had reached the poorer quarter of the town, she suddenly stopped outside a sweet-shop. "It won't be very extravagant if I get a pennyworth of acid-drops, will it?" she said, with almost her old smile; and Mrs. Graham had to wait while she went in and bought them. Then they went on together through street after street, till at last Mrs. Graham said, "It's here, come in."

As the door opened Lucy heard the barking of a dog; and next moment she found herself in a room such as she had never been in in her life, but which seemed to her, at that moment, the most delightful place in the world. It was a kitchen, horribly dirty, with a dog-kennel in one corner, and a rabbit-hutch on the top of the kennel; there was a patchwork rug on the floor, and a deal table in the middle, with a piece of paper on one end of it as a table-cloth, and a loaf of bread, without a plate, standing in the middle of the table.

"Have something to eat, miss," said Mrs. Graham, and Lucy sank into an old stuffed armchair, which stood by the side of the fire-place, the springs broken and protruding, and the flock coming through the horse-hair in great gray handfuls.

The baby was still asleep, and lay quietly on her lap as she munched ravenously at the thick slice of bread and butter which Mrs. Graham cut for her. All at once she heard a little cry, and, looking round in the corner behind her, she saw a baby lying in a clothes-basket.

"You'll have to sleep with the children to-night," said Mrs. Graham. "We've only two rooms besides this, and the children has one of them. When you've had a bit of a meal, you'd better lie down and rest yourself."

When Lucy went into the room which was to be her bedroom for the night, she could not at first distinguish the bed. There were no bedclothes, but some old coats and petticoats had been heaped up over a mattress on a little iron bedstead in the corner.

"Now just lie down for a bit," said Mrs. Graham, "and you give me the baby. I know the ways of them."

Lucy threw herself on the bed. She could at least rest there; and she put a couple of acid-drops into her mouth, and then, almost before she knew it, she was asleep, in her old baby-fashion, sucking her thumb.

II

Lucy slept at Mrs. Graham's two nights. She had been told that she would have to work ; and she would do anything, she said, anything. Mrs. Graham had a cousin, Mrs. Marsh, who had a large laundry ; and Mrs. Marsh happened to be just then in want of a shirt and collar hand. Lucy knew nothing about ironing, but she was sure she could learn it without the least difficulty. So the two women set out for Mrs. Marsh's. It was not very far off, and when they got there Mr. and Mrs. Marsh were standing at the big side-gate, where the things were brought in and out, watching one of their vans being unloaded. The shop-door was open, and inside, in the midst of the faint steam, rising from piles of white linen, smoking under the crisp hiss of the hot irons, Lucy saw four young women, wearing loose blouses, their sleeves rolled up above their elbows, their faces flushed with the heat, bending over their work. Mrs. Marsh looked at her amiably enough, and she led the way into the laundry. Besides the four girls, the two shirt and collar hands, the gauferer and the plain ironer, there was a man ramming clothes into a boiler with a long pole, and a youth, Mrs. Marsh's son, turning a queer, new-fangled instrument like a barrel, which dollied the clothes by means of some mechanical contrivance. Clothes were hanging all around on clothes-horses, and overhead, on lines ; the shirts were piled up in neat heaps at the end of the ironing-boards ; some of the things lay in baskets on the ground. As Lucy looked around, her eye suddenly caught a white embroidered dress which was hanging up to dry ; and for the moment she felt quite sick ; it was exactly like a dress of her mother's.

And the heat, too, was overpowering ; she scarcely knew what was being said, as the two women discussed her to her face, and bargained between themselves as to the price of her labour. She realized that she was to come there next day ; that she was to learn to iron cuffs and collars and shirt-fronts like the young woman nearest to her, whom they called Polly ; and, as a special favour, she was to be paid eight shillings a-week, the full price at once instead of only six shillings, which was generally given to beginners. That she realized, she realized it acutely ; for she was already beginning to find out that money means something very definite when you are poor, and that a shilling more or less may mean all the difference between everything and nothing.

That day it was arranged that she should rent a little attic in a house

not far from Mrs. Graham's, a house where a carpenter and his wife lived : they had no children, and she could have a room to herself. She was to pay five shillings a-week for her room and what they called her keep, that is to say, breakfast and supper, which, she soon found out, meant bread and cheese one day, bread and dripping another, and bread and lard a third, always with some very weak tea, water just coloured. Then there was the baby ; she could not look after the baby while she was out at work, so the carpenter's wife, who was called Mrs. Marsh, like the laundress, though she was no relation, promised to take charge of the baby during the day for half-a-crown extra. Five shillings and half-a-crown made seven-and-six, and that left her only sixpence a week to live on : could one say to live on ? At all events, she had now a roof over her head ; she would scarcely starve, not quite starve ; and she sat in her attic, the first night she found herself there, and wondered what was going to happen : if she would have strength to do the work, strength to live on, day after day, strength to nurse her baby, whose little life depended on hers. She sat on the edge of the bed, looking out at the clear, starry sky, visible above the roofs, and she sent up a prayer, up into that placid, unresponsive sky, hanging over her like the peace that passeth understanding, and has no comfort in it for mere mortals, a prayer for strength, only for the strength of day by day, one day at a time.

Next morning she took up her place at the ironing-board, next to Polly, between her and the head ironer, whom she was told to watch. They were all Lancashire girls, not bad-hearted, but coarse and ignorant, always swearing and using foul language. Lucy had never heard people who talked like that ; it wounded her horribly, and her pale face went crimson at every one of their coarse jokes. They had no sort of ill-will to her, but they knew she had a child, and was not married, and they could not help reminding her of the fact, which indeed seemed to them no less scandalous than their language seemed to her. They really believed that a woman who had been seduced was exactly the same as a prostitute ; they talked of people who led a gay life : " Ah, my wench, it's a gay life, but a short one ; " and they were convinced that every-one who led a gay life came to a deplorable end before she was five-and-twenty. To have had a child, without having been married, was the first step, so they held, in an inevitably downward course ; indeed, they believed that all kinds of horrible things came of it, and they talked to one another of the ghastly stories they had " heard tell." Lucy had never heard of such things, and she half believed them. " Can all this really be true ? " she said to herself sometimes, in a paroxysm of terror ; and she tried not to think of

it, as of something that might possibly be true, but must certainly be kept out of sight and out of mind.

One of the girls, Polly, was always very nice to her, and would come round sometimes to her little room and hold the baby for her ; but the others called her "Miss Stuck-up," "Miss Fine-airs," and when she blushed, cried, even, at the ribaldries which seemed to them so natural and matter-of-course, they would taunt her with her bastard, and ask her if she didn't know how a baby was made, she who pretended to be such an innocent. She never tried to answer them ; she did her work (after three days she could do it almost as well as the most practised of them), and she got through day after day as best she could. "It was for baby's sake," she whispered to herself, "all for baby's sake."

In the middle of the day they had a dinner-hour, and the girls brought their dinner with them, which they generally ate out of doors, in the drying-ground at the back, glad to be out of the steam and heat for a few minutes. That hour was Lucy's terror. She had no dinner to bring with her : how could she, out of sixpence a week ? and every day she pretended to go out and get her meal at an eating-house, scared lest one of them should come round the corner, and see her walking up and down the road, filling up the time until she could venture to go back again. She knew that if any one of them had guessed the truth, had known that she could never afford even the cheapest price of a dinner, they would one and all have shared with her their sandwiches, and bread and cheese, and meat pies, and apple dumplings. But she would not have let them know for worlds ; and the aching suspense, lest she should be found out, was almost as bad to bear as the actual pang of hunger. She grew thinner and paler, and every day it seemed to her that the baby grew thinner and paler too. How could she nourish it, when she had no nourishment herself ? She wept over it, and prayed God in agony not to visit her sin on the child. All this while the poor little thing lay and wailed, a feeble, fretful, continual wail, ceasing and going on, ceasing and going on again. It seemed to her that the sound would lodge itself in her brain, and drive her mad, quite mad. She heard it when she was in the laundry, bending over the steaming linen ; it pierced through the crisp hiss of the irons as they passed shingly over the surface ; she heard it keeping time to her footsteps as she walked hungrily up and down that road in the dinner-hour ; she dreamt of it even, and woke up to hear the little wail break out in the stillness of the night, in her attic bed. And the wail was getting feebler and feebler ; the baby was dying, oh ! she knew that it was dying, and she could not save it ; there was no way, absolutely no way to save it.

III

She had now been eight weeks at the laundry, and she seemed to get thinner every day. As she looked at her face in the glass, she was quite frightened at the long hollows she saw in her white cheeks, the dark lines under her eyes: her own face seemed to fade away from her as she looked at it, away into a mist; and through the mist she heard the small persistent crying of the baby, as if from a great way off. "Am I going to be ill?" she wondered, looking down at her fingers helplessly. Certainly both she and the child were in need of the doctor; but who was to pay for a doctor? It was impossible.

That day, for the first time since she had been at the laundry, she had a half-holiday, and she put on her hat and went out into the streets, merely to walk about, and so think the less. "I can at least look at the shops," she said to herself, and she made her way to the more fashionable part of the town, where the milliners' and jewellers' shops were, and as she looked at the rings and bracelets, the smart hats and stylish jackets, it seemed to her worse than ever, to see all these things, and to know that none of them would ever be hers. It was now three o'clock; she had had nothing since her early breakfast, and the long walk, the loitering about, had tired her; it seemed to her, once more, as if a mist came floating up about her, through which the sound of voices was deadened before it reached her ears, and the ground felt a little uncertain under her feet, as if it were slightly elastic as she trod upon it. She turned aside out of the main street, into the big arcade, where she thought it would be quieter, and she found herself staring at a row of photographs of actresses, quite blankly, hardly seeing them. As she put her hand to her forehead, to press down her eyelids for a moment, she heard some one speaking to her, and looking round she saw a middle-aged gentleman standing by her side, and saying in a very kind voice: "My child, are you ill?" Was she then looking so ill? she wondered, or was she really ill? She did not think so, only hungry and faint. How hungry and faint she was! And as she shook her head, and said "No, thank you," she felt certain that the old gentleman, who looked so kind, would not believe her. Evidently he did not believe her, for he continued to look at her, and to say . . . what was it? she only knew that he told her, quite decidedly, that she must come and have some tea. "Thank you," she said again: how was she to say no? and she walked along beside the gentleman in silence. He did not say anything more, but before she

quite knew it, they were sitting at a little table in a tea-shop, and she had a cup of tea before her, real tea (how well she remembered, from what a distance, the taste of real tea!), and she was buttering a huge scone that made her mouth water, only to look at it.

When she had eaten her scone and drunk her tea, she saw that the gentleman was looking at her more kindly than ever, but with a certain expression which she could not help understanding. He was a man of about fifty, somewhat tall, with broad shoulders and a powerful head, on which the iron-gray hair was cut close. His face was bronzed, he had a thick, closely-cut beard, and his eyes were large, gray, luminous, curiously sympathetic eyes, very kind, but a little puzzling in their expression. And he began to talk to her, asking her questions, feeling his way. She blushed furiously: how he had misunderstood her! She was not angry, only frightened and disturbed; and of course such a thing could never be, never. He seemed quite grieved when she told him hurriedly that she must go; and when they were outside the shop he insisted on walking a few steps with her; if not then, would she not come and see him some other day? He would be so glad to do anything he could to help her; that is, if she would come and see him. But she blushed again, and shook her head, and told him how impossible it was; but as he insisted on her taking his card, she took it. What was the harm? He had been kind to her. And of course she would never use it.

That night, as she ate her supper of bread and dripping, washing it down with what Mrs. Marsh called tea, she thought of the tea-shop and the meal she had had there, the pleasantness of the place, the bright little tables, the waitresses gliding about, the well-dressed people who had been in there. And the life she was living seemed more unbearable than ever. At first she had been so glad to be anywhere, to find any sort of refuge, where there was a roof over her head, and some sort of bed to lie on, that the actual sordidness of her surroundings had seemed of little moment; but now it seemed more and more impossible to go on living among such people, without an educated person to speak to, without a book to read, without any of the little pleasantnesses of comfortable life. No, I cannot go on with this for ever, she said to herself; and she began to muse, thinking vague things, vaguely; thinking of what the girls at the laundry said to her, what they thought of her, and how to them it would be no difference at all, no difference at all; for was she not (they all said it) a fallen creature? When she went upstairs, and heard the feeble wail of her child, she almost wondered that she could have refused to take the man's money, which would have paid for a doctor. Oh, yes, she was

a fallen creature, no doubt ; and when you are once fallen you go on falling. But of course, all the same, it was impossible : she *could* not ; and there was an end of it.

But such thoughts as these, once set wandering through her brain, came back, and brought others with them. They came especially when she was very hungry ; they seemed to float to her on the steam of that tea which she had drunk in the tea-shop ; they whispered to her from the small, prim letters of the card which she still kept, with its sober, respectable-looking name, "Mr. Reginald Barfoot," and the address of a huge, handsome building which she had often seen, mostly laid out in bachelor's flats, very expensive flats. But of course, all the same, it was impossible.

IV

On the Saturday of that week, while she was working at the laundry, she had a message from Mrs. Marsh to say that her child was very ill. She hurried back, and found the little thing in convulsions. The poor little wasted body shook as if every moment would be its last. She held it in her arms, and crooned over it, and cried over it, and with her lips and fingers seemed to soothe the pain out of it. Presently it dropped into a quiet slumber. Lucy sat on the chair by the bedside, and thought. She had never seen an attack like that : she was terribly frightened : would it not come on again ? and if so, what was to be done ? A doctor, certainly a doctor must be called. But she had no money, and doctors (she remembered her aunt's doctor) were so expensive. The money must be got, and at once. She looked at the card, at the address. Was it not a matter of life or death ? She would go.

Then she felt that it was impossible ; that she could never do it. Was it really a matter of life or death ? The baby slept quietly. She would wait till to-morrow.

Through that night, and half-way through Sunday, the child seemed much better ; but about three the convulsions came on again. Lucy was frantic with terror, and when the little thing, now growing feebler and feebler, had got over a worse paroxysm than ever, and had quieted down again, she called Mrs. Marsh, and begged her to look after the child while she went and fetched the doctor. "I may be a little while," she said ; "but baby is quiet now ; you'll

be very careful, won't you?" She gave the child one big kiss on both his little eyes; then she put on her hat and went out.

She went straight to the address on the card, without hesitation now, rang at the door, and a man-servant showed her into a room which seemed to her filled with books and photographs and pretty things. There was a fire in the grate, which shed a warm, comfortable glow over everything. She held out her hands to it; she was shivering a little. How nice it is here, she could not help thinking, or, rather, the sensation of its comfort flashed through her unconsciously, as she stood there looking at the photographs above the mantel-piece, as blankly as she had looked at those photographs, that other day, in the arcade. And then the door opened, and Mr. Barfoot came in, smiling, as he had smiled at her before. He did not say anything, only smiled; and as he came quite close, and took her hand, a sudden terror came into her eyes, she drew back violently, and covering her face with her hands, sobbed out, "I can't, I can't!"

For a moment the man looked at her wonderingly; then the expression of his face changed, he took her hands very gently, saying, "My poor child!" Something in the voice and touch reassured her; she let him draw away her hands from before her eyes, in which the tears were beginning to creep over the lower eyelids. She looked straight into his face; there was no smile there now, and she almost wondered why she had been so frightened a moment before. He led her to a chair. "Sit down, now," he said, "and let us have a talk." She sat down, already with a sense of relief, and he drew up a chair beside her, and took her hand again, soothingly, as one might take the hand of a timid child. "Now," he said, "tell me all about it. How ill you look, my poor girl. You are in trouble. Tell me all about it."

At first she was silent, looking into his face with a sort of hesitating confidence. Then, looking down again, she said, "May I?"

"I want you to," he said. "I want you to let me help you."

"Oh, will you?" she said impulsively, pressing the hand he held. "I haven't a friend in the world. I am all alone. I have been very unhappy. It was all my fault. Will you really help me? It isn't for myself, it . . . it's my baby. I am afraid he's dying, he's so very ill, and to-day he had convulsions, and I thought . . . I thought he would really have died. And I haven't a penny to get a doctor. And that's why I came."

She broke off, and the hesitation came into her eyes again. She let her hand rest quite still; he felt the fingers turning cold as she waited for what he would say.

"Why didn't you tell me before?" was all he said, but the voice and the eyes were kinder than ever. She almost smiled, she was so grateful; and he went on, "Now we must see about the doctor at once. There's a doctor who lives only three doors from here. If he's in, you must take him back with you. Here, do you see, you'll give him this card; or, no, I'll see him about that. Just get him to come with you. And now I'm going to give you a sovereign, for anything you want, and to-morrow . . . but first of all, the doctor. Would you like me to come with you?"

"No, please," said Lucy.

"Well, you had better go there at once. And mind you get anything you want, and for yourself, too. Why, you don't know how ill you look yourself! And then to-morrow I shall come and see how you are getting on, and then you must tell me all about yourself. Not now. You go straight to the doctor. By the way, what is your address?"

Lucy told him, hardly able to speak; she could not quite understand how it was that things had turned out so differently from what she had expected, or how everything seemed to be coming right without any trouble at all. She was bewildered, grateful, quiescent; and as she got up, and closed her hand mechanically over the sovereign he slipped into it, she was already thinking of the next thing to do, to find the doctor, to take the doctor back with her at once, to save her child.

"Now I shall come in to-morrow at eleven," she heard him saying, "and then I'll see if you want anything more. Now good-bye. Dr. Hedges, the third door from here, on the same side."

He opened the door for her himself, and as she went downstairs she felt the sovereign in her hand, pressing into her flesh, in a little round circle. She wrapped up the sovereign in her handkerchief, and thrust it into her bodice. She was repeating, "Dr. Hedges, the third door from here, on the same side," over and over again, without knowing it, so mechanically, that she would have passed the door had she not seen a brougham standing outside. It was the doctor's brougham, and as she went up the steps in front of the house, the door opened and the doctor himself came out. "I want you, please, to come with me at once," she said; "my baby . . . I'm afraid he'll die if you don't. Can you come at once?"

The doctor looked at her critically; he liked pretty women, and this one was so young too. "Yes, my dear," he said, "I'll come at once, if you like. Where is it? All right; jump in; we'll be there in a minute."

The doctor talked cheerfully, and without expecting any answer, all the

way to the house. "It's the mother," he thought to himself, "who wants the doctor." Lucy sat by his side white and motionless, putting up her hand sometimes to her bodice, to feel if the gold was there. "Heart wrong," thought the doctor.

When they reached the house, Lucy opened the door. "Come in," she said, and began to fly up the stairs; then, suddenly checking herself, "No, come quietly, perhaps baby is sleeping." They went up quietly, and Lucy opened the attic door with infinite precaution. As she held open the door for the doctor to come in, she saw Mrs. Marsh move towards her, she saw the bed, and on the bed a little body lying motionless, its white face on the pillow; she saw it all at a glance, and, as the doctor came cheerfully into the room, she realized that everything had been in vain, that (she said to herself) she had waited just too long.

She sat down by the side of the bed, and looked straight in front of her, not saying a word, nor crying; she seemed to herself to have been stunned. The doctor examined the child, and then, taking Mrs. Marsh into a corner of the room, began to question her. "Poor little thing," said Mrs. Marsh, "he just went off like you might have snuffed out a candle. He was always weakly, like; and she, you know, sir, she ain't by no means strong, not fit to have the charge of a baby, sir. I'm that thankful she takes it so quiet like. Did you say, sir, there'll have to be a crowner's quest? Well, I do hope not; it do look so bad."

At this moment they heard a wild cry behind them; both turned, and saw Lucy fling herself full length upon the bed, clasping the little body in her arms, sobbing convulsively. The tears streamed down her cheeks, the sobs forced themselves out in great bursts, almost in shouts. "It will do her good to have a good cry," said the doctor. "I'll leave you now; rely on me to see afterthings." And he went out quietly.

Lucy never remembered quite how she got through the rest of that day. It always seemed to her afterwards like a bad dream, through which she had found her way vaguely, in a thick darkness. Early in the evening she undressed and went to bed, and then, lying awake in the little room where the dead baby lay folded in white things and covered up for its long sleep, her mind seemed to soak in, unconsciously, all the uncomfortable impressions that had made up her life since she had been living in that miserable little room. Through all the hopeless sordidness of that life she lived again, enduring the insults of the laundry, the labour of long days, starvation almost, and the loneliness of forced companionship with such people as Mrs. Marsh

and Polly the ironer. She had borne it for her child's sake, and now there was no longer any reason for bearing it. Her life had come to a full stop; the past was irrevocably past, folded away like the little dead body; her mind had not the courage to look a single step before her into the future; she closed her eyes, and tried to shut down the darkness upon her brain.

When she awoke in the morning it was nearly nine o'clock. She got up and dressed slowly, carefully, and when she had had her breakfast she went out to an undertaker's, from whom she ordered a baby's coffin. Remembering that she had a sovereign, she asked him to make it very nicely, and chose the particular kind of wood. She stayed in the shop some time, looking at inscriptions on the coffin lids, and asking questions about the ages of the people who were going to be buried. When she got back it was nearly eleven. She had taken off her hat, and was tidying her hair, quite mechanically, in front of the glass, when she heard a clock strike. Then she remembered that Mr. Barfoot was coming to see her about eleven. She stood there, lifting the hair back from her forehead with her two thin hands, and her eyes met their reflection in the glass, very seriously and meditatively.

ARTHUR SYMONS.