

What Will Become of Annie?

By BRAND WHITLOCK

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SPRING had come back to Leadam street. The moist cobblestones had steamed in the new sun all the afternoon; sparrows were sweeping up to the eaves, trailing strings and long straws after them; from the back porches of the flats were loud, awaking, tinny sounds, breaking the long silence. The clank of the cable-cars was borne over the roofs, clearly now in the damp, heavy atmosphere; from somewhere came the jingle of a street piano. Floating down the mild afternoon came the deep, mellow note of some big propeller, loosing her winter moorings at last and rousing to greet the tug that would tow her out of the narrow river. Kelley, the policeman, strolled along the sidewalk, with his hands locked behind him, his nose in the air, sniffing eagerly and pleasurably. He had left off his skirted overcoat, and changed his clumsy cap for his helmet.

Annie had sat at her window all the afternoon, but, as the spring day wore toward its close, she began to realize that only the melancholy, and none of the promise of this first spring day had touched her. She had thrown open the window, to test the quality of the air. Now and then a warm breath came wandering in off the prairies, though when it met the cold, persistent wind from the lake, it hesitated, and timidly turned back. But Annie would not let herself doubt that the spring had come. She knew that in time the prairie wind would woo its way until it would be playing with the waves of the lake itself, the little waves that danced all day, blue and white, in the sunshine. And then the summer would come, and on Sunday afternoons Jimmy would take her out to Lincoln Park and they would have their supper at Fisher's Garden.

Leadam street was dull enough on week days; on Sundays it was wholly mournful.

Once Annie saw a woman, with a shawl over her head and a tin bucket in her hand, go into Englehardt's place, down the street. The woman went in furtively, and brushed hastily through the "Family Entrance," though why could not be told. She went there nearly every hour of every day. Then Annie was left alone. She did not turn inward to the flat; that was too still and lonesome, and it was growing dark now, as the shadows gathered. She heard the strenuous gongs of the cable-cars over in State street, and she could imagine the crowds, gay from their Sunday holiday, that filled them, clinging even to the running-boards. She might have gone out and been with them, as every one else in the street seemed to have done, but she would not for worlds have been away from home when Jimmy came. She heard the jingle of the street piano, too; she wished it would come down that way. She would gladly have emptied her purse for the Dago.

It was not unusual for Annie to be left alone, and she had grown used to it—almost, as used as a woman can—even the wife of a politician. Jimmy has told her that she must not worry at any of his absences; an alderman could never tell what might detain him. She had but a vague notion of the things that might detain an alderman, though she had no doubt of their importance. At times she thought she felt an intimate little charm in the importance that thus reflected itself upon her, but, nevertheless, her heart was never quite easy until she heard Jimmy's step on the stair and his key in the latch, and then—joy came to the little flat, and stayed there, trembling and fearful, until he went away again. She had grown to be so dependent on Jimmy. Ever since she had been graduated from the convent his great, strong personality had stood between her and the world, so that, as her girlhood merged into womanhood, she had hardly recognized the change, and she remained a girl still, alone but for him; he was her whole life. She had doubted his entrance into politics at first, just as she had doubted his going into the saloon business, though she scarcely understood either in their various significances. Father Daugherty had told her she was a fortunate girl to have Jimmy for a husband, and that had been enough. Her only objection was that politics seemed to keep Jimmy away from home oftener than the old work in the packing-house used to; she had trembled at it at times, and at times had grown a little frightened. His success in politics had pleased her, of course, and made her proud, but it could not have made her prouder of him than she had been. He was all-sufficient for her; no change could make any difference. . . . Without Jimmy, what could she have done? He had never been gone so long before; here it was Sunday evening; he had left at eleven o'clock Saturday morning; there was to be an extra session of the council Saturday night, an unusual thing, and she had not been surprised when she awoke to find that it was Sunday morning—and that Jimmy had not come.

The morning wore away, and she had made all the arrangements for the dinner she would have awaiting him. She had gone about lightly, hap-

pily, all the day, singing to herself, the gladness of the new spring in her. But, one by one, all the tasks she could think of were performed, even to drawing the water for his bath and laying out his clean linen. And then, when there was nothing else to do but wait, and nothing with which to beguile her waiting, she had taken her post at the window to watch for his cab.

The day waned, the Sunday drew wearily toward its close, as if it sighed for Monday, and the resumption of active life. The street grew stiller and stiller. She heard the voice of a newsboy, far out of his usual haunts, crying an extra. She could not distinguish the words in which he bawled his tidings, and she thought nothing of it. One of Jimmy's few rules was that she was not to read the papers. But, when the heavy voice was gone, she found that it had had a strange, depressing effect upon her; she longed for Jimmy to come; the day had dragged itself by so slowly, and something of its somberness had stolen into her soul. She sighed, and leaned her chin on her arm; her back was growing tired, and beginning to ache. Then suddenly she heard horses' hoofs and the roll of a carriage in the street. She rose and leaned far out of the window to welcome him. The cab drew up; it stopped; the door opened. But the man who got out was not Jimmy. It was Father Daugherty. She knew him the instant she saw the fuzzy old high hat thrust out of the cab, and caught the greenish sheen of the shabby cassock that stood away from the fringe of white hair on his neck in such an ill-fitting, ill-becoming fashion. The old man did not look up, but tottered across the sidewalk.

Annie gasped, and scarce could move. In a moment more she heard the old steps on the stairs, the steps that for forty years had gone on so many errands for others, kind and merciful errands all of them, though for the most part sad. He was soon beside her, and she looked up into the gentle face that was so full of the woes of humanity. He had driven at once from the hospital in the cab they had sent to fetch him. Jimmy's last words had been:

"What will become of Annie?" The death of Alderman Jimmy Tierman at any time would have been a shock. When death came to him by a pistol ball it created what the newspapers, in the columns they were so glad to fill that Monday morning, defined as a profound sensation. This sensation was most profound in two circles in the city, outwardly unconnected, though bound by ties which it was the constant and earnest effort of both to keep secret and unknown.

The city council had had a special session on Saturday night, and had passed the new gas franchise. Alderman Tierman had had charge of the fight. Malachi Nolan was away, and Baldwin had picked out Tierman as the most trustworthy and able of those of the gang who were left behind. Jimmy had felt the compliment, and gloried in it. It was the biggest thing that had fallen to him in his political life, and he was determined that he would make all there was to be made out of the opportunity. Not in any base or sordid sense—that is, not wholly so; that would come, of course, but he felt beyond this a joy in his work; the satisfaction of mere success would be his chief reward, the glory and the professional pride he would feel. He relished the fight against the newspapers, against "pub-lic opinion," whatever that was; against the element that called itself the "better" element.

He was fully determined that no step should be misplaced; he counted his men over and over again; he checked them off mentally, and it all was present, every one voted, and voted "right" when the roll was called; the new gas franchise was granted; Jimmy had delivered the goods. It was natural that such a glorious victory should be celebrated, and the gang, when it assembled in Jimmy's place, immediately after the session was over, could not restrain its impetuosity. The boys longed to have the fruits of the day's work; with their wages they could celebrate with glad, care-free hearts. But Jimmy was of a Gaelic cunning. He would not jeopardize the victory at that stage by any indiscretion. He saw at a glance the mood the gang was in. He smiled, as he always smiled—and any one, to see his smile, must have loved him—but he shook his head.

"The drink's in you, boys," he said, "and you can't trust your tongues. You'll have to wait. Monday night you'll be over. Then we'll talk business."

Subconsciously, they still were sober; in a strange dual mentality they saw the safety there was in his decision; and, in the paralysis of will his magnetism worked in them, they loved him the more for it. They remembered that it was just what Malachi would have done. And so, noisy and excited as they were, they applauded his sagacity. Then they gave themselves over unreservedly to their appetites. It was a famous night in the annals of the gang. Jimmy himself joined in the revelry. And in the calm, silent Sunday morning, with the

new sunlight of spring glaring in his swollen, aching eyes, he found himself, with a companion, in a Clark street chop house. Just as they were going to order breakfast, a young man came in, with a black look in his eyes. No one saw it then, though they all remembered it afterward. Jimmy greeted him as gayly as he greeted everybody, but the young man did not warm to Jimmy's greeting. There were words, the quick rush of anger to Jimmy's face, a blow, and the pistol shot. At first the newspapers were glad to trace some sinister connection between the franchise fight and the tragedy. Afterward, they said it was only some private grudge. No one dreamed that Jimmy Tierman had an enemy on earth.

At the hospital, Jimmy opened his eyes, and on his face, grown very white, there was a smile again, the last of his winning smiles. His friends were with him, and they wept, unashamed. Then he rolled his head on his pillow, and spoke of Annie. The calm Sister of Charity pressed her rosary into his hand, and stooped to listen. They had just time to send for Father Daugherty.

Down in the ward, the sadness that had come to Leadam street spread blackly. Many a man, and many a woman, and many a child, cried. The poor had lost a friend, and they would not soon forget him. In the long days of the distant winter they would think of him over and over. Every one in that ward was poor, though the reformers, condescending that way whenever Jimmy was up for re-election, somehow never grasped the real significance of the fact. And it was a somber Monday around the city hall. Jimmy had been a man with a genius for friendship. The gang mourned him in a sadness that had added to it the remorse of a recent sobriety, but their grief, genuine as it was, had in it an evil bitterness their hearts would not have owned. They were restive and troubled. Whenever they got together in little groups, they read consternation in one another's faces; and now and then they cursed the caution they had exhaled on Saturday night. Besides these varied effects, Jimmy's death, while it could

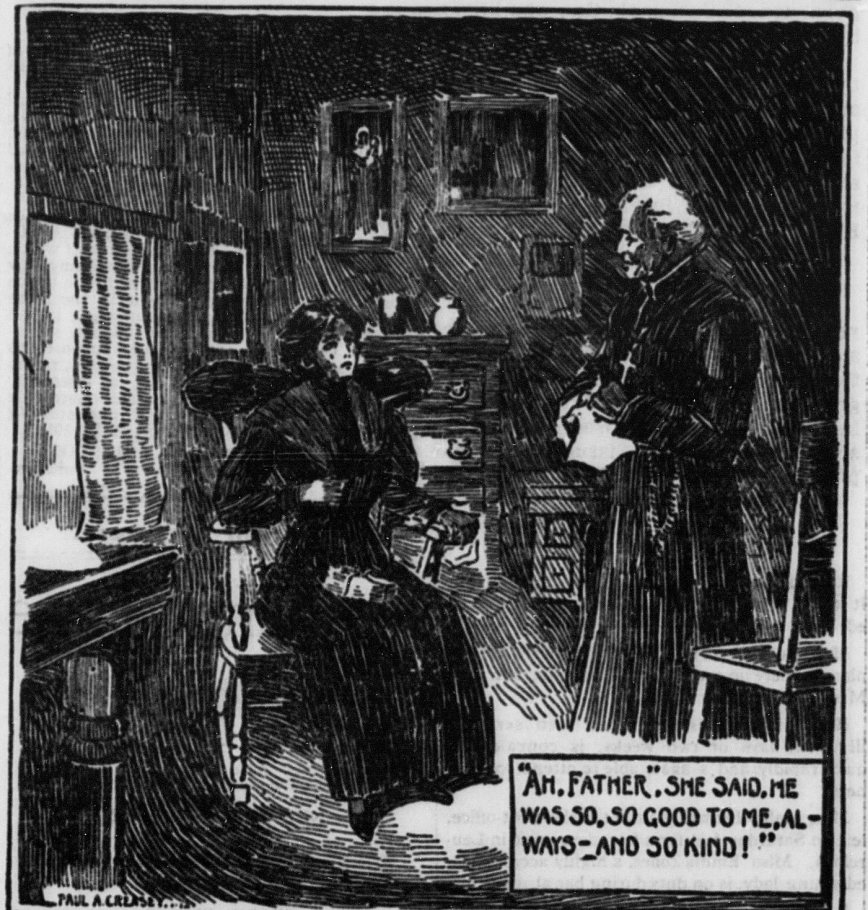
had wrought their complex and tragic tale in his face. The joys he left them to taste alone; but he found too much sorrow to have time for joy. During all those years he had given himself unsparingly; if it was all he had to give, it was the most precious thing he could have given—a daily sacrifice that exhausted a temperament keenly sensitive and sympathetic. So he had grown old and white before his time. Many a man had he kept straight when times were hard and the right to work denied him; many a widow had he saved from the wiles of the claim-agent. The corporations and the lawyers hated him.

And so, on Monday morning, the clerks of the probate court had scarcely had time to yawn reluctantly before beginning a new week's work, when Father Daugherty appeared to file Annie's waiver of her own right to be appointed administratrix of the estate of James Tierman, deceased, with an application for the appointment, instead, of Francis Daugherty as administrator.

"He must keep a set of blanks," whispered one clerk to another.

As Father Daugherty went about his inventory, he saw that the result would be what he had expected. Jimmy had left no estate, no insurance, nothing but the saloon. And that, with Jimmy dead, was nothing, for its value lay all in Jimmy's personality and the importance of his position in politics. The fixtures would hardly pay for the burying of him. When the debts the law prefers had been paid, Annie would have scarce a penny. The world might preserve a respectful and sympathetic attitude during the few exciting days when it was paying its last conventional tributes to the dead man, but it kept itemized accounts meanwhile, and it could not long pretend to have forgotten material things. It would present its bills, and they must be paid. Annie would have hardly a cent to meet them with. And Father Daugherty knew, even if Annie did not know, what the world would do then.

Yet he smiled, though he shook his head, as he thought of the free-handed, indiscriminating generosity that



not create a crisis in the market, nevertheless gave rise to nervous feelings in certain segments of financial circles. It was inevitable that financial and political circles should overlap and intersect each other in this matter, and there were conferences which seemed to reflect a sense of personal resentment at Jimmy for having been murdered so inopportunistically. In the end, the financiers were peremptory with Baldwin. He must fix the thing some way. And he assured them that he would give the appointment of the administrator his immediate attention. Already, he said, he had a man in view who would be reasonable and practical. There were suggestions of strong-handed methods, but that was never George R. Baldwin's way. He went out with his air of affability unimpaired. Meanwhile, political and financial circles could only wait and hope.

The excitement of the first few days following the tragedy kept Annie's mind occupied; but, when the funeral was over, and she returned to her little flat, when the neighborly women had at last gone back to their homes and their interrupted duties, and the world to its work, Annie was left to face life alone. She could not adjust herself to the change, and fear and despair added their blackness to her grief. Father Daugherty knew how great a blow Jimmy's death would be to her, and though he gave what comfort he could, he left her grief to time. He did not belong to the preaching orders. But, as he pondered in his wise old head, he shrewdly guessed that the careless Jimmy would hardly have made provision against anything so far from his thoughts as death, and he perceived that if Annie were to be protected from a future with which she, alone and unaided, would hardly have the capacity to deal, some one must act.

Long ago might Father Daugherty have celebrated his silver jubilee as pastor of St. Patrick's, but he was not the man for celebrations. The parish was one big family to him, and he knew the joys and sorrows, the little hopes and pathetic ambitions of every one in it. The sorrows of his children he bore in his own heart; they

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