ICE WATER PL—!

By FANNIE HURST

This is the first installment of another of Fannie Hurst's fascinating stories. There's a surprise in this one—but it doesn't come until the last chapter on Saturday.

CHAPTER I

WHEN the two sides of every story are told, Henry VIII may establish an alibi or two, Shylock and the public school system meet over and melt that too solid pound of flesh, and Xantippe, herself the sturdier man than Socrates, give ready lie to what is called the shrew in her. Landladies, whole block-bonbazine generations of them—oh, so long unheard!—may rise in one Indictment of the Boarder: The scarred bureau front and match-scratched wall paper; the empty trunk nailed to the floor in security for the unpaid bill; cigarette-burnt sheets and the terror of sudden fire; the silent new comer in the third floor back hustled out one night in handcuffs; the day-long sobs of the blonde girl so suddenly terrified of life-about-to-be and wringing her ringless hands in the fourth floor ballroom; the smell of escaping gas and the tightly packed keyhole; the unsuspected flutes that lurk in the boarders' trunks; towels, that querulous and endless paean of the lodger; the high cost of liver and dried peaches, of canned corn and round steak!

FANNIE HURST

Tired bombazine procession, wrapped in the greasy odors of years of carpet-sweeping and emptying slops, airing the gassy slit of room after the coroner, and padding from floor to floor on a mission of towels and towels and towels!

Sometimes climbing from floor to floor, a still warm supply of them looped over one arm, Mrs. Kaufman, who wore bombazine, but unspotted and with crisp net frills at the throat, and upon whose soft-looking face the years had written their chirography in invisible ink, would sit suddenly, there in the narrow gloom of her halls, head against the balustrade. Oftener than not the Katz boy from the third floor front would come lickety-clapping down the stairs and past her, jumping the last four steps of each flight.

"Irving, quit your noise in the hall."

"Aw!"

"Ain't you ashamed, a big boy like you, and Mrs. Suss with her neuralgia?"

"Aw!"—the slam of a door clipping off this insolence.

After a while she would resume her climb.

And yet in Mrs. Kaufman's private boarding house in West Eighty-ninth street, one of a breastwork of brownstone fronts, lined up stoop for stoop, story for story, and ash-can for ash-can, there were few enough greasy odors except upon the weekly occasion of Monday's boiled dinner; and, whatever the status of liver and dried peaches, canned corn and round steak, her menus remained static—so static that in the gas-lighted basement dining-room and at a remote end of the long, well-surrounded table Mrs. Katz, with her napkin tucked well under her third chin, turned sotto from the protruding husband at her right to her left neighbor, shielding her remark with her hand.

"Am I right, Mrs. Finshriber? I just said to my husband in the five years we been here she should just give us once a change from Friday-night lamb and noodles."

"Say, you should complain yet! With me it's six and a half years day after tomorrow, Easter Day, since I asked myself that question first."

"Even my Irving says to me tonight up in the room, jumping up and down on the hearth like he had four legs—"

"I heard him, Mrs. Katz, on my ceiling like he had eight legs."

"'Mamma,' he says, 'guess why I feel like saying "baa."'"

"Saying what?"

"Sheep talk, Mrs. Finshirber, b-a-a, like a sheep goes."

"Oh!"

"'Cause I got so many Friday nights' lamb in me, Mamma,' he said. Quick like a flash that child is."

Mrs. Finshriber dipped her head and her glance, all her drooping features pulled even farther down at their corners. "I ain't the one to complain, Mrs. Katz, and I always say, when you come right down to it maybe Mrs. Kaufman's house is as good as the next one, but—"

"I wish, though, Mrs. Finshriber, you would hear what Mrs. Spritz says at her boarding-house they get for breakfast; fried—"

"You can imagine, Mrs. Katz, since my poor husband's death, how much appetite I got left; but I say, Mrs. Katz, just for the principle of the thing, it would not hurt once Mrs. Kaufman should give somebody else besides her own daughter and Vetsburg always the white meat from everything, ain't it?"

"It's a shame before the boarders! She knows, Mrs. Finshriber, how my husband likes breast from the chicken. You think once he gets it No. I always tell him, not till chickens come double-breasted like overcoats can he get it in this house, with Vetsburg such a star boarder."

"Last night's chicken, let me tell you, I don't wish it to a dog! Such a piece of dark meat with gizzard I had to swallow."

Mrs. Katz adjusted with greater security the expanse of white napkin across her ample bosom. Gold rings and a quarter-inch marriage band flashed in and out among the litter of small tub-shaped dishes surrounding her, and a pouncing fork of short, sure stab. "Right away my husband gets mad when I say the same thing. 'When we don't like it we should move,' he says."

"Like moving is so easily, if you got two chairs and a hair mattress to take with you. But I always say, Mrs. Katz, I don't blame Mrs. Kaufman herself for what goes on; there's one good woman if there ever was one!"

"They don't come no better or no better looking, my husband always says. 'S-ay,' I tell him, 'she can stand her good looks.'"

"It's that big-idead daughter is more to blame. Did you see yet her new white spats tonight? Right away the minute they come out she has to have 'em. I'm only surprised she 'ain't got one of them red hats from Gimp's what is all the fad. Believe me, if not for such ideas, her mother could afford something better as succotash for us for supper."

"It's a shame, let me tell you, that a woman like Mrs. Kaufman can't see for herself such things. God forbid I should ever be so blind to my Irving. I tell you that Ruby has got it more like a queen than a boarding-housekeeper's daughter. Spats, yet!"

"Rich girls could be glad to have it always so good."

"I don't say nothing how her mother treats Vetsburg, her oldest boarder, and for what he pays for that second floor front and no lunches she can afford to cater a little; but that such a girl shouldn't be made to take up a little stenography or help with the housework!"

"S-ay, when that girl even turns a hand, pale like a ghost her mother gets."

"How girls are raised nowadays, even the poor ones!"

"I ain't the one to complain, Mrs. Katz, but just look down there, that red stuff."

"Where?"

"Ain't it cranberry between Ruby and Vetsburg?"

"Yes, yes, and look such a dish of it!"

"Is it right extras should be allowed to be brought on a table like this, where fourteen other boarders got to let their mouth water and look at it?"

"You think it don't hurt like a knife! For myself I don't mind, but my Irving! How that child loves 'em,' and he should got to sit at the same table without cranberries."

From the head of the table the flashing implements of carving held in askance for a stroke, her lips lifted to a smile and a simulation of interest for display of further carnivorous appetites, Mrs. Kaufman passed her nod from one to the other.

"Miss Arndt, little more? No? Mr. Krakower? Gravy? Mrs. Suss? Mr. Suss? So! Simon? Mr. Schloss? Miss Horowitz? Mr. Vetsburg, let me give you this little tender—— No? Then, Ruby, here, let Mama give you just a little more——"

"No, no, Mama, please!" She caught at the hovering wrist to spare the descent of the knife.

By one of those rare atavisms by which a poet can be bred of a peasant or peasant be begot of poet, Miss Ruby Kaufman, who was born in Newark, posthumous, to a terrified little parent with a black ribbon at the throat of her gown, had brought with here from no telling where the sultry eyes and tropical-turned skin of spice-kissed winds. The corpuscles of a shab might have been running in the blood of her, yet Simon Kaufman, and Simon Kaufman's father before him, had sold wool remnants to cap-factories on commission.

"Ruby, you don't eat enough to keep a bird alive. Ain't it a shame, Mr. Vetsburg, a girl should be so dainty?"

Mr. Meyer Vetsburg cast a beetling glance down upon Miss Kaufman, there so small beside him, and tinkled peremptorily against her plate three times with his fork. "Eat, young lady, like your Mama wants you should, or, by golly! I'll string you up for my watch-fob—not, Mrs. Kaufman"?

A smile lay under Mr. Vetsburg's gray-and-black mustache. Gray were his eyes, too, and his suit, a comfortable baggy suit, with the slouch of the wearer impressed into it, the coat hiking center back, the pocket-flaps half in, half out, and the knees sagging out of press.

(Continued tomorrow)

Change in Program

Emilio de Gogorza, baritone, will not sing at the third concert of the Boston Symphony Orchestra this evening at the Academy of Music, owing to a sudden indisposition.

In his place will be Leo Ornstein, composer and pianist, who will play MacDowell's concerto in D minor No. 2. As changed, the program will be: Beethoven's Pastoral symphony; Wagner's Prelude to Parsifal; MacDowell's piano concerto No. 2, and Liszt's Mephisto waltz.