

CARLETTA ;
OR
"Going to sing in Heaven."



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Carletta,

or,

"Going to sing in Heaven."

"If I could have your faith, Hawkins, gladly would I—but I was born a sceptic. I cannot help my doubts more than I can the results they lead to. I *cannot* look upon God and the future as you do; with my temperament, and the peculiar bias of my mind, it is utterly impossible."

So said John Harvey as he walked with a friend under a dripping umbrella; for the night was stormy and very dark, though the brilliancy of the shop-lamps made a broad path of light along the wet sidewalk. John Harvey was a sceptic of thirty years' standing, and apparently hardened in his unbelief. Everybody had given him up

as unconvertible. Reasoning ever so fairly and calmly made no impression on the rocky soil of his heart. Theologians disliked the sight of his massive face, and humble Christians sighed as he passed them. A man with such capacities, they said,—with such generous impulses (for everybody knew how kind he was), with an intellect so enriched, and powers of the keenest metal—and yet no God!—no hope of the future!—walking with the lamp at his feet unenlightened. Alas! it was sad, very sad!

But one friend had never given him up. When spoken to about him—“I will talk with and pray for that man until I die,” he said; “and I will have faith that he may yet come out of darkness into the marvellous light. And oh, how wonderful that light will seem to him—shut up so long.”

And thus whenever he met him (John Harvey was always ready for “a talk,”) Mr. Hawkins pressed home the truth upon him. In answer on that stormy night, he only said, “God can change a sceptic, John. He has more power

over your heart than you have, and I mean still to pray for you.”

“Oh, I’ve no objections, none in the world—seeing is believing you know. I’m ready for any modern miracle, but I tell you it would take nothing short of a miracle to convince me. However let’s change the subject. I’m hungry, and it’s too far to go up town to supper, this stormy night. Whew! how the wind blows; Here’s a restaurant, let us stop here.”

How warm and pleasant it looked in the long, brilliant dining-saloon! Clusters of gas-jets streamed over the glitter and colour of pictures and gorgeous carpets, and the rows of marble tables reflected back the lights as well as the great mirrors.

The two merchants had eaten, and were just on the point of rising, when a strain of soft music came through an open door—a child’s sweet voice.

“Upon my word that is pretty,” said John Harvey; “what marvellous purity in those tones.”

“Out of here you little baggage,” cried a hoarse voice, and one of the

waiters pointed angrily to the door.

"Let her come in," said John Harvey, springing to his feet.

"We don't allow them in this place, sir," said the waiter, "but she can go into the reading-room."

"Well, let her go somewhere, for I want to hear her," responded the gentleman.

All this time the two had seen the shadow of a something hovering back and forward on the edge of the door; now they followed a slight little figure, wrapped in patched cloak, patched hood, and leaving the mark of wet feet as she walked. Curious to see her face—she was very small—John Harvey lured her to the furthest part of the great room, where there were but few gentlemen, and then motioned her to sing. The little one looked timidly up. Her cheek was of olive darkness, but a flush rested there; and out of the thinnest face, under the arch of broad temples, deepened by masses of the blackest hair, looked two eyes, whose softness and tender pleading would have touched the hardest heart.

"That little thing is sick, I believe," said John Harvey compassionately.

"What do you sing, child?" he added.

"I sing you Italian, or little English," she said softly.

John Harvey had been looking at her shoes. "Why!" he exclaimed, and his lip quivered, "her feet are wet to her ankles, absolutely; her shoes are full of holes."

By this time the child had begun to sing, pushing back her hood and folding before her her little thin fingers. Her voice was wonderful; and simple and common as were both air and words, the power and pathos of the tones drew together several of the *habitués* of the reading room. The little song commenced thus—

"There is a happy land,
Far, far away."

Never could the voice, the manner, of that child be forgotten. There almost seemed a halo round her head; and when she had finished, her great speaking eyes turned toward John Harvey.

"Look here, child, where did you learn that song?" he asked.

"In Sabbath school, sir," was the simple answer.

"And you don't suppose there is a happy land?" he continued, heedless of the many eyes upon him.

"I know there is; I'm going to sing there," she said, so quietly, so decidedly, that the men looked at each other.

"Going to sing there?"

"Yes, sir. My mother said so. She used to sing to me until she was sick. Then she said she wasn't going to sing any more on earth, but up in heaven."

"Well—and what then?"

"And then she died, sir," said the child, tears brimming up and over on the dark cheek, now ominously flushed scarlet.

John Harvey was silent for a few moments. Presently he said:—

"Well, if she died, my little girl, you may live you know."

"O no, sir! no, sir! [very quickly]—I'd rather go there, and be with mother. Sometimes I have a dreadful

pain in my side, and cough as she did. There won't be any pain up there, sir, it's a beautiful world!"

"How do you know?" faltered on the lips of the sceptic.

"My mother told me so."

Words how impressive! manner how child-like and yet how wise! John Harvey had had a praying mother. His chest laboured for a moment—the sobs that struggled for utterance could be heard even in their deeps—and still those large, soft, lustrous eyes, like magnets, impelled his glance toward them.

"Child, you must have a pair of shoes."

John Harvey's voice was husky.

Simultaneously hands were thrust in pockets, purses pulled out, and the astonished child held in her little palm more money than she had ever seen before.

"Her father is a poor consumptive organ-grinder," whispered one. "I suppose he's too sick to be out to-night."

Along the sloppy street went the

child, under the protection of John Harvey, but not with shoes that drank the water at every step. Warmth and comfort were hers now. Down in the deep, den-like lanes of the city walked the man, a little cold child-hand in his. At an open, broken door they stopped; up broken, creaking stairs they climbed. At last another doorway opened, a wheezing voice called out of the dim arch—"Carletta."

"O father! father! see what I have brought you! look at me! look at me!" and down went the hoarded silver, and, venting her excessive joy, the child fell, crying and laughing together, into the man's arms.

Was he a man?

A face dark and hollow, all overgrown with hair, black as night, and uncombed—a pair of wild eyes—a body bent nearly double—hands like claws.

"Did he give you all this, Carletta?"

"They all did, father; now you shall have soup and oranges."

"Thank you, sir—I'm sick you see—all gone, sir—had to send the poor

child out, or we'd starve, sir. God bless you, sir! I wish I was well enough to play you a tune;" and he looked wistfully toward the corner where stood the old organ, baize covered—the baize in tatters.

"It's no matter," said John Harvey with difficulty. "I'll come and see you some other time;" and he groped his way down stairs.

* * * *

One month after that the two men met again, as if by agreement, and walked slowly down town. Threading innumerable passages, they came to the gloomy building where lived Carletta's father.

No—not lived *there*; for as they paused a moment, out came two or three men bearing a pine coffin. In the coffin, the top nailed down so that no mourner might open, provided there had been any such, slept the old organ-grinder.

"It was very sudden, sir," said a woman who recognized his benefactor.

"Yesterday the little girl was took sick, and it seemed as if he dropped right away. He died at six last night."

The two men went silently up stairs. The room was empty of everything save a bed, a chair, and a nurse provided by John Harvey. The child lay there, not white, but pale as marble, with a strange polish on her brow. Oh, how those dark eyes on the instant became eloquent, as John Harvey sat on the side of the bed.

"Well, my little one, so you are no better."

"Oh, no, sir! father is gone up there, and I'm going."

Up *there*! John Harvey turned unconsciously towards his friend.

"I wish I could sing for you," she said, and her little hands flew together.

"Do you wish to sing?"

"Oh, *so* much!—but it hurts me. It won't hurt me up there, will it?" Where was the child looking, that there seemed such wonder in her eyes.

"Did you ever hear of Jesus?" asked John Harvey's friend.

"Oh, yes!"

"Do you know who he was?"

"*Good* Jesus," murmured the child, with a rare smile.

"Hawkins, this breaks me down," said John Harvey, and he placed his handkerchief to his eyes.

"Don't cry, don't cry; I can't cry, I'm so glad!" said the child exultingly; and she looked up as if heaven's light were already dawning on her.

"What are you glad for, my dear?" asked John Harvey's friend.

"To get away from here," she said deliberately. "I used to be so cold in the long winters, for we didn't have fire sometimes; but mother used to hug me close, and sing about heaven. But I *did* have to go out, because they were sick, and people looked cross at me, and told me I was in the way; but some was kind to me. Mother told me never to mind, when I came home crying, and kissed me, and said if I was his, the Saviour would love me, and one of these days would give me a better home; and so I gave myself to him, for I wanted a better home. And oh, I shall sing there, and be so

happy. Christ sent a little angel in my dream—mother told me he would, and that angels would carry me up there. Oh, I feel *so* sleepy!”

With a little sigh she closed her eyes.

“Harvey, are faith and hope nothing?” asked Mr. Hawkins, pointing to the little face taking on such strange beauty, as death breathed icily over it.

“Don’t speak to me Hawkins; to be as that little child I would give all I am worth,” was the broken response.

“And to be like her you need give nothing—only your stubborn will, your sceptical doubts, and the heart that will never know rest till it find it at the feet of Christ. O my friend, resolve, by the side of this little child, who is soon to be ‘singing in heaven,’ that you will be a follower of my Saviour. Let reason bow here, before simple, trusting faith.”

There was no answer. Quietly they sat there in the deepening shadows. The hospital doctor came in, stood off a little way, shook his head. It needed

no close inspection to see what was going on.

Presently the hands moved, the arms were raised, the eyes opened—yet, glazed though they were, they turned still upward.

“See! see!” she cried. “Oh, there is mother! and there are the angels! and they are all singing—all singing.”

Her voice faltered, her arms fell, but the celestial brightness lingered yet on her face. Feebly she turned to those who had ministered to her, feebly smiled—it was a mute return of thanks for all their kindness.

“There is no doubting the soul-triumph there,” whispered Mr. Hawkins.

“It is wonderful,” replied John Harvey, looking on both with awe and tenderness. “Is she gone?”

He sprang from his chair as if he would detain her, but the chest and forehead were marble now, the eyes had lost the fire of life; she must have died as she lay looking at them.

“She was always a sweet little thing,” said the nurse softly.

John Harvey stood as if spell-bound. There was a touch on his arm; he started and turned.

“John,” said his friend, with an impressive look, “shall we pray?”

For a minute there was no answer—then came tears; the whole frame of the man shook as he said—it was almost a cry,—“Yes, pray, pray!”

And from the side of the dead child went up agonizing pleadings to the throne of God. That prayer was answered—the miracle is wrought—the lion is a lamb—the doubter a believer—the sceptic a Christian. Careless reader may a little child lead you!



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