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LIVING UP TO BILLY



"I NEAR WENT NUTTY, AND MADE AN AWFUL FOOL OF MYSELF."—Page 137

LIVING UP

TO BILLY

BY

ELIZABETH COOPER

AUTHOR OF "MY LADY OF THE CHINESE
COURTYARD," "SAYONARA," ETC.



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LIVING UP TO BILLY

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I

Dear Kate:

Two years! Only two years, what do you think of it! Why, when I heard the judge say two years, I nearly fell off the bench. You were caught with the goods, and he had your record with its two stretches right before him, yet he only gave you two years. You told me yourself you thought you would get at least five. We tried to dope it out up to the room, and kind of figured that he had it in for the prosecuting attorney, and you got the benefit. Well, if you ain't singing to-night in the toms, you orter be. And two years, old girl, will go by so quick that when you see the lights of Broadway again, you won't even see a change. You can get a lot off for good behavior, and you know how to work all the con games there is to be worked, so as it will make it easy for you, cause it ain't as if it was your first time. Put on a good face, and don't get sulky and you will be out before you have time to remember you was ever sent up.

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Now, I will come up and see you just as often as I can, and I will get you a letter regular once a month anyway, and I will tell you all that is doing. Oh, Kate, it kinda breaks me all up to think of you being put away again. You're all I got, and I don't know what I will do without you. That last stretch of yours I nearly died. You and me have just got each other and we have been mighty close, more so than most sisters I think. You have not always treated me white, sometimes you have been mean, but it was not your fault. I suppose it is hard in a girl like you to have a sister left on her hands, and I was only a kid when you had to take me over and was lots of trouble to you. You have been good in your way, and Kate, I want you to know when you are setting alone at night, that I am just counting the days till you come back to me.

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Yours,
Nan.

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II

Dear Kate:

I didn't write you before cause I wanted to be able to tell you what we are going to do about the kid. Jim was up and we talked it all over and I said I would take him. I don't want none of Jim's friends to have him cause he ain't no good, Kate, and I have always told you so. I made him promise if I take Billy that he will leave him alone. I won't have him hanging around and I don't want Billy to see nothing more of him than he has to. I blame him for all that has come to you. Before you married him and got in with his crowd, you was on the level, but—it ain't no use kicking now, it is all done; only I want him to keep his hands off Billy. There is a roomer on the floor below that has got a little girl who will come in and kinda look after Billy when I am out. I can take him out for a walk every day and perhaps I can get him in one of those kids' schools for two or three hours in the afternoon.

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Jim brought him up at night, and he was all sleepy and soft and warm and cuddled up to me just like a little kitten. I never noticed before how pretty he was, but I watched him as he lay there with his red lips half open and his long black lashes laying on his cheeks and his hair all curling around his face, and I just could not go to sleep for looking at him. He is too pale, I think. Seems to me he ought to have more color in his cheeks. I suppose it is cause he hasn't had enough outdoor exercise that babies should have. Roomers should not have kids. It don't seem just right to shut a baby up in four walls when he would like to run and play outside with other young things. But I am going to do the best I can by him, so don't you worry, he will be all right.

Jim is pretty sore about you getting pinched, and says he is going to leave town. The crowd is kinda scared, and I think they are going to scatter. Irene went to St. Louis the other day, cause she said the cops are getting too familiar with her face. I told the whole bunch what I thought of them, and that they had better clear out. Do you remember Jenny Kerns? She was that little blond that use to clerk in Siegel's store. She has got the room right next to me, and say, she is awful sick. I have been setting up nights with her till I am dippy for want of sleep. I think she is all in. I didn't let her know it, but I have sent for her mother. I snooped around her place the other night till I found her mother's address, and I wrote her a letter telling her just how Jenny was, and that some one orter come and get her. Jenny would kill me if she knew it, cause she don't want her folks to know what she is doing, but it seems too bad to have her die here alone in a rotten little room on 28th Street when she has got a mother, who, no matter what she has done, would be glad to see her. Say what you will Kate, girls that have got mothers have a darned sight better chance than girls like you and me who was brought up on the street, and when she gets sick and lonely, no matter how tough she has been, if she can reach out her hand and touch her mother, she can sort of begin over again.

I have been learning a lot of the new dances, and Fred Stillman and me took the prize the other night for the best hesitation waltz. I am going to try to get a job dancing in one of the restaurants. I am tired working like a dog in these cheap theatres, and I know I can dance as well as any girl on Broadway. A crowd of us blew in the other night at that big dance hall at 59th Street, and everybody stopped to watch me and Fred. It kinda makes you feel good to know you can do anything well, if it is only tangoing, and I do love it! When I get a good partner it seems to me I hear voices calling, and the music ain't made just by some niggers in the corner, but it is just something speaking to me and something inside of me answers and I forget I am in a hall with a lot of people looking at me, I am just a dancing by myself to the things I hear. Jim says you have fixed it with a guard so as you can get all the letters you want. I can't slip you over twenty dollars a month to save my soul. That orter be able to fix him enough, but if it ain't, let me know, cause you know Kate, you can have every dollar I make except just enough to keep the kid a going, if it will make things easier for you. Get me out a letter whenever you can. Remember I am always thinking of you.

Nan.

III

Dear Kate:

I told you, didn't I, of sending for Jenny Kerns' mother. Well, she come and she was just the kind you read about in story books. The moment I opened the door I knew who she was and I took her in my room and had her take her hat off and smooth her hair and try to make it easy about Jenny. I told her she had been working too hard, and had caught cold and that if she was took home where she had the right kind of things to eat and real nursing, not just us girls going in when we had the time, that she would soon get all right. The mother could hardly wait until I had finished, and she sort of trembled all over. When I took her into Jenny's room, Jenny was laying with her eyes shut, not asleep, but just like she lays most of the time, and she looked so white and little and her lashes were so black against her white face, that I could see it went right into that mother's heart. She went up to the bed, and put her arms around Jenny, and her face against hers, and said, "My little girl, mother's own little girl," and then I left, 'cause I am kinda soft, and I could see it was the hose cart for me. In about half an hour, I went in to see if they was hungry, and Jenny was laying there with her mother's hand in hers looking as if she had found peace. I just wanted to put my arms around that little old fashioned woman and cry. You know, style don't seem to count when it is your mother. The old lady is going to stay until Jenny is better, then they are going home, and I hope we will never see Jenny again. Being a chorus girl ain't her place. She belongs in a little town playing the church organ.

But say, you would laugh to see the old lady. She don't fit in a rooming house in 28th Street. She has a nice, sweet, old face and she combs her hair back from it, parted in the middle, and she smiles at all of us in a loving way, cause she thinks we have been good to Jenny. And the girls! It is funny to see them when they first blow into the room and run into her. They look as if they saw a ghost, and then they set back quiet, and let her talk. She tells them all about Iowa or wherever it is she is from, and about Jenny when she was a little girl, and her father and her two brothers, and how sorry they were when Jenny come to New York to study music, but they didn't want to stand in her way. All the girls come in whenever they have a chance and bring Jenny some little thing from the delicatessen or some plants or flowers. Her room is awful pretty, cause they keep

it just filled with flowers. Mary Callahan took the mother out the other afternoon to a moving picture show. She didn't want to leave Jenny, but we told her she must get out a little or she would get sick too. Mary said that everyone stared at her, and some of the crowd at the corner were going to guy her, but she gave them one look, and they said nothing. I stayed with Jenny and she talked about her mother all the time that she was gone and about the home and the little berg where she comes from. She is crazy to get back, cause I think she knows it won't be for long, and she wants to pass in her checks with the folks around her. She said to me, "Oh, Nan, I have had my lesson, and it has cost me dear, but I won't kick, as I wouldn't have been satisfied till I had tried it." But I thought, if all the preachers could bring up a few girls who think they want to try the Great White Way, and let them take a good look at Jenny, it would be better than all their sermons. Any girl with half a brain would say, "Oh, little Oskaloosa is good enough for me."

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No, I won't bring Billy up to see you, Kate. He is big enough to remember things, and I don't want him to know what a prison is, and his first remembrance of his mother must not be that he saw her behind the bars. I know you want to see him and I can understand it, because I love him too, but I would die without ever touching his hand rather than ever let him see me in stripes. He will be five years old when you get out Kate, and he grows cunninger each day. He don't look a bit like Jim, has got our curly reddish hair, and his eyes are blue like yours instead of brown like mine. I suppose I orter have his hair cut, as it is so thick and curly, but I can't bear to, as it is the only thing he has of mine, and I like to look at it, and feel he is a little bit like me. I make him up a bed at night on the morris chair, cause Jenny's mother sleeps with me, and do you know, at night when she is sound asleep if she hears Jenny cough, she raises up and listens and if it don't stop right away, she slips out of bed and goes into her room. I tell you, I am going to have a mother some day if I have to get you to steal one for me.

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Yours,
Nan.

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IV

Dear Kate:

I ain't wrote you for quite a time, cause I have been in a lot of trouble, and so busy and kinda tired out that any time I set down long enough to write a letter, I go to sleep. Billy had an awful accident. I was making some hot chocklate in my room, and he pulled the pan over on him and burned his hand and arm and shoulder. I took him to St. Vincent's hospital and they fixed him up, but said he didn't look well and I orter leave him there awhile. They put him in a ward with a lot of other babies, and I go every day to see him. He can set up now and play. I take him up something every time I go, and some things for the other kiddies too. There are twelve little tads in the room, and they are awful good when you think that they are sick. One little kid had both his hips broke, and he lies on his back with his feet in a sling that holds his legs straight up and he plays with his toys and talks to himself and never whimpers except when he sees the doctor come in the ward. Then his face gets awful scared, and his eyes get big and black with a helpless look of fear in them, cause he knows the doctor means changing his bandages and that hurts. The doctors and the nurses talk and handle the children just as if they loved them. There is a little boy in the bed next to Billy who is only six months older than Billy, and he looks something like him. He has got Billy's blond curls, and great big eyes, only he is much stronger. I suppose it is because he lives in the country. His mother is an English woman with an awful funny accent, but I like her real well. She lives out in New Jersey, somewhere on a little farm. Her kid is going to leave next week, and she asked me to bring Billy and come and see her. I told her I would, but Lord, I don't believe I know where New Jersey is. When I come to think of it, I ain't never been even to Hoboken. All the United States of America I know is bounded on the north by 59th Street, and on the south by 14th Street, on the east by Third Avenue, and the sun sets on Seventh Avenue for me. I never stopped to think that people lived anywhere else, but I suppose all these folks that we see chasing up and down with packages in their hands must be going somewhere. You know, Kate, we ain't never been in the country in our lives. Honest, I don't believe we have ever seen real grass and I never wanted to before, but when I saw the look in that little woman's face, and how different her baby was than Billy, I kinda thought I would like to see how she lived. I wonder if country kids do have a better time than city kids? We had an awful good time, if doing just as you please is having a good time. Do you remember how you used to shake my teeth out for following the hand organ men around town? It is funny we young ones didn't get run over or killed, the way we was always in the streets. It might have been all right, but I would hate to see Billy bringing himself up the way I did.

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Oh, Kate, he is the cutest thing! He has a cot in the corner of the room facing the doorway, and I step in the door and stand there a minute until he looks up, and then his face all changes and breaks in little dimples and smiles, and he holds out his arms to me and says, "Nannie, my Nannie is tum." Why you know, I all choke up and I hold him close in my arms and talk to him and play with him until the nurse comes with their suppers, and all the visitors must leave. I go back to the room which is empty without him. It is funny what a change a baby brings to a place, and how it makes home out of a bum little six-dollar-a-week room. I didn't put his things away when he was took to the hospital, cause I like to see them laying around. His shoes look so funny under the bed setting by mine, and I got a lot of his clothes hanging up on a line behind the door. I

washed lots of his clothes out myself, not so much to save the money as I like to be a doing something for him. I must say you dressed him nice, Kate, his clothes looked so pretty when they was all ironed and hung up in a row and his funny little white stockings—don't he wear them out fast? When I undressed him at night, if there was a hole in his stocking, he would wiggle his little pink toe out of it and point to it and say, "Naughty, naughty Billy." The girls in the place were just crazy about him, but they gave him too much candy and fussed over him more than I liked, yet I hated to call them down, as the poor devils don't have a chance to see a baby often.

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Mary Callahan is sick. I want her to go to the hospital, but she won't do it. The other night coming home from the theatre in a lot of slush and snow, she caught an awful cold. She is all in. I fussed around her all morning and put a mustard plaster on her chest, which burned the skin all off and made her awful mad at me. She says she won't be able to cover it with make-up for a month, and it will mean a good fat call-down from the manager, but between you and me, she will have time to get a brand new skin before she will be able to show up at work again.

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Well, so long, old girl. I must go to bed. Gee, how I do miss Billy. Night-times I used to have to lift him over on his own side, cause he would lay cross wise on the bed, and when I would get in it would be all warm where his little body had been. Oh, Kate, he is the dearest kid! I bought him a funny little jumping jack to-day. You pull a string and a man's neck goes away out and I can just see Billy's eyes and hear his funny laugh when he first sees him.

Nan.

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V

Dear Kate:

I got a lot to tell you cause things have shaken up a bit. Do you remember that little English woman who had a baby in the hospital next to Billy? Well, I went out to see her one Sunday. It was such a nice, warm spring day, just seemed as though I had to do something different, and the greatest shock I could give my system was to leave the pavements of New York for a time. I dressed Billy in a blue velvet coat I bought at Macy's, and he had on a blue hat over his little red curls, and his shoes had dark blue tassels on the front of them, and he looked cunning enough to eat. He was so proud of his tassels that he showed them to everybody in the street car and in the train. It took us almost two hours to get out there, and the people met us with a horse and buggy and drove us to their house. Why, Kate, I didn't know there was such places! The house is on a side hill with great trees around it, and in the front of it is a little lake with ducks and geese swimming on it. They had a great big stable opening on to a pasture where there was calves and cows and horses and pigs. I think I stood half an hour looking at the pigs. It is funny, but I always thought a pig a sort of a ham hanging up in the window of a delicatessen, instead of being a live, friendly animal that will come when you call it. There were a lot of chickens, white leghorns, I think the woman called them, and they looked friendly and home-like wandering around the place talking and singing to themselves like a bunch of happy women. Mrs. Smith let me feed them. She gave me a milk pan full of corn and told me to hit on its edge with a spoon, and they came flocking from every direction, some half flying, half running, as if they were afraid they would miss the party. They were so tame that I had to hold the pan up high to keep some of the sassy roosters from climbing into it. Mrs. Smith knows them all and can tell if one is missing, though they all look alike to me. She says she hates to kill them cause it seems like eating some of the family. Her husband laughed and said, "I will tell you the tragedy of the wrong hen." He said, "You know once a week we have chicken pot pie, and for seven days Mary goes mourning around wondering which one of her precious chickens she can part with,—and live. We hear the virtues and the vices of each old biddy, cause my wife loves each feather. The other day after heart breakening talks Mary decided that Peggy could be killed, and a motherly old hen who wanted to set should be tied up. We caught them at night and put a blue string on Peggy, and a white string on the motherly hen, and tied them to the ice-house door. Mary took an hour and a half to explain to me that the chicken with the blue string was to be eaten, and she of the white string was to be left tied to the ice-house door until her longings toward motherhood would stop. In the morning when I went out to see those chickens, blest if I could tell which was to be killed, and which was not, but I thought I would take my chance on the fattest, and I took her head off. I suppose you noticed Mary's eyes—it was the wrong head."

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Billy and the kid played out-doors all day and his face got sun burnt and his eyes sparkled, and he looked just like another baby. Her boy is only six months older than Billy, but he is so much bigger, and it just makes me sick to think I can't give this to Billy and let him have a chance to grow up big and strong like other boys. All the way in on the train, I kinda cussed under my breath, to think I had to take him back to that dirty little room, and the girls who were always talking to him and feeding him things he orter not have, and him a hearing things that perhaps he will remember when he grows up, and it may make him do a lot of thinking by himself. I wish I could do something, but I don't know what I can do. I feel helpless, as if my hands was tied down by my sides, and I couldn't get them loose. Good-bye, I am kinda sore to-night. Seems to me we got in wrong somewhere, Kate, and I don't know where nor how. It ain't your fault, and it ain't mine, but it don't seem to me we have had our chance like other women have. I saw a picture the other day on a calendar. It was a happy looking woman dressed in a long blue gown carrying a

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baby up a beautiful stairs with flowers everywhere, and they were looking over her shoulder at the father down below. Now, can you imagine anything nicer than that to be in a home of your own with a pretty dress on, your baby in your arms, going to put it in its bed and your husband looking up at you proud? Nothing to be ashamed of, and nothing to be afraid of. That is the biggest kind of heaven I know, but I guess it ain't for us. We got in wrong from the start, but oh, Kate, I do wish things was different. I don't care so much for myself, but I do want to get Billy out of this life where thieving and being a crook is the natural thing, and a person on the level is looked upon as being queer. Sometimes when I see Billy do some little thing or have a look in his face like Jim, my heart most stops beating. I don't pray, but I do say, "Oh, if there is such a thing as a God, don't let Billy grow up like his father." And, there are a lot of your little ways that I would just as soon not see cropping out in him.

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Well, good night, I am glad you are getting along so well. I can't send you any money this time, cause I am flat broke since I paid your storage bill, but I will give you twenty next month. Do write me a decent letter, Kate. Your last letter was simply a touch from the beginning to the end, and between you and your friends, I am kept pretty well cleaned up.

Nan.

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VI

Dear Kate:

Say, but I am a happy girl! What do you think, Billy and me is in the country. I am going to stay a week, and Billy is going to stay always, I hope. After I had made that first visit to Mrs. Smith, I kept seeing that place with the pigs and the chickens and the trees and the lake and the nice green grass and the kids rolling over on it, and the room here got smaller and hotter, and Billy got whiter, and I felt I couldn't stand it, so I sat down and wrote Mrs. Smith, and asked her if she wouldn't take Billy to board. She was real nice and came over to see me one day, and ended up by taking me and Billy back with her. She asked me to stay a week so Billy would get used to her and the place and not be lonesome. The manager kicked, but I said I was sick, and I got a week's leave. Mrs. Smith offered to take Billy for nothing, but I wouldn't stand for that and we settled on \$3.50 for his board. I offered to pay more, but she would not listen to me. She says he will be company for her baby, and that two is easier to take care of than one anyway.

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This life here don't seem real to me. I went to bed at nine o'clock, which I don't remember I have ever done in my life before. Even as a kid I was on the streets until ten or eleven o'clock and, in the last three years, three in the morning has been my bye-bye time. I went up to a little room under the roof, and lay awake until almost morning, hearing such a lot of strange sounds that I was as nervous as a hen. There was a big tree by the corner of the house, and its branches would swish across the roof as if a ghost was trying to get in the window. Talk about the quiet of a country night, I never heard so many sounds in all my life and they all seemed sad. The little frogs go chug, chug, as if their hearts was broken, and every once in a while, the tinkle of the cow-bell from some pasture down below, would come to me. There is a night bird called the whip-o-will that set in a tree up near the barn and called another one across the lake whose answer I could just hear. There is a funny animal up here called the bull-frog, who sets upon a log over at the back of the lake and hollars at his friends. The first time I heard them, it nearly scared a lung from me, but now I lie in bed and laugh when they commence. I thought the Smiths were joshing me when they showed me the little thing that made such a big noise. Wouldn't it be nice if we could make a noise as big according to our size as the bull-frog does to his? I know lots of people that I would like to sit on a log and hollar at.

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It seemed I had just shut my eyes when they called me to breakfast, but it was beautiful. We ate out in front of the kitchen door and saw a gray mist rise over the lake all turning to rose when the sun touched it. It looked like a pink silk dancing petticoat under a gray chiffon skirt. Did you ever eat at a table under a great big tree looking out on the water? You know you eat different. You eat slow, and you think of the things you love, the things you have read about, and of what you would like to be. The toast seems crisper, and the coffee tastes better, and you forget the rotten crowd and old New York and the hot, dry streets and the Childs restaurants and the dance halls and the whole bum world. Then our evenings are so happy! We row around the lake and afterwards come home and water the flowers. We must pump the water from the pump in the kitchen and carry it in pails. I had one side of the lawn and Mrs. Smith had the other side, and last night my flowers took fifteen pails. It makes my back ache, and the pump coughs as if it had the T. B., but the flowers are so pretty, and they look so happy and so old fashioned in the big green tubs, that I am willing to do anything for them. Mrs. Smith has learnt me their names. There are pansies with purple and yellow faces, and proud red dahlias, and China astors and hollyhocks against the wall, and flox all mixed together in a way that shows, as Mrs. Smith says, that there is no social standing in the country. There are some poor tea roses that by mistake got planted in a bed of merrigolds, and they are not doing very well and act unhappy. Each morning I go over them all and take away the foolish green worms that always crawl back in the night, although I throw them over the fence.

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Then, when all the "chores," as Mr. Smith calls them are done, we shut the boat-house door and set on the veranda and watch the moon as it goes down over the tree tops. It shines so beautiful

through the pine trees at the edge of the lake. Everyone is quiet. Even the babies snuggle down in our arms and stop their chattering. There are two great toads that live under the front veranda, who come out on the walk and look at each other as only toads in love can look, and there is a cricket in the tree down by the lake that calls to a lady cricket who lives over by the ice house. She answered lovingly for two evenings, but I guess now she is gone, and he sets in his lonely tree, and calls and calls, and no soft-voiced cricket says, "Yes, dear." There is a loud-voiced cricket that sets near the boat-house door, and says, "Come to me, come to me," and I fear my lady cricket has gone to him.

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Then we take our little lamps and go to bed, and I have the baby near me if I want to speak to him. I use to have to read till I couldn't keep my eyes open any longer, but now sleep seems to come to me just like a friend. Some way I feel that this is the right life, and if I only could live it long enough, I might become a woman after all.

Nan.

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VII

Dear Kate:

I have had the grandest week. It is Billy's birthday, and I come out to stay two days with him and have stayed on and on and won't go back until next Monday. I brought out both the kids a white pique suit and white shoes and stockings, and they look awful cunning. I always buy something for Paul, because it seems kind of selfish to give to Billy and not to the other one. I don't think the Smiths have much money. He was a teacher in a school in England, and his health broke down and he come to America because he thought he could do better here, but I don't think every thing is going just as he thought it would. His brother is in Australia, and is doing fine, and I guess they wish that they had gone there instead. He is an awful nice man and knows all about the birds, and the trees, and the flowers, and he tells it to me and it has changed lots of things for me, because I know all the sounds now and what they mean, and they talk to me instead of being just noises.

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I am learning to be a housekeeper, and "I help round," as Mrs. Smith says, all day. We washed Monday and I never knew it took such work to just wash clothes. I have washed handkerchiefs and some of Billy's things up in my room, but here we wash sheets and pillow cases and table clothes and shirt waists. Talk about shirt waists! I use to tell Mrs. Murphy that did mine up, that she was an old thief, cause she charged me twenty cents for them, but now I know she earned her money all right. First Mrs. Smith soaked the clothes over night with some white powder in the water. Then Mr. Smith fished the washing machine out of the lake where it was put where its seams would swell up, and I turned the handle of the thing, till I thought my arm would come off, but it was rather fun, as it was out-of-doors and I could watch the chip-monks as they come looking for scraps from the kitchen. There is some squirrels in the trees, and they look so pretty setting up on their haunches with their long bushy tails curled over their backs, nibbling away at a nut. If I lived in the country, I wouldn't keep a cat, because it kills the chip-monks and birds. The young black birds are just now trying to leave their nests, and sometimes they fall out and set on the ground under the bushes and call their father and mother with a funny little chirp sound, and the cat hears it and creeps with her stomach close to the ground till she is close to the baby bird, and then pounces like lightening on him, and the poor little chap cries for help most like a human baby. The mother bird will fight for her little ones, as long as she can, and sometimes I wish she would peck the old cat's eyes out. I spent a good share of my time chasing the cat from place to place, but even after doing that and watching the chip-monks and squirrels and stopping to keep the children from falling off the dock, I got the washing done at last, and Mrs. Smith rinsed and blued the clothes and hung part of them up on a line and part she spread on the grass to bleach. My clothes looked surprised as they never found themselves in such a place before, laying on nice clean grass with the hot sun blazing down on them. They seemed sort of happy, and they took such odd positions that I looked at them in wonder, hardly knowing my old friends. But they got whiter and whiter, and we gathered them in when the dusk come and they smelled so sweet, that I am sure I will have to carry clean thoughts for the rest of the week.

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Mrs. Smith lets me gather the vegetables for dinner. Every morning after the dishes are washed, I go across the road to the garden and pick the string-beans and gather summer squash and grub around the nice smelly earth for potatoes. I get the dirt all under my finger nails, and can just see the duchess at Gimble's who manicures me, when she takes my lily-white hands in hers next time. I pick the cucumbers from the vines, and I never in all my life saw such big tomatoes. Then we come down the path, Billy carrying a cucumber in each hand, because they don't break if he drops them, and Paul with a summer squash swinging by the neck, and me with my apron piled full of things that smell of the vines.

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There is nothing to drink up here, and I don't miss it and I don't bring cigarettes with me. My friends think it ain't nice to smoke, and I would not hurt them for worlds. Their friendship and the love they show me is worth more than all the drinks or smokes in little old New York. Why, I would give up anything just to see the look in their faces when they meet me at the station, and I know they really want me to come.

It rained yesterday, not a dull, drizzling rain like we have in the City, but a happy "I am good for you" rain, that washed old mother earth's face and left quiet gray shadows on the lake. I never thought I could think a rain was pretty, but yesterday it was just beautiful as it came down slantwise on the water. We heard it coming long before it got to us, sounded just like the patter patter of soft footed things on a chifon carpet, and way across the lake we could see a blue-gray wall that come nearer and nearer till it got to us. Then when the rain was finished, the lake looked like a dull looking glass with every leaf and tree showing in its face. The birds began to call to one another again, and the robbins came out on the lawn looking for worms. There is one saucy robbin who comes toward me and cocks his little head and says, "Am I not a little dandy? Do I not hold myself as a gentleman should?" Then he finds a big fat worm and pulls and tugs until he gets him loose and flies away to his wife and babies because, although his vest is far too gay for a person who is the main support, quite likely of a large and growing family, he don't seem to have the air of a bachelor. There is a loon at the other end of the lake that laughs just like a person, and twice I have seen a big bird walking around on the edge of the water that Mr. Smith says is a blue heron. When we go up into the woods, little red lizzards with gold spots run across the path, and the babies try to get them. I have been fishing twice, but I won't do it no more, as I can't bear to take the hooks out of the fish's mouth, so when the others go I will stay on shore and watch the funny water-bugs that make such big jumps. If we could jump like them, one good hop would take us from 14th Street to the Grand Central, and there would be no use for the subway.

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I just live out-of-doors, setting on the veranda watching the mist rise over the lake, or, when I am not helping Mrs. Smith, spending long hours lying flat on my back looking up at the sky and wondering if there is some path for me, and if I will ever find it. I think it is good to get close to the ground, and I tell it all my secrets. It gives me strength, and a sort of hope I never had before.

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Oh, Kate, I am so happy here! You know I have been hungry all these years and didn't know it, just hungry for friends. I wanted love that you didn't have to watch, and these people give it to me. They show me that they want me and I have a part in their life, eat the things they eat and hear their home talk and am just one of them. You know I never tasted food, no matter how much it cost, that tastes so good as it does out here. It ain't just the things, if you got lots of money you can buy them, but it is the something that goes with the "why, come right in, you are in time for dinner." If it was only potatoes and salt, the way they offer it to you makes it better than a dinner party at Martin's. In the afternoon, we have tea and bread and butter and preserves that Mrs. Smith has made herself. She is English you know, and says she could not go without her afternoon tea any more than she could go without her breakfast. And we set and talk and laugh and I feel as if there was such a thing as windows in one's soul, mine are all open to the sunlight for the first time.

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Good night, Kate dear. Do I seem sort of stupid to you? I know you wouldn't like it here, as it is too far from Broadway, but I love it! We have been out on the water all evening, each sitting in our end of the boat with a lot of pillows at our back and looking at the moon. You know I never seemed to have known the moon before, he is a new friend that I have made at Lake Rest, and life will never be quite the same now I have known him. He makes me dream and I plan such a happy future for you and me and Billy, and when I look at him there is nothing but rose leaves in life. But—well—it is a new moon now, I wonder what the old moon will say.

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Lovingly,
Nan.

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VIII

Dear Kate:

It is raining and I am staying in the room cause I bit my tongue last night and I can't talk. I am sore. Sometimes I think I will never do a good trick for a person as long as I live, and then, when the time comes I am always Mr. Easymark. Last night I was coming along home after work about two o'clock, and it was cold and rainy and a miserably bum night. At the corner of Sixth Avenue I saw a fellow all sort of hunched up, walking along as if he had a jag. As I went by him I saw it was Fred Dennis, and he sure looked all in. He was shaking as if he had chills and fever, and I stopped and asked him what was the matter. He said he just come out of the hospital where he had typhoid. Between you and me, I think he had been in the jag ward at Bellevue, but that was none of my business, and he sure needed help. He said he was stone broke, that he didn't have the price for a ten-cent lodging house, and he give me a touch. First I thought I would cough, then I looked in his shifty eyes, and I knew he would go straight to Kelly's and get a drink and take a chance of sleeping on the floor, so I said to him, "You come up to my room, and I will make you some hot cocoa, and you go to bed in a *bed*. That is what you need, or you will be costing the City a funeral." I sneaked him up to the room and had him put on that old Japanese wadded wrapper of mine and get in bed, and I made him some hot cocoa. His teeth chattered like they was playing a tune, but I piled all my bed clothes on him and my winter coat and most of my clothes and when he got warm, I went in and slept with Myrtle Seaman. She has only a single bed, and I went to turn over in the night and fell out and bit my tongue. Say, but it is sore. It seems to fill my whole mouth, and I spend most of my time setting in front of the looking glass to

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see if the swelling is stopped.

But my tongue ain't half as sore as I was, when I went into my room this morning thinking I would make Fred some coffee and give him a half a dollar, so as he could get a square meal. Now what do you think that piker had done? He had copped everything in my room that he could hock. He took my black bag, my winter coat, my new green silk petticoat that I got to wear with my slit skirt, the buckles off my dancing slippers, and the little silver frame that had Billy's picture in it. My can of cocoa was gone and he even sneaked the bottle of milk in front of the door. Can you beat that for nerve! Now, the next time I see a bum standing on a corner, shaking his teeth out with the cold, he can stand there and scatter his pearls from 14th Street to 42nd for all me.

I am just sore to-day. I have been a setting here and a thinking that this game ain't worth it. There must be something better somewhere than living from hand to mouth with people that would steal the pennies off your eyes. You can't tell where you stand with any of them. They will be good to you one minute, and the next minute do you a dirty trick. Just like Ethel Rooney who sat up three nights running with Mamie Callahan when she was sick, then pinched her only pair of slippers. I believe crooks have something wrong down deep inside of them. They never do nothing like other people. Their hearts are good, they will go to the pen for a friend rather than peach on him, and yet that friend wouldn't trust him alone in his room with a five dollar bill, and the women—if they don't steal each other's money, they steal each other's fellows if they're left around careless-like.

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I sent your letter to Jim, and I told you before, I paid the storage man. Don't get so blue, it won't be long, and I am doing everything I can for you. You are always a kicking at me, Kate, and I am a doing the best I know how. I am working like a dog, and I don't spend a cent for myself more than I have to. I am a thinking of you, Kate, and I love you even if you do seem to always have a grouch against me.

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Yours,
Nan.

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IX

Dear Kate:

I haven't wrote you for a long time, cause I know you will be sore at what I am going to tell you, and I was afraid you would tell some of the old crowd where I was, and they would queer me in some way. I have been doing housework, Kate. Yes, I can see you throw a fit as you read it, but it will tell you one reason why I have not been able to send you any money the last two months. I had been dancing steady for a long time and I got dead tired of the crowd. The bum faces and the cheap girls and the dirty restaurants and the fresh waiters got on my nerves and it even spoiled my work. Mrs. Smith has been after me for a long time to leave it. She just talks to me and talks to me every time I go over there. I got half sick and went over to Lake Rest for a couple of weeks, and I used to lie at nights up in my room a hearing the sounds and a feeling the quiet, and in some way it made me hate the sidewalks and the hot dusty streets and the dance halls and the nights when I was up till morning and the days when I was a feeling like a boiled owl. I talked it all over with Mrs. Smith and she didn't want me to do clerking, cause I would still have to live in a room, and it is the people in the rooming houses she is dead sore at. She wants me to do something that will take me away from the crowd. Then she asked me if I would be willing to do house work. I told her I would be willing to try scrubbing, that sometimes it seemed that any old thing was better than what I have been doing for the last seven years. But I told her I didn't know nothing about housework, as I don't remember ever having been in a real house except hers. I lived in furnished rooms all my life but I was willing to learn and it seems to me if you are only willing to try, you can learn anything. I stayed with her two weeks, and she showed me how to cook potatoes, to fix meat, and I think the first day I made an apple pie all by myself, I nearly bust with pride. Why, Kate, there is a joy in just making something. To take some apples and some flour and butter and lard and to fix it all yourself, then take it out of the oven crisp and hot and have some one say, "Ain't that fine"! Why, you feel you have really *done* something. It must be like when an artist paints a great picture. I had *made* something, something that is a part of me. The last week I was there, she let me get all the meals, and if I ever marry a man, I would want to do all the cooking myself. I don't think there could be any bigger happiness for a woman who really loved her man, than to see him eat the food that she had fixed with her own hands, and if I could hear a man of mine say, "Pass me them biscuits, Nan," or "You sure can make good gravey," well—I would have all that is coming to me. I learned to set a table and how to put the right knives and the right forks in the right places, and I always put a bowl of flowers in the middle. Sometimes they was yellow nasturcheons, and I would mix them in with leaves and put them in a big yellow bowl and they would make the food taste better just to look at them. Often the babies and me would go out in the fields and get great arms full of daisies and I would put them in with some pretty ferns we had around the house, or else I would gather red poppies, and wheat and it would make it look as if all out-doors was a growing on the table.

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Mrs. Smith showed me how to make a bed just right, and to dust and sweep, to iron the clothes and to do all the things that women must know if they keep a house clean. But finally she said she thought I would do, and one day she went over town to a friend of hers that lives up in the Bronx.

What she told her I don't know, but anyway I got a job and I went over to my room and packed my things, and I have been here two months. It was hard at first, as I didn't know how to manage, and couldn't make my head save my legs. But I got along somehow, although at night I used to be so dead tired that two or three times I cried myself to sleep. The woman ain't as nice as Mrs. Smith, she is kind of suspicious of me, and watches me a lot, and she feels I ought to know more than I do and tells me to do things without telling me how. But I am going to stick it out. The main trouble is that it is devilish lonesome. At night after I get the dishes done, there ain't no place to go except a little room which looks out on a courtyard, and there is nothing to do and nobody to talk to, and I set by myself trying to think things all over. Sometimes I think I am a fool to work like a dog a whole week and only get six dollars for it, and then again I remember all Mrs. Smith said to me, and the nice letters she writes me telling me to be brave and that I am doing the square thing. My afternoons off I don't take, because I don't want to see the old crowd, and I don't know no one else. Every two weeks I have been over to see Billy, but it costs quite a lot, and after I pay \$3.50 a week for his board, I ain't what you call a J. D. Rockefeller. I used always to take the kid some little thing, but now it has to be so darned little you can't see it. The woman next door has got a baby, and she knits things for it, and I asked the woman I worked for if she would ask the woman to learn me how to knit. She was awful nice about it, and I bought a lot of white yarn, and nights up in my room I made Billy and Paul each a jacket, and now I am making them some mittens, so when it gets cold they can wear them when they play outside. Next week after I get my pay, I am going to get some of that grey pusey yarn and make them each a cap.

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One night I got so blue I almost died, and I went downtown to see Irene who is back from St. Louis. I had an awful good time, a lot of fellows and girls come into Irene's room, and I sent one of the boys out for some oysters and showed them some fine stunts I could do with the chafing dish. They was crazy to know where I was and what I was doing but I wouldn't tell them, as I knowed they wouldn't understand. I suppose there is something wrong in me somewhere, but it seemed awful nice to see all the crowd again, and hear them talk and laugh and even the old cigarette smoke smelled good. There didn't one of them seem to have any trouble nor have to work hard, and I thought of how they could sleep in the morning, and how I would have to get up when my old alarm clock went off at half past six. For a minute I thought I wouldn't go back, then I thought of Mrs. Smith and how bad she would feel if I didn't stick, so I said, "Oh, me for my little room," and I left the crowd at half past ten, sort of the middle of the day for most of them. But I ain't been unhappy, though I didn't know there was so little money in the world. Why, it seems funny not to be able to buy anything at all. When you look in the shop windows and see all the fluffy petticoats and the pretty collars and the silk stockings and the fancy shoes, and you know you can't buy one of them, it makes you feel sore all over. Why, I think every body ought to take their hat off to a pretty girl who is pegging along on six or eight a week, and who wants pretty things just the same as all women do and who knows all she has got to do is to give a little nod to get them, I say, *them* is the people that ought to have a statue up on that hall of fame on the Hudson.

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I had to buy two maid's dresses when I come here, plain black with little white collars and cuffs, and in the afternoon the woman makes me wear a dinkey little cap on my head which makes my hair look curlier than ever though I brush it down as best I can. Callers kind of looked surprised when they see me first, I guess cause I am kind of thin now and my eyes sort of fill my face.

Billy is looking fine. He is most as big as Paul and he has learned a lot of things. Mr. Smith takes the kids with him in the woods and Billy knows the names of trees and plants and can tell the Robin's call from the Blue Bird's whistle. Mrs. Smith reads little stories to the children and they know their A B C's already, and by the time Billy is ten, he will have lots more book-learning than I have now.

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Now don't write me a rotten letter, Kate, and don't put any of the gang on to try to queer me nor to try and come and talk to me, cause house work ain't no joke for a person who ain't never done nothing, and sometimes I feel all in and something told me at the wrong time, might make me throw the whole thing up. And I don't want to. I want to make good if it is only at housework, and if I can, I am going to stick to it till there's skating down below.

Nan.

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X

Dear Kate:

I am back in my old room and I guess there is where I belong. I did intend to stick, and I didn't think I would ever see this old room again, but here I am, and guess here I will stay. You know I was getting along real well in that place where I worked, and things got much easier, as I kind of learned to save my steps and plan the work, and it didn't make me so tired as it did at first. I had saved up twelve dollars too, and was going to buy Billy's winter clothes and send you five, then the darn thing fell. I had been over on Sunday to see Billy and was chasing along home about half past ten at night along 33rd Street to catch the subway, when one of them old rounders passed me by and stuck his old face down into mine and as I didn't say nothing, he kept chasing after me and saying something in a low voice. I pretended I didn't hear and went on a little faster and he

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kept right after me. When we got near to Fourth Avenue, he came up close to me and said, "Don't be in such a hurry, little girl," and I didn't say nothing, then he stuck his face right down into mine and said something, and it just made me sick, and before I knew what I did I slapped his dirty old mouth for him. He stood still a minute, and almost turned white and then what do you think the piker did? He called the cop from the corner and had me arrested for speaking to him. It was Casey who knew me and I told Casey he was a liar, and Casey said to the man, "Are you going to court and make a charge against this girl?" And the man says, "I am, and if you don't take her I will have you broke." I honestly think Casey believed me, but he couldn't do nothing, and they took me down to Jefferson Court. I hoped I would never see that place again, but there I was with the girls and the bums and the plain closemen and the cops and the shister lawyers and the probation officer who knew me at once as your sister, and I kinda felt I was up against it. But I told my story straight to the Judge, and the man told his, and of course the Judge took his word against mine and he fined me ten dollars or ten days. When I thought of that ten dollars and what it meant and how hard I had saved and scrimped for it, and how I had gone without things and that Billy wouldn't have the winter things that he ought to have, I just lost my head and I told the Judge he was an old fool, that if he couldn't tell a lie from the truth, he had not order be a setting up there like an old brooding hen. I told him he didn't see nothing but crooks, and he couldn't tell a crook from a decent person and then he got back at me by saying, "*Did* I say ten dollars or ten days, I made a mistake, I meant ten dollars *and* ten days," and I had to go to the Island. I don't think I was ever so broke up in my life, it didn't seem I was getting a square deal. I suppose I did say things I shouldn't have, cause I was so mad I couldn't see and then I cried all night. I wrote a letter to Mrs. Smith and told her just how it was and asked her to go and see the woman I worked for and tell her about it and not blame me. Now, Mrs. Smith believed me and came over to see me on the Island but that other woman didn't believe me and went down to the night court and saw the probation officer and I guess she got the idea you built the Jefferson Court with your fines. Anyway, she said she didn't want me in her house no more. I guess she is afraid I would hurt the dishes. When I got out I went up to see her and her face was hard and nasty and she wouldn't take my word at all. I asked her if she seen a thing out of the way for four months, if I hadn't done my work right and if I hadn't stayed in nights and been as good as any girl she ever had. She said "yes" to them all, but she didn't believe in encouraging vice and she never could tell what I might do because I come of a bad family. She got your record from A to Z and she even knew about father and she acted as if she thought perhaps, that all the cussedness of the family was stored up in me and might have busted any minit.

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Well, it made me all sore, and I come right down to the old room and told Mrs. Murphy that she quite likely would have me for the rest of her life, I had all I wanted a working. I went out that night to Kelly's dance hall and danced till closing time trying to forget my troubles. It did make me forget because I can dance, Kate, and if I ain't a fine dish washer nor fit to be in somebody's kitchen, I sure can tango. I fished out all my pretty clothes again and done them two maid's dresses up in a wad and threw them under the bed. It is me for the slit skirt and the high heeled slippers, and I am going to be the best dancer on Broadway or know the difference.

Yours,
Nan.

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XI

Dear Kate:

I have been dancing at Rudolph's, it is awful hard work there and the hours are long, but it is better than it was down at the corner inn. I am working up, Kate, and I expect one of these days to be dancing on Broadway. The manager from Casey's come in and watched me dance the other night, and he said he thought I was the lightest thing on my feet in New York. Billy Flynn is my partner now, and he is working real hard. We go mornings to a teacher up at 59th Street who learned me a lot of new steps. We practise most every afternoon. I have met some of the other dancers in the cabarets and they are mostly a nice lot of girls. It ain't so hard for me as it is for some of them, as I have been dancing all my life, and I only have to see a new step once to be able to do it. I don't see why the people are against dancing, it is awful good for everybody. Why, you see old men and women that never done nothing before but stay at home and read The Christian Advocate, dancing in the restaurants, and it makes them forget all their troubles. Dancing makes you say with your body what you would like to say with your tongue, and you don't know how. Lots of people have beautiful thoughts and they can't tell them, so they have to read books writ by people who say just what they think, but can't tell, or they go to the theatre and hear acted all the love and beautiful things that they would like to have come to them, but can't. With dancing they can say themselves all the things they feel and the swaying of their body in time to the music is just a telling the love and the romance and the poetry that is inside of them. Why, when I am dancing with a good partner, I forget all the ugly things of life and it seems to me that if there ever is a God, he is a speaking to me and I sometimes feel as if I had wings and could fly right away with them. There is nothing wrong with the dancing itself, as I keep a telling Mrs. Smith. She wants me to leave it all the time, and of course in some of the places where I have to dance, there is a bum crowd and you do have to talk to the men and lots of the women that you wouldn't choose for your sister. I tell you I am going to work out of this, I am a good dancer and there ain't no reason why I shouldn't be working in the better places where

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the management won't allow the men to get fresh with the girls. If I live long enough and don't get paralyzed in my legs, you will see at the Winter Garden "Nancy Lane" in great big electric lights. I have been around some of them places and if I ever get a chance, I know I can do as well as the girls there now. Why, Kate, I would rather dance at the Winter Garden than have a front seat in Heaven, and I got a mighty poor chance of either one, but I am going to try for them both. You know I believe when you want a thing real bad and just keep thinking of it night and day, you are going to get it some way and when you come out, Kate, I think you are going to be straight, and you won't queer me as you have so many times, just when I was beginning to get along.

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I am sending you twenty. You ought to own that boarding house you are in, with the money I've sent you the last year. Mamie Callahan was in yesterday, she is working in a chorus somewhere. Gee, she does look swell! She must have cost a thousand just as she stood. She wants me to go back to Miner's, but the restaurants pay more. One of the boys I met the other night at Kelley's wants me to join him and go dance out West somewhere, but I don't want to go so far away from Billy. I know he would be all right with the Smiths, but I kinda like to see him, and I am always planning little things about him and what he will say to me and what I will say to him and what I am going to buy him. I kind of feel that if I wasn't able to go out there once in two or three weeks, and touch him and play with his hair and wash his little hands and notice how he is growing out of his clothes, that I wouldn't care to live. The money I could earn wouldn't mean nothing without him. I had just as much happiness out of him when I was earning six dollars a week and I could only take him out a ten cent jumping jack, as I would if I was earning fifty and could buy him fur coats. Babies just love, they don't think of the price of the thing you give them, but they seem to feel the heart behind it. Billy put his arms just as tight around Nannie's neck when she didn't have nothing in her hands for him, as when they was full.

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I heard through Long Dave that Jim has been pinched in Chicago, but they think he will get off. He struck me for fifty but I wouldn't cough up, he can go to the pen for all I care. I always did tell him that stripes become his style of beauty. You know he is like a lot of crooks that even hate to look at a barber's pole cause of the stripes on it, and when you stop to think about it, you never see a crook wear a striped suit of clothes. They will wear plain colors, pepper and salts, cheques, but no stripes for the con man, they make him nervous.

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I am coming down next week. I wish I could bring you something but I don't know what you could use. I am glad you are getting along so well, Kate, you will get four months off, won't you? I miss you awful, you are the only one I can talk to, and though you don't see some things my way, you are my sister, the only mother I ever knew. I wish when you are quiet there, Kate, you would think things over and decide to do different. You and me and Billy could go away somewhere. You must see by this time, Kate, that thieving don't pay. Why you are only thirty-three years old, and you have had five years in the pen and you are getting bitter and sour and you will have a grouch against life, and you know you are awfully clever, if you could only turn your brain to something honest, I don't see why you couldn't get along. I believe we could save up some money and go somewhere and start a boarding house. I can cook real well, and I believe something could be doing in that line.

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Billy had a party and it sure was some party. Mrs. Smith asked some of the farmers' children in, and she gave them cake, and I brought him out presents and give each of the children a toy. Billy ate too much cake and was awful sick in the night. Mrs. Smith give him some medicine and he was all right the next day, and ready to eat more cake. Why, he eats all the time, Kate, and he is the fattest, biggest boy. We dress him awful swell. Mrs. Smith makes her boy's clothes and I help her and we made Billy some funny little linen pants like a Dutch baby, and he is the cutest looking thing. We cut his hair off square, but it still curls and don't look Dutch at all.

Good night, I must go to bed.

Nan.

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XII

Dear Kate:

Say, but I am having a good time! And what do you think? I am having my picture painted. Some artist people blew into the cafe the other night, and after I had danced a couple of times they talked to the manager, then they asked me to come over and talk to them. I set down to the table and they were awful nice to me, didn't get fresh, but asked me a lot of questions about myself and where I learned to dance. I told them I could dance ever since I could walk, that I danced as a kid at Coney Island, and Miner's theatre had got in trouble twice with the Children's Society because of me. I laughed and said, "Why, I never *learned* to dance, I just *danced*." The artist man said he wanted to paint my picture. It is a funny idea it seems to me. He wants to paint me in this dirty cabaret with the tables all around me and the bum men setting around and me a dancing in the center with the lights on me. He said he is going to call it "Youth." He said to one of the men that was with him, "Can't you see it, Phillip, can't you see it? That pretty girl the very spirit of youth with her gold hair around her face and her wonderful body swaying to the time of the music and all those bloated beasts looking up at her through the smoke?" I don't see how he is going to paint the picture, but that is his business. Mine is to go to his studio every day at ten o'clock.

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Do you remember Will Henderson who used to play in the orchestra in the Grand Opera and who lived next to us when we was at 129? Well, what do you think? He is playing the piano in this joint here. Isn't that a come-down? He got to taking coke and he couldn't be trusted to keep his dates and he lost all his good jobs and now he can only get a place in the joints, but he does play wonderful! And when he is not too dopey, he sets down at the piano and makes music that draws the heart right out of you. He won't touch his violin cause it makes him remember, he says. It is a lucky thing for me in a way, as he likes me and he has wrote some music for me to dance by. He wrote a piece for me called "The Poppy," and that artist chap who is painting my picture got me a dress made for the dance, and oh, Kate, it is grand! It is red chiffon, and over it green chiffon like the leaves of the poppy, and I wear red slippers with pale green silk stockings that are so thin I can hardly get them on, and he had my hair all fluffed out and piled on top of my head, where it made a "golden halo," whatever that is. Him and Will explained to me about the dance. It seems that opium is made out of the flower, and they wanted me to show by dancing all the beautiful dreams that come with opium, and then the sleep afterward. I have known a lot of people who hit the pipe, and I don't know as they have ever had many beautiful dreams, but anyway the dance is awful pretty. The artist gave a party the other night, and had me come and do it. All the lights in the room was turned off and a greenish light was thrown on me and I danced fast at first and then I went slower and slower until at the last I dropped down on the stage and the lights went out and I run away in the dark. Everybody was crazy about it, and one of the big restaurants on Broadway is going to have me give the dance every night at midnight. Do you see, Kate, I told you if I got a chance I would get away from Seventh Avenue. I begun at 14th Street, and I am working up. I am up to 42nd and one of these days, I tell you, I am going to be dancing at the Winter Garden. I don't see why I shouldn't, I can dance as well as any girl in New York City, and now that Jim and your gang ain't around to queer me, there ain't no reason why I shouldn't be in the best places in town. I have had to stick to a lot of bum joints just because the managers of decent places didn't want to have a person who was mixed up with the crowd that I was in, around their place.

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I am really having an awful good time. I get home about three in the morning and I sleep until about nine. I make my breakfast in my room yet, cause I like my own coffee, and then Jim Kelly who is my dancing partner now, comes up and we practise steps or else Will Henderson and Jim and me go over to Mamie Callahan's who has got a piano, and we work at some new thing. I don't have to be at the cafe till night and most every afternoon, I go around to some of the other places or to the shows to see what the other girls are dancing. I thought I would take some lessons from some of the swell teachers, but Lord, I can dance as well as any of them so what is the use of me spending my money.

I bought a swell new suit yesterday, and I sure do look some going up the avenue and, hear *me*, it is Fifth Avenue instead of Seventh. Oh, there is some class to your sister, Kate, and when I get on the new lid that the milliner made me, well—I should worry.

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I went up to a party the other night at Rose Fisher's. I couldn't blow in until after work, but even as late as it was, I won \$4.90 at penny ante, and it tickled me most to death. I have been trying to learn a new game called bridge that the girls are crazy about. I guess it is not in my line cause it is a thinking part. I can't remember what cards are out or what is trumps or what is anything else, and set sort of making over my old clothes or thinking up new steps when we are playing, and you can't do that with bridge. I lost a lot of money the other afternoon, and what is worse, Katie Regan was my partner and she took it hard and gave me an awful call-down. I got sore and felt like slapping her face, but I guess she is right. Don't play a game with other people's money unless you attend to business.

Do you remember that fat old brewer that use to come hanging around you? Well, he blew in while I was dancing the other night, and claimed to be a long lost friend. He come down every night for about a week, and then tried that old gag of putting some money for me in a wheat deal or some such thing where it was tails I win and heads you lose. I told him I was on to that chorus trick, and wasn't at all crazy about it. You see, whether he won or lost he would have handed me over three or four hundred dollars and kinda felt he owned me body and soul. I simply laughed at him, and said with a voice of a Wall Street broker, "Man, I am making so much money that it is quite impossible to find investments for my income, so I am planting it around the yard in tin cans." I even offered to make him a loan if business was bad. He went away in a huff, and I got a call-down from the manager because the brewer owns the bar the same as he does all the other saloons around our district, and the saloon-keeper is only in on a percentage. If the temperance people would only go after the brewer and the distiller, instead of the poor devil of a saloon-keeper, they might do something worth while, cause there ain't one bar in twenty in New York that is owned by the man who keeps it.

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Well, good-bye, I am going to dinner in a place in 39th Street where they say they have an awful pretty dancer. I am saving up my money, Kate, so when you come out, you will have enough to live on for awhile until you find out what you want to do. Now don't worry, and don't write me any more letters like that last one. Everything is fine and dandy. Billy is all right, and I am as happy as a clam and getting fat. I have put on two pounds in three months. I weigh 118 now, which is a lot for me, and if I keep on like this I will look like Taft one of these days.

I am coming down to see you next week, and I have got something for you. Oh, Kate, I am fond of you and I get just crazy to see you.

Yours,

XIII

Dear Kate:

I have been working again. Mrs. Smith got at me about the dancing, not that she thinks the dancing is bad, but she don't like the places where I dance nor the people I have to be with, and she is dead sore at the rooming house where I live. She don't like the girls I float around with, and that hang around my room. I can't understand it, because they are all right, and I have known them kind of girls all my life. She came up to see me one afternoon, and there was half a dozen in the room, and the smoke was so thick you could cut it with a knife, and she cried after they left, and said a lot of rot about me being too good to throw my life away with them sort of people. She talked and she talked to me, and I thought I would try to work again, not but what dancing ain't work and there ain't nothing wrong with it either, but there is a hard crowd down at Kelley's, and sometimes it kinda makes me sick. She talked to me a lot about Billy, and said it will make a great difference in his life if he can look back to his folks as being respectable. I myself don't see why he should be any prouder of his aunt being a servant than he would be if she was a dancing girl, and I get thirty per for dancing, and only six little bucks for housework. I stayed awake two nights thinking about it, wondering if I was getting tough and didn't know it, cause things that I don't think nothing about at all, Mrs. Smith thinks awful, and she says that the longer you live in that kind of life and with people who have no "ideals"—whatever them is, one is just bound to go down. I don't want to go down, and I don't want to get so I will think crookedness is right, and that decent people are wrong, so I just piped it out to myself as I lay awake at night that I would give the honest work job another chance.

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I answered an "ad" in the paper. I got a place up on West End Avenue. I stayed there two months, then I had bad luck again. I liked the place real well, and the people liked me, and I suppose I would have been there yet, if I hadn't of cut my hand, because, take it from me, Kate I am a dandy housekeeper and I like it too. I can't imagine nothing nicer than having a little home of your own and taking care of it yourself. It even give me a little thrill to walk into some body else's kitchen and see it all clean and nice, the dishes and the glasses shining, and the pretty white cloth on the table, and a bird singing in a cage before the window, and know that all looked so home-like cause I made it so. If somebody else's kitchen can make me feel that way, if I had one of my own, I suppose I'd just naturally bust. The woman I worked for was one of those sort of no-good women who ain't bad or who ain't good, who is just *nothing*. She didn't do a thing around the house, didn't even take care of her own clothes. She read a little in the morning, then went down town every afternoon of her life, either to the theatres or to the restaurants or shopping. Then at night as often as she could, she made her poor husband put on his dress clothes and go somewhere with her. They use to scrap a lot about it, as he was tired and generally wanted to put on a pair of old slippers and set and smoke and read. Sometimes I use to wonder what she done to earn her board, as she wasn't as much of a help as a wife of a crook generally is. Even you, Kate, used to pass the leather on when Jim pinched one, which was doing your share in buying your meal ticket. She was dippy on the dancing, and women used to come in the afternoon and dance with the victrola. I didn't let her know that I danced at first.

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One night I was a cutting bread and the knife slipped and cut my hand between my thumb and first finger. The woman was awful nice about it, and kept me on for two weeks. It didn't seem to get no better and the doctor thinks I poisoned it. I didn't have the nerve to stay there without doing something, so one day when she and some of her friends were dancing like a lump of cheese, I told her I would learn her the dance if she wanted me to, and—gee, didn't those females work me after that! They didn't care nothing about the housework. It could go hang, but morning, night and noon I was a holding some fat lady or some tall lady or some short one from breaking her neck, as she tried to do the Castle Glide or the Maxixe. I must say my boss was generous, she was perfectly willing to loan me to all her friends and they grabbed after me like a cat after a mouse, cause they was getting five-dollar lessons for nothing. I stayed two weeks and I lost six pounds and my hand didn't heal none and I didn't see where I was doing any better being a private dancing teacher for a lot of fool women who really think no better than a lot of the girls I had to go with, but who only know how to say it better. Here I was working harder for six a week and at the same kind of work, than I would be if I was dancing at thirty, so I told the woman I must go. I spent all my money with the doctor and I didn't know what to do, as I didn't want to go back to my room. Mrs. Smith was awful nice and told me to come with her. I did and I am there now. My hand is a little better but I still can't do much work and have to keep it tied up. I can't wash dishes, nor do nothing where it will get wet.

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Billy has learned his letters and he knows a lot of stories, especially Bible stories out of a book that is full of pictures. He is awful funny. He was showing me the book the other day, and he come to an old man with long whiskers and I said, "Who is that old guy, Billy?" and he looked at me so shocked and said, "Why, aunt Nannie, where have you been? That is Moses," and he told me all about him and the Israelites which is another name for Jews. I said if he has got anything to do with Jews, I orter know something about them, cause there ain't much else in New York, yet they ain't much in my line, as I just naturally hit the Irish.

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Do you remember Rosie O'Grady who got married about three years ago? Well, she is only twenty years old now. She has got a kid and supporting it herself. That fellow she married was a coke fiend, and she fired him, and she is doing real well. Her brother is a driver at McCreey's, and between them they hire a little flat down on 20th Street and her mother takes care of the baby and they are real happy. I went down to see her the other night. A lot of women live there who scrub offices or go out washing or do any kind of day work they can get. Most every one of them support a drunken husband. One woman next door to Rosie has both her husband and her brother on her hands, and her brother has been full for three months and that poor woman goes out washing to give these good-for-nothing men their food. I'd let their stomachs grow to their back bone before I'd feed them. You see an awful lot of drink down around Eighth Avenue, and it seems like it is done by the men that most need the money. Yet I suppose when they are out on the wagon all day in the cold and the wet, that a saloon looks awful nice and warm and the free lunch tastes mighty good. They can't afford to go to the restaurants, even cheap ones, so they go to the saloon and drink that rotten whiskey that drives them crazy. That is one thing I never saw no fun in, and I must say for you, Kate, that with all the rotten crowd you run with, you didn't take to booze nor dope. If you hadn't just naturally not known the difference between what belonged to you and what belonged to the other man, you might have been a pretty respectable member of society. I tell you I am watching Billy mighty close to see that he don't have too small fingers. By the looks of him now, the way he is growing, his hands are going to be like hams, and if he ever got them in another man's pocket, he would never get them out again.

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I can't send you no money. I tell you I am absolutely flat strapped. I hocked my two rings and I even sold my dancing slippers. I ain't paid Mrs. Smith for Billy's board in most a month, and I know they need the money. Cheer up, old girl, you only have a short time now. I keep a trying to think what you can do when you come out, but I don't seem to light on nothing you would like. Anyway, you know I am thinking of you.

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Yours,
Nan.

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XIV

Dear Kate:

I am worried to death. I don't know what to do and my hand don't seem to get well. I haven't got a cent to my name, I owe Mrs. Smith six weeks' board money for Billy, and I have been eating off her for three weeks. She can't afford to feed me, and every mouthfull I take chokes me. I know they are hard up, cause I caught her crying the other day. Her husband is awful nice, but he ain't got much sense and his business in life is teaching not trying to raise vegetables. She says she won't hear me going back to dancing, but I don't see what else I can do. My hand don't affect my feet. I was over town the other day and saw my old dancing partner, Fred Keeney. He said we can get a job at the Cafe Boulevard and I am crazy to try it. Yet if I could work, I would cut the whole thing out, cause Mrs. Smith is right when she says that dancing ain't bad, just the bum crowd you have got to go with. And I am up against it more than most of the girls, cause nearly all of them have homes, but everybody seems to know or finds out mighty sudden that I am your sister, and it ain't up to me then to go in for the heavy respectable. Gee, Kate you have got a reputation! You must have had a lot of newspaper advertising. Nobody ever says I am Nan Lane, they just say I am Kate Lane's sister. Then they look at me as if I was going to take a bite out of them. That is why it is more comfortable for me to keep with the old crowd, cause they don't throw a fit every time your name is mentioned.

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Oh, I am sure distracted. I've walked the floor nights till I wore a path in the carpet. What with my hand aching and me wondering what in the world I ought to do, I can't sleep. I go out in the afternoon and lie down in the woods and if I knew something to pray to, I would sure get right down on my knees and ask it to tell me which way to turn. I have been in Mrs. Smith's room twice when they have what they call family worship. It didn't seem to do me much good but I bowed my head as I saw them do. Why, if they wanted to stand on their heads and meow like cats, I would bark an accompaniment cause I like them so.

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Mrs. Smith cries every time I speak of the dancing, but I can't live on charity for the rest of my life and I am pestered to death for money. When I was coming out of Kelley's the other day, I saw father and of course, he give me a touch. He never shows up unless he wants something. Oh, I hate him, Kate. When I saw his shifty old eyes I just turned sick. Every time I see him I think of the kicks and the cuffs we kids got whenever he come round, which, thank goodness, wasn't often. Do you remember how happy we was when we went down to court and heard him get that seven years' stretch? That was the finest present the judge could give us, and when we got back to the room I remember we just hugged each other and danced round and round and made up a song with the chorus, "Pa's got seven years, we ain't glad, oh, no." You gave a party that night, and we almost got pulled for being so noisy. I wonder what mother was like. What kind of a woman she could have been to have seen anything in him. You must be something like her, cause you stick to Jim and you know what I think of *him*. I suppose being married to a man does something to a woman because I know a lot of nice women that stick to good-for-nothing bums because they are married to them. As for me, I don't suppose I ever will be married cause none of

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the crowd I know now for *mine* and I don't have much chance to meet the Henry Van Dykes or the John T. Wanamakers.

Well this ain't telling me what to do. What *will* I do? I am near crazy. Well—I can always go to bed, good night.

Nan.

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XV

Dear Kate:

Well, I am back at the old work and it is all right. I have been dancing in the best restaurants in New York, and what do you think, Kate, I am going to dance at the Winter Garden. The manager there saw my poppy dance the other night, and he is giving me a dance. I can still come back and dance at twelve o'clock in the restaurant. Fred Kelly, my dancing partner, is crazy glad. Will Henderson nearly cried. He said, "You have got your chance, Nan, you have got your chance." I offered to give him part of my salary because if he had not thought out all the pretty dances, him and the artist chap, I never could have piped them out myself. But he won't take a cent. He is dead square, and not a half bad fellow, and I have been trying to get him to take the cure. I offered to pay all expenses if he would go up to that dope cure joint at White Plains, and sometimes he says he will, then again says he won't. You can't trust a person who takes dope. Sometimes he shows up every night and plays just beautiful, then again we don't see him for ten days. Fred Kelly is so tickled at this chance to work in the good places, that he has braced up and seems a different fellow. He used to drink a lot and one time when he was tanked up, he had to throw me from one arm to the other in the dance, and he let me fall and hurt my back so bad, I could hardly move for a week. It gave me an awful scare and I had a good heart to heart talk with him. I told him he either had to cut out the booze or cut out working with me, cause you can't do the two things and do both well. Oh, I am glad that I have left the joints and I am proud of myself. I have worked awful hard and something inside of me has always said I would win out, and it *is* winning out, because there ain't no bigger thing in my line than dancing at the Winter Garden. They are going to advertize me, Kate, and they call me Nancy Lane. Sounds kinda pretty, doesn't it? I got some of the nicest clothes you ever saw. My new dancing slippers is made to order, and I got some pretty things for my hair, though I think it looks better without anything in it, as it is hard to match the color.

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Mrs. Smith and the children came over the other afternoon to see the toys. I bought the kids some things, then we went to a place and had ice cream sodas and sundaes until I bet two babies went to sleep that night with a stomach-ache.

Oh, yes, I forgot to tell you. I got a funny present. Do you remember Jenny who was sick about a year ago, and whose mother come from Iowa or Kansas or somewhere to get her? Well, I got a package the other day about the size of a house and when I opened it there was a bed quilt in it made of little pieces of colored calico set around with white pieces. Jenny's mother wrote me a beautiful letter saying she made it herself for me out of pieces of cloth she had saved from her family's dresses. I put it on the bed, and gee, it was the funniest looking thing you ever saw. It didn't seem to belong to 28th Street anymore than the old lady did. It was funny to watch the girls when they come into the room. Them who had been born on the sidewalks like me whooped when they saw it, and made a lot of fun of it, but the girls who had come from the country looked at it different and a sort of change come over their faces. One girl who is in the chorus at the Columbia, set down by the bed and run her hand up and down the cover and then put her head on it and cried, and Mary Crosby who comes somewhere from Pennsylvania and has only been in the quarter about three months, looked at it straight for about five minutes without speaking and then turned and left the room. I followed her out into the hall and said, "What is the matter, Mary?" And she said in a queer choked way, "Good-bye, Nan, me for that little room down in old P-a. I've got enough." And I'll be darned if she didn't go home.

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It was nice to see you, Kate, and you are looking real well. You have got the only soft snap there, but I can trust you for getting anything that is laying around easy. I am off to work, going to try a new dance on to-night.

Nan.

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XVI

Dear Kate:

I opened your trunk and got out the clothes you wrote about. I give the grey dress to Mary, and the coat to Mrs. Keenan. There are a lot of things that you won't be able to use when you come out. Hadn't I better give them to some one? It seems a shame to have them laying there no use to any body.

I had a dandy day yesterday. Mildred Carter met me in a shop and we spent the whole day together. You know she is married. Married some swell man and lives in a fine place on Riverside Drive. She is just as pretty as ever. No wonder she was in all the Broadway shows. She hasn't a bit of sense, but her tiny figure has the most perfect curves, and her face and eyes are just like a wondering child. She makes me think of Billy. She has a baby two years old, and if it wasn't for him, she would go back to the stage. She is awful lonesome up in her fine home, and she misses the lights and the fun and the pretty dresses. She is crazy over the clothes the girls are wearing in the new Field show, and I think she misses the suppers after the shows when a lot of the girls used to go with the Johnnies and sort of joy ride. There wasn't nothing wrong with the parties, but her mother-in-law thinks it is awful to even mention them. A pretty girl like Mildred could have four suppers a night if she wanted to, because lots of men like to take a show girl out. They wear pretty clothes and attract attention and are funny, have lots of up-to-date slang, know all the new songs, and don't expect a man to be clever. All that they want of him is to pay the supper. And they are perfectly willing to pay for it if you don't expect them to talk of art or the uplifting of the drama. Just look pretty and say fool things and whistle popular songs and say things that don't make their head ache to answer. I tell Mrs. Smith who, like so many women, think it is always wrong to go to supper, that it is done by heaps of girls who are on the level.

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I am kind of sorry for Mildred. She is pretty but nothing but a little butterfly, and Tom's folks don't like her, and make little dabs at her about being in the chorus, and they are trying to educate her. Read to her from a man named Emerson and Tennyson and a lot of high brows that put a kink in her brain that lasts for days. And they think the theatre is all wrong except things by Ibsen and Shakespeare and a man named Shaw, and of course Mildred thinks, and so do I, that a funny show where the comedian makes a monkey of himself and the girls change their dresses twenty times, and do stunts under the spot light is a lot decenter than those nasty shows where people turn their feelings inside out, especially their private feelings that ought not be talked about in public. She is bound to go back and I had a long talk with her. I told her that his folks might take the baby away from her, and she nearly went crazy. She turned on me like a cat, and said, "What do you mean?" I said that they would like her and Tom to separate and they would take the baby. She could not speak for a minute then she blazed at me:

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"Take my baby, take Tommy? But he is mine. He is my baby. No one can take him away from me. I couldn't live without him." I saw that was the only way to get her switched off from going back, cause she met some stage manager the other day who offered her a job, so I rubbed it in; I don't know whether I am right, but it worked with her all right. After a while she sat down and talked sense, and I am sorry for her. She said sort of pitiful, "Tom is in newspaper work, and I am alone nights and I lay there alone a longing for something to be going on. I hate the dark and the being alone. Why I never used to be alone. His people don't look at my side of the question at all. They are not fair to me. I had no idea when I married Tom that his people would not like me. Every one always liked me. I had my picture in all the shop windows and people always jollyng and making me laugh.

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"His people make me old. All the sun goes out of the room as soon as one of them come into it. To have dinner with them is awful. I am afraid to move at the table or ask for more bread. Every one is so polite and so quiet. You can't laugh and if you should happen to put your elbow on the table, it would be a tragedy. And I have lived that life two years, and Tom blames me and looks hurt cause sometimes I want the old life. And, Nan, I see you are with him and think I am wrong. But remember I am only calling for my own. I can't help longing for it. I think it is my right to laugh and to be gay *my* way. I have tried to make myself over in Tom's way, but I can't. God did not make me a New England woman. All I want is the lights and the music and the laughter. I want to snuggle down in a big chair and have somebody make me laugh, laugh, laugh, and never be told it is bad form to laugh too loud. Everything I do is bad form, and oh, Nan, I don't want to do anything wrong, I just want to live."

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Poor little devil, I am sorry for her, but she must stay where she is. I am going to get hold of Tom some day and tell him to side step so much family and take Mildred out more and give her a good time *her* way.

But we had had an awful good time until we got to talking about the baby, when she got scared and hurried home to see if anything had happened to him. We had lunch together at Bustanoby's, and went to that swell Castle Garden for tea. She treated cause it cost \$2.50 per and that was too rich for my blood. I danced with her and she looked awful cunning, and I learnt her some new steps, altho' I never dance with women, as I don't think it looks nice. One of the dancers who runs the place came over and asked me to dance with him, and everybody stopped to watch us. Gee, I wish I could get a place in one of them swell places, but I will, you just watch me do it. I had on a pretty new dress and a hat that is a dream, and silk stockings and new patent Colonials and I felt *some*. Ain't it funny how everybody is dancing, I wonder how long it will last. I must get in before everyone gets over the bug. It sure can't last forever. Seems awful funny to see a lot of old men and grannies fluffing around a room, when they ought to be home rubbing their backs with Omega Oil. One old lady, sure she was sixty, danced with the professional at Bustanoby's, and he told me she had a table there every day, and about three nights a week, and dances till closing time. I heard her tell some friends, "I told John that if he didn't want to learn he could stay home and go to bed, *I am going to dance,*" and she is sure a dame of her word.

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What do you think? Fred Kelly, my dancing partner, is engaged to an awful nice girl. She is crazy over him, but she is making an awful mistake. His legs are all right, but his head was just put on his neck to finish it off. There is nothing in it, and if this dancing craze goes out, he will have to

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run a sizzor's grinding machine to earn a living, as he couldn't even play a thinkin' part.

I went out to see Billy last Sunday and we went to church. I felt awful jay as I didn't know what to do, but I watched Mrs. Smith and done everything she done and got through all right. The kids looked so nice in their little Sunday clothes, and Billy was so good. I didn't think much of the sermon, as it didn't seem to hit anything, but I am glad the Smiths take Billy every Sunday. It may do him good, and it can't hurt him, yet it seems to me that if the preacher talked a little more about how to get help and how to peg along every day, that it would do people more good than to talk about some old guy—he called him Isaih—who has been dead a long time. When Billy gets a little bigger, I would like him to sing in church. He would look lovely in a long white night dress, and his eyes and hair would show up wonderful. I asked the Smiths about it, and they said that they would get both Paul and Billy in the choir if I wanted them to. I would like it, but still I am kinda scared that it might put ideas of the stage in his head and no theatre for our Billy. I want him to be a working man of some kind. A man that builds things, or invents, or writes. I want him to do something and *be* something, not just amuse a lot of fool people who can't amuse themselves. When you come home we will pipe up something great for that son of yours, and we will stick to it and *make* him be something. There is a chance for every one in this nice big fat world of ours, and Billy will come out on top some way, or his aunt Nan will know the reason why.

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Lots of love,
Nan.

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XVII

Dear Kate:

I am having the best time of any girl in the whole world. Oh, Kate, I do love to dance, cause dancing is just a saying the nice-thoughts inside of you with your body instead of your lips. And I think when you get better thoughts you do better work. I know mine is different somehow, cause even old, fat Casey who never throws you a decent word if he can help it, said I'd do. When I used to dance in the joints around 14th Street and over on Eighth Avenue I danced just the things I knew then, which was cafes filled with cigarette smoke, booze on the tables and puffy, bad faced men staring at me. My dancing was not good, just making my feet go, but now I think about other things and I dance the buds coming out on the pussey willows, the dog wood blossoms and the ripples of the lake when the moon shines on it. I hear the crickets and the katey-dids and the little peepers from the pond, and instead of hard-faced girls puffing cigarette smoke into men's faces, I see Billy with his curls hanging round his laughing face as he runs up the long road to meet me when I come from the station. My body seems to have grown softer with my feelings and it bends more easy and I believe I have even changed my face. I don't feel that all the world is against me and that I have to fight my way through it, cause I know I am loved and trusted and there is always some one waiting for me at the gate. Why, Kate, it changes your whole life to know there is some one caring for you who won't try to do you the first chance they get, and if it makes such a difference in your feelings, it is bound to make a difference in your actions, and that is the reason when I dance, I sway and bend and turn as light as if I was a fairy one reads about in story books. It ain't dancing, it ain't work. It is just a telling all the world I'm happy.

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Dancing in these better places is not bad for a girl cause the management don't make you talk to no one and won't let the men get fresh. Of course I get a lot of notes and bids to dinner, but I don't mind them cause I have had them all my life. The only difference now, the spelling is good in these and they are supposed to come from gentlemen. Yet I tear them up just as easy as I did the other kind. Mrs. Smith is always scared about me. I showed her a mash note once and she sure threw a fit, but I tell her she don't need to worry about me, I know how to take care of myself all right, as I have been doing it all my life. I seen too much crookedness and I have seen that it don't pay. I never knew a girl yet that went the limit but landed hard some day on the pavement. Even you was straight, Kate, your only trouble is that your hands are too small, and when you married Jim and he showed you how easy they went in other people's pockets, you kinda took to it natural. I suppose that is because of father who is a born dip and it had to come out again in some of the family. I wonder if lots of people ain't crooked cause they don't know no better. I have been thinking a lot lately about education. Mr. Smith was a teacher in a boy's school in England, and he talks sometimes about the right kind of learning, and I sit by and listen trying to hear all I can that will help Billy. Mr. Smith says that if a boy has got the right kind of education, he will just naturally choose the right things in life. He don't believe because Billy's father and his grandfather are dips that that is any reason that Billy should be one. He says, give him the right kind of schooling and teachers that will understand him or show him what kind of books to read and tell him the great things that have been done by other men, and that he can do it if he tries, that it will make him ambitious and he will naturally choose the right kind of a life instead of the wrong kind. He will go with the right kind of people, instead of the wrong kind.

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He wants to make Paul an electrical engineer, but first he wants him to go to college and get a lot of book-learning, so when he is by himself he will be willing to sit by the fire and read some book he loves instead of chasing down the Great White Way to find amusement. He says a man must know something besides his business or when he ain't working he won't know what to do with himself. Them is the men, he says, that fill the night restaurants and sets in the front row at the

Burlesques. He believes that if men were educated in the way they orter be, there would not be no crookedness. That the upper story men and the dips and the safe blowers most always ain't got no education, and they are crooked because they don't know nothing different. He says ignorance makes a man not able to tell right from wrong. I told him I knew lots of dips who were clever, and he said, "Yes, that is so, but if they had been able to train that cleverness in the right way when they was young, they would not be dips now. They would use their brains in building up some business that was on the square. They ain't never had the right chance, so they can't be blamed." That is so, part of it, Kate. Lots of people I know, feel it in their bones that crookedness don't pay, but they don't know nothing else, cause they got in wrong at the start. Now if it is all true that he says and education will make a man on the level, then me for education. Billy is going to have it if I have to pour it down him with a spoon. Billy is going to have just as good a chance as Paul. I am getting to be such a tight wad that I am losing all my friends. I won't buy a drink for no one, and I even shove the girls sweet Caporals instead of Melachrino's when they come up to my room. Why, I squeeze a nickle till it hollers, and I wear out three dollars of shoe leather chasing up the street to find an eating joint where they will fill me up for a quarter. Any way, Kate, your son is going to have a lot of letters writ after his name, if his aunt Nan don't get the cholly hoss in her legs, and lose her thirty bucks per week that she is making now.

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Good-bye, Kate, I am coming to see you soon, and I will bring you some pictures of the kid that we took when he went in swimming. He can float on his back and Mr. Smith nearly scares a lung out of me learning him to dive. I am thinking of you always.

Nan.

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XVIII

Dear Kate:

I went down to Miner's the other night and saw Mable Lee. I was in her dressing room with her most two hours. She is a near star now, and don't she put on airs! She has a dressing room of her own, and any mere chorus girl that puts her nose in her door gets a lady-like call-down that you can hear to 42nd Street. She forgot that she ever worked at Coney with us, and rustled beer between acts, and that ain't the only thing that has happened to her memory. She says she is only twenty one, and she was twenty one when we were playing together at the Casino and I was doing a kid act. That was ten years ago. I must say it for her, she gets it over because she has got new red hair and when she gets her face fixed up and her long ear rings on, which is about all she wears in this new act, she looks about sixteen.

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I danced the other night at a party. There was a lot of swell folks there, women with low neck dresses and real diamonds. Gee, if Anthony Comstock had come in he'd a got busy when he piped off some of the clothes. They acted as if they were trying to be tough, set around and smoked and acted like street girls dressed up. Funny, ain't it, street girls try to act like real ladies, and real ladies try to act like street girls. I suppose everybody wishes sometimes they could be what they ain't, and so they play at the other thing. I wondered as I looked at them if they had homes or babies, and if they ever set in front of the fire and talked of things like Mr. and Mrs. Smith does.

Sometimes Mr. Smith reads at night from a Bible and he read the other night something written by a Jewish gentleman named Moses. I heard it all one evening when I was dancing. It just come back to me like a soft voice:

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"As an eagle that stirreth up her nest, that fluttereth over her young. He spread abroad his wings, he took them, he bare them on his pinions."

Now, ain't that pretty? I thought after I went to bed about the big bird that broke up her nest, as Mr. Smith told to me, and pushed her babies out so as they could learn to fly, and then went under them with her wings all stretched out wide to catch them if they fell. That is just like a mother, ain't it? They want their children to go in the world and learn, yet they would put out their bodies if they could for them to fall on when things went wrong. I suppose it is because children are so helpless and their mothers must care for them and keep them from everything that is hard and so it brings out all the love and sweetness in a woman's heart and makes her give her life for her own. Anyway, I heard it a humming in my heart along with the music, and I didn't dance my dance at all, I just danced old Moses, and I will never see a kike again with the same eyes.

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I got another new dress. Gee, it is like pulling teeth to spend the money. Will Henderson made up another dance for me, and I had to have the clothes to go with it. He is a wonder, Kate, a sure wonder! Even when he is half full of dope he sets down to that old piano and makes it talk. Some times he sets for half an hour with his head in his hands, and then he raises up and has a funny look in his eyes and plays such music that all the crowd stops laughing and listens to him. I can dance anything he plays, cause he makes the music talk to me. Sometimes it is country fields and flowers and birds and running brooks, and then it changes to dull wet nights beneath the street lamps with sad eyed girls and bad-faced men and hungry eager people all looking for something they have missed, and they go into cabarets like this I dance in, filled with smoke and laughs that only come from lips not from the heart—and I whirl and dance until I am mad from dizziness. And

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then the music quiets down again and sadness comes and you know the searchers have not found what they were looking for, and they, wander out into the dim grey light of morning and disappear like mist upon the lake.

Oh, Kate, I love to dance! I hope I will never grow old, I want to die a dancing.

Yours,
Nan.

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XIX

Dear Kate:

I have not time to write much, but I am so glad I must tell some one, and I know you will be glad with me. I am going to dance at the Winter Garden at last. We are going to have our try out, and if we take, we will sign a contract like real professionals. I can't talk it to you, I can't say all I am feeling, but if you was here I would dance it to you.

Yours,
Nan.

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XX

Dear Kate:

Just as I was a getting ready to go up to the Winter Garden for our try out, I got a letter from Mrs. Smith saying that Billy had the diptheria. She said, "don't come," that she would let me know all the time how he was. Fred come to take me up and I told him I was not going, that I was going to Billy, and he almost went crazy. He said, "Why, Nan, don't you see you will lose your chance if you don't show up now, they will never give it to you again." I said, "I don't care, I am going to Billy." He nearly cried. He said, "Nan, you have been working two years trying to get on Broadway, and if they had told you six months ago that you had a chance to go on at the Garden, you would a said they were liars or you would a died for joy. And now you throw it all over for a kid." I said, I didn't care, I was a going to Billy. He talked and he talked and then he went down and phoned for Will Henderson who come over and talked to me. They made me feel that I was doing them a rotten trick, cause Will wrote the music and was going to have his name on the program, and he said that if I didn't show up, he would lose the biggest chance he ever had, to get back decent again. So I gave in if they would promise to get me to the train as soon as our turn was over.

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Well, we went and the dance sure did go. I came back eight times and I never saw anybody so tickled in his life as Will to think that he can have his name on a program again. He says he will go out to that dope joint in White Plains to-morrow, cause he believes he still has got a chance of making good. It does put heart into you when you are down and out to feel that perhaps there is something still ahead of you if you will only buck up.

After my turn the manager came into the dressing room and offered us season's work. I think it was the happiest minit of my life. I have worked for it ever since I was a kid and I just seemed to know that some day I would be on top. Why, think of it, Kate, I am going to have my name, Nancy Lane, on a program of the biggest dancing place in America, and I will be dancing along side of girls from Europe and real actresses. I felt all choked up and I was dead scared that fat manager would see how tickled I was. I am going to do three dances, and talk about wages—no, it is salary now—say, when I die I will leave a Foundation fund for poor dancers who have caught rheumatism in their lower limbs. I'll bet you to-morrow that everybody from 14th Street to 42nd Street will be trying to give me a touch. That is a sure sign you are getting along well in the world, when your friends try to borrow money off you, but Hetty Green will be a willful waster compared to me, cause I am going to plant it all in the saving's bank for you and Billy.

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Good-bye, old lady, I am off for New Jersey. Even when I was a dancing and the people was a giving me a hand, I was a wondering how Billy was, and every once in a while his face would come before me and nearly shut out the lights.

Your happy
Nan.

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XXI

Dear Kate:

We are out of quarantine. I sent you word twice that Billy was all right, and he is getting well, but poor little Paul died. When I got out here that Monday night, the doctor was in the house and told me that if I come in he would have to put me in quarantine and I couldn't leave. It kinda paralyzed me for a minit, cause I thought of that fat Garden contract, and how all my chances would be gone because you can't talk to theatre managers about kids or diphtheria, as that don't fill the house. Then I thought of Will and Fred and how it would knock Fred out of a job and I kinda got sick and set down quick. I asked the doctor how Billy was, and he said they was both pretty sick, then I said, "To Hell with contracts," and I took off my hat and I'm here.

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Oh, it has been awful, Kate. Did you ever see a sick baby, when he couldn't tell what was the matter with him and lay just fighting for his breath and you not able to help him, just a standing by with helpless hands, promising God that if your kid ain't took this time you will sure do something for Him if you ever get a chance? Billy was much worse than Paul for a time, and I was scared when I seen him lyin' on the pillow with his face all red with fever, and he didn't seem to know me. The doctor put a tube in their throats and it worked all right with Billy, but it was no good for Paul, and he died just at daylight, Wednesday morning. Oh, Kate, my heart just broke for his mother. She didn't cry nor nothing, and when they got her away from the baby she come in my room where Billy was and she looked down at him for a long time and then—she cursed him. It would a made your blood run cold to hear her talk. She said in a low, *hate* voice, "You, a child of the streets, a baby nobody wants, you are left and my baby is taken. You,—you will grow up to be a professional thief like your father. They say your mother is in prison, and yet God leaves you. There ain't no God! I tell you it is all a lie, there ain't no God!" I was a setting in a chair at the foot of the bed and she turned and looked at me as if she didn't know me. Then all at once she dropped on her knees at my feet and put her face in my lap and said, "Oh, Nannie, why didn't God take me too? How can I live the to-morrows." And Oh, Kate, if you have never seen a mother when her only baby is lying in the next room white and cold, you ain't never seen real sorrow. She set on the floor at my feet nearly an hour then she wanted me to go in and help her dress little Paul. We put on the new suit I bought him for his birthday, and he looked just as if he was asleep.

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They buried him in a little grave yard on the hillside, and Mrs. Smith can see it from her bed room, which I think is bad for her. She acts queer and won't come in the room where Billy is, and I never speak his name to her. He is getting along all right now, but it turns me cold to think what might have happened.

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I will send you word as often as I can, so don't be worried.

Nan.

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XXII

Dear Kate:

I am staying to-night at Lake Rest and it seems like home. I am a setting in front of a fire of logs in a great big fire-place, and the flicker of the fire and the ticking of the clock seem a sort of music to me. Oh, Kate, it is wonderful here now! It is a little cold and the hills around the Lake instead of being green, are all scarlet and brown. The maple trees look as if they had put on their dancing dresses and the beach turns to gold when the sun strikes it. The bitter-sweet has little yellow berries which burst open and show the red centres, and the sumac is all rouged standing stiff and straight as if waiting for the calcium to be turned on it. The brown of the oak trees seem only made to show off the green of the pines and hemlock and spruce, and the brakes that was so green a month ago, are now all crisping up and dying along with the golden rod and the purple astors. The ground is covered with a thick brown carpet of oak leaves that rustle when you walk through them, as if the fairies Mrs. Smith reads about, was trying to speak to you.

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It rained yesterday when I come, sort of an unhappy rain that made little ripples on the water and the Lake was covered with grey shadows that said as plain as they could. "There is something deep and wonderful below me here that I am covering up with my veil of mystery." I was disappointed that I couldn't see the moon, but he broke out of the clouds a while ago and touched their edges with silver. I am sure it ain't the same sun and moon shining here that shines on city streets. This morning I woke up early and from the ground to the sky there was nothing but a sea of color. It looked as if the world was on fire over there beyond the hills. It waved and rippled a great crimson thing without a shadow, and then it changed to colors which I have never seen before and I felt I was looking into a world of beauty that drawed the heart right out of me. The sky above grew bluer and lighter with only here and there a cloud till it was lost in a great cup that closed down over the earth like a cap of silver.

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Oh, Kate, I love it here, I wish I never had to go back. After I have had a night here with the quiet and the peace that seems to be everywhere, the restaurants, and the smoke and the people make me sick. But after a couple of nights I slide back into it again, and like it, I suppose because I have never knowed anything else. But I believe that if I had a home like this I would never go to the city and rush around with the women with tired faces and loud voices that seem to be trying to hurry to finish something before they die. I sometimes set and listen to women who seem to be so busy doing nothing, and when I hear them say, "I am rushed to death" or "I haven't time to do

a thing," I wonder what would happen if they didn't do it. What is the difference anyway? If they died to-morrow they wouldn't care it wasn't done, and if they don't die, they will have time to do it, if it is the thing to be done.

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I am tired of it all. Mrs. Smith says I have been working too hard and I am blue because I am tired. Anyway I want to get way down in a big easy chair and watch the fire and hear the wind in the trees and once in a while, hear the acorns as they drop on the roof. That is all the music I want. I never want to hear an orchestra, and I am sure that some day I will put my foot through the big drum that keeps time for the dancing. I wish you liked the country, Kate, and we could get a little place and have a pig and some chickens and a duck and I wouldn't never have to see a pavement or a street light.

I am thinking of you, Kate, though I am awful tired.

Nan.

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XXIII

Dear Kate:

I know you will be dead sore at me, but I could not do nothing else and perhaps some day you will understand why I done it. Anyway, I have given Billy his chance. He has got just as good a show as any boy of growing up and being a good man, and he won't ever need to know that there are such things as thieves and prisons. He'll learn to think of Mrs. Smith as mother and he won't ever know that his real mother was in the stir. He will think of his aunt Nan, as a little red headed girl who loved him and brought him toys, and he won't never have bitterness or wickedness come into his life through us. He is going away.

I will tell you all about it, so as you can get the worst of your madness off before you come out, cause I know when you read this you will want to kill me, and perhaps you will, but I don't care, I have done the only thing I knew to do for Billy.

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After Mrs. Smith's baby died, she wouldn't look at Billy for a long time. Then she got to holding him and rocking him to sleep at night, and after a while she couldn't let him out of her sight. I was awful glad, cause I thought perhaps she would be always glad to have him, and then one day I heard them talk about going to Australia. Mrs. Smith didn't like the house since Paul was gone. She stops and listens as if she expects to hear him round the corner, and she don't want to go in his room, and she acts queer. Mr. Smith thinks that if she got away where everything was different, she would forget sooner, or if she didn't forget she wouldn't remember with so much pain.

His brother wrote from Australia and asked them to come there a long time ago. He is in the sheep business and doing very well. They talked it over and talked it over, and now they have decided to go. It most killed me, cause this is the only home I ever knew, and I didn't know what would become of Billy. I felt I couldn't take him back to the room. I said to Mrs. Smith one day that it kinda kicked my feet from under me to think of Billy losing his home and the mother and things he has had for two years. She looked at me a long time and then she said, "Nan, Billy don't need to lose his home." I said, "What do you mean?" "I will take him with me," she said. It took my breath away for a minit to think of losing Billy, as he is all I got, and I guess she saw it in my face cause she said quickly, "You can come too." I did not say nothing for a long time. I thought that this was my chance, I would get away from the old crowd, get away from all the things I hate and yet seemed kinda drawed to. I could leave this life that may be will take me down and down, and Billy and I could commence over again in a new country. Then I thought of you, Kate, and how you are coming out soon, and if both Billy and me was gone, you would have nothing to hold to, and I know you, and I know you would go straight to Hell. There would be no half way place for you, you would keep on sliding. And, Kate, I couldn't leave you. Billy can get on without me, he won't never know no difference, but you would be all alone, and it's hard enough to try to be decent when once you've been in stir—even with friends to help you, and when you come out, Kate, I am going to be waiting for you at the gate, and you are going to make a fight and win out and live decent.

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I thought of all this when I sat there looking at Mrs. Smith and then I said, "No, I can't go, but you can take Billy." She said, "Nannie, I won't take a baby unless I can adopt him and make him really mine. I don't want any father and mother to come and take him when I have grown to love him." I said nothing cause I knew neither you or Jim would give him up unless you saw something in it for yourselves, and these people are poor people and could not afford to pay you nothing. Then Mrs. Smith moved over close to me and took my hand and said, "Nan, I am going to say something that perhaps will hurt your feelings. Won't you give Billy to me?" I said, "Why, I would love to, but I can't, he ain't my Billy." Then Mrs. Smith said, "Now, don't be angry at me, I have never said anything, but I have never believed that story about Billy being your sister's baby. Isn't he your little boy?" At first I didn't understand her, and then it all come over me what she meant. She thought I had lied to her, thought I had made up that story about you being Billy's mother. At first I was mad, not because she thought Billy was mine, cause that don't make no difference one way or another, but I hated to think she thought I had lied to her. She saw I was hurt and she

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held my hand a little tighter and said, "Remember, child, I don't blame you, and I don't think none the less of you. I have loved you for two years and I will love you always, but if you want me to take Billy, I must take him as his mother." Then she got up and kissed me and said, "Don't answer me to-night, think it over and tell me to-morrow morning." They left me alone that evening and I sat before the fire till midnight, and when I went up to my room I stood by the window and looked over the lake till the sun come up. And then it all come to me. I would give Billy his chance. In a few months you were coming out, in a year Jim would be out. You may settle down and be straight, but Jim—never. Billy would grow up with crooks, would live around in little cheap rooms, getting no education, playing on the streets nights, knowing nothing but dirt all his life and quite likely spend most of his time after he grew up in prison, all through no fault of his, but just because he didn't have a chance. If he could go with Mrs. Smith he could live in a great big out-of-doors country, where people have clean thoughts and live clean lives, and instead of eating out of the garbage pails of life, he could eat in a clean dining room with a white cloth on the table.

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I went down in the morning and I did not say nothing until after breakfast, then I said to Mrs. Smith, "Yes, you are right, I lied to you. Billy is my baby." She come over and kissed me and said, "I knew it, dear, and I will always like to think of you as his mother." I said to her quick so she would not know how bad I felt, "What must I do to give you Billy?" And she said, "We will go to the lawyer's and he will make out the papers." So we went and I swore that I was his mother and that his father was dead, and I give Billy to Mrs. Smith and when he come back he was her little boy. Oh, Kate, I can't write more, my heart is nearly broke.

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Nan.

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XXIV

Dear Kate:

Billy is gone. He sailed away at ten o'clock this morning. I went over to the boat with them and I didn't say nothing. I don't think even Mrs. Smith knew how bad I felt. It seemed when I saw that boat pulling out that it was taking all the world with it, and as I stood on the dock watching Billy dressed in his little blue suit, his pretty gold curls all around his face, I just wanted to die. The Smiths and Billy are the only good things I ever had in my life, and it seemed at the last I *couldn't* let them go. Even the morning of the sailing Mrs. Smith wanted me to go with them, and I felt at first I *had* to go, that I couldn't stay on here and look all the days and nights in the face and keep on living. Then I knew it would not be playing the game. You do need me, don't you, Kate? You won't be dead sore about Billy, will you, and some day you will understand?

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I have just walked the streets all day, I didn't want to go up to the room, and I am writing this in Kelly's restaurant. I begin to work to-morrow night at the Cafe Boulevard, and perhaps when I am dancing I won't remember. You will be out in a few weeks and we will be together and happy again. You won't be sore at me, say you won't, Kate?

Oh, Kate, I wish things had been different, so we could have kept him. It is Hell to be crooked, ain't it?

Yours,
Nan.

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XXV

Dear Kate:

Billy is back! I don't know hardly how I can tell you all about it, it don't seem real to me yet. Two days out from New York the ship that they was on run into another ship in a fog and everybody was saved except eighteen people, and the Smiths was lost. An officer saw Billy and threw him in a boat and the Smiths was put in another boat that was swamped. I read it in the papers first, and it said the Smiths was drowned and of course I thought Billy was with them, and I was near crazy because I thought it was all my fault. If I had not of given him to the Smiths, he would be alive still. I went down to the dock where the people who was brought in by the other boat landed, and one of the first persons I see was Billy, standing with a man and woman, looking just as natural as ever, with his curls around his face and his eyes a laughing just as if nothing had happened. I near went nutty, and made an awful fool of myself, but I was so tickled, I didn't care.

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I suppose it is wrong to be so glad as I am to have him back, and I feel so bad about the Smiths, that one minit I am crying about them and the next minit I am hugging the life out of Billy to have him again. I got him up in the room and I will never let him out of my sight a minit if I can help it. I leave him with Myrtle Williams when I am at work and I hurry right home as soon as I am through. He just makes the sun shine in the old room again. He is such a big strong boy, it is all I can do to lift him over to his own side of the bed at night. I take him out in the morning and we

have a long walk. We went up to the park the other day and saw the animals. I think I was as tickled with them as much as Billy was, but I guess I made a mistake taking him up there because if he had his way he would board with Miss Murphy and her baby. He seems to take to hippopotamuses and elephants and things big. I bought him all new clothes, and he looks awful cunning. Oh, Kate, he sure is one kid. And talk, why, he has got Bryan beat to a finish. I have to watch him kinda close cause girls have no sense with babies. Myrtle took him out the other afternoon when I was at work and filled him up with ice cream and candy and all kinds of stuff till he nearly died. I gave her a call-down and she said, "Well, he wanted it." I said, "Of course, he wanted it, kids want everything they see, but that is no sign they should have it. Ain't you got nothing in your head but your rat?" She got sore and then I was sorry cause she has been awful good, and I gave her my best slipper buckles to make up. But I tell you it threw a scare into me. Billy got all blue and kinda swelled up and I chased her out for a doctor and he said it was all right, and gave him some stuff and the next day Billy was nearly all right. I gave Billy a talking to and told him that if he coaxed aunt Myrtle for everything he saw that I would spank him. It was hot air, and I think he knows it, cause I couldn't bear to spank him. I only did it once and then I was so mad that I did it before I thought. He and Paul had a fight, and he pulled a big handful of Paul's hair out and made Mrs. Smith mad, and I just up and gave him a good fat spanking where it did the most good and it helped a lot. I just can't whip him, but sometimes I set him down with a thud that jars his teeth. I don't know what I will do with him, as it ain't good for him to live in one room, but I am so glad to have him that I ain't worrying much.

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Write me a long letter Kate. I have been scared to see a post man come my way since I sent you the letter about Billy going away, but now, you sure can't be sore, and I will give the old man a good fat hug when I see him ambling up my stairway.

Yours,
Nan.

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XXVI

Dear Kate:

I have been house furnishing. No, not for myself, but for Charlie Haines who lives across the hall from me. He is an awful nice fellow and is working in the General Electric and doing real good. He told me he is getting seventy five a month now and was going to get married to a little girl he has been engaged to a long time, way off in Vermont where he used to live. We had a heart to heart talk and I asked him all about her and found she was just a nice little girl who goes to Sunday school and teaches the girls and has never been farther away from home than Brattleboro, wherever that is. He thought of taking a bigger room and rooming for a while, but I told him not to be a fool, and not to board neither. Take a little girl from the country that has always had something to do and put her in a room in a rooming house or a boarding house, and she would go crazy or get to chasing around with the lazy women who live in them places and if she was not a fine sort of girl you can't tell where she would land. A woman wants something to do, and then it ain't no life for a man to come home from work and have to chase out to a restaurant for his grub or down to a long table of folks. What he wants is to take off his coat and wash his face in the kitchen sink and put on a pair of straw slippers and set down smelling the beef steak and onions frying in his own kitchen. And they can talk without a lot of people rubbering and after supper he can help her wash the dishes, and water the geranium and then get in the morris chair and put his feet on the radiator or window sill and smoke and sing "Home sweet home." He fell for the stuff and got quite excited, but then he sort of shifted around and I tumbled to the fact that he hadn't saved much money and didn't know how to get the furniture. I said, "Now, you just trust your aunt Nancy, we will buy it on the installment plan." I found out he had only about \$25 after he had payed their fare down here, cause her folks are poor, so I said, "Well, we will go look up a flat. Better get out a ways so you will get more for your money", and we found a pretty place at 207th Street for twenty dollars a month. Four rooms and bath on the fifth floor and there ain't no elevator, but they are both strong so it won't hurt them to climb the stairs, and he will be so tickled to get home nights that he won't think about them. He wanted to furnish it and have it all ready when they come back, he is going up to get her and be married at her folks', but I put the nix on that too. I said, "We will furnish the bed room and the kitchen so as you can have a place to stay, but let her pick out the fancy things like the parlor rug and the dining room table. It will make it seem more like her own," and so he done everything I said. They got back about five days ago and say, haven't we been the busy ladies! She is an awful nice little thing, has not got much sense and green—well, Kate. Believe me, we are the funniest looking pair. I guess she makes her own clothes and her hats—they must have been wished on her. But I like her and she is the happiest thing about the flat. She thinks it is the grandest place she ever seen. I was right about letting her pick her own things as it has given her something to do, the first few days when she was kinda lonesome for her mother and little bit afraid of Charlie. We went to a place on 125th Street and picked out the furniture, a real nice dining room table and a little side board that looks like real mahogany, and six chairs. Got a centre table and a nifty rug for the parlor and a morris chair and a rocking chair, and got the bed room furniture all white, and didn't we have fun buying kitchen things! We went to the ten-cent store and bought everything you ever heard of, from frying pans to egg beaters, and we packed them home in the subway looking like immigrants just landed. She got the grandest set of dishes, a hundred pieces

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for three ninety five. Each dish has got a wreath of pink roses around the edge and they would make even fried onions smell like Spring. I am going to help her make the curtains, cause lace ones don't look right in such a little place and we bought some white stuff with dots in it for six cents a yard. I can come up mornings once in a while and sew them. They didn't have money enough to pay all down, so I lent Charlie fifteen dollars and they have to pay ten dollars a month. They will get along fine. Alice is going to the market herself and I told them they ought to live for five dollars a week for the two of them, so they will save money.

Gee, it kinda made me feel all in that the flat was not mine. When you come out, Kate, let us hire a flat and you stay home and take care of Billy and do the cooking and I will hustle the dough. Wouldn't I just love to put my door key at night into a little place like they are in, and feel it was ours and go out in the kitchen and eat some Irish stew, and then set down and have a gab fest with you over what we had done all day? Well, maybe we will do it. Just want a thing bad and you will get it and I want a little place of our own some day and you and Billy with me and no fear of the police. I am waiting to hear from you.

Yours,
Nan.

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XXVII

Oh, Kate, but your letter made me happy. I just carry it round with me and take a peep at it every once in a while to make sure it is real. You say when setting alone you have been thinking and you want to go straight when you come out for Billy's sake. I understood how you feel about me giving him away and that it was a rotten trick for me to play you, but I didn't know what else to do then. And then you feel so glad to have him back and know you can see him again, that it has kinda braced you up. Now, perhaps if I had not give him away, and he hadn't been nearly drowned, you wouldn't have had the scare about losing him, and you wouldn't never have known how much you cared for him. Oh, Kate, I just feel it in my bones that we are going to be happy as goats when you get out. We will shake Jim someway, and anyway, it will be a long time before he is out, and we will begin over again and you will keep house for Billy and me and—I just can't talk I am so happy. Heaven's going to have to offer a lot to coax Nancy Lane away from little old New York when all these pipes come true.

Yours,
Nan.

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XXVIII

Dear Kate:

I just don't know how I can tell you all about it. Jim is out and it is awful. I suppose you know it by this time in that way that you people seem to get all the news, especially any news that has to do with crooks or prisons. The papers say that him and French Louis hit one of the guards over the head with a hammer while coming from work, and got away. They hit too hard, and the guard is dead.

Well, I didn't think much about it except to be kinda sorry that Jim had made such a fool of himself as he only had a year more, and it nearly knocked my pins out from under me when I come up to my room one night and found Jim setting there. He was all in and in an awful bad way, and I said to him, "For God's sake, Jim, why did you come to me? The police will sure watch me." He said, "I couldn't help it, Nan, I am sick and broke and I got to have money and I didn't know who else to touch who wouldn't peach."

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Well, I just stood with my back against the door and looked at him, with one ear ready to listen if any one come up the stairs. He sure did look tough. The year hasn't done him no good. He couldn't look even me in the face. I asked him if it was so what it said in the papers that he had killed a guard. He all broke down and said, "Honest to God, Nan, we didn't mean to croak him. We didn't hit hard enough to break a baby's head. It must a been like mush." He got up and walked up and down the room and was all in a tremble and he kept saying, "We didn't mean to croak him."

I asked him how he got in my room cause my door was locked, and he just laughed and said, "Well, if I get so as I can't unlock a crazy lock like this, I better stay in stir the rest of my life."

He talked about half an hour with me and I was scared that he had been seen, and I tried to get him to go away, but it seemed he wanted to talk with some one he was not afraid of. I asked him what he was going to do, and he started to tell me where he was going to hide, but I stopped him and said, "Don't tell me, Jim. Then I won't know if the police get after me." I said, "Here is fifty dollars, all I got now, but I will get you more, only don't let no one come here or don't send no letters nor nothing. The bulls are bound to think of me first thing." Billy was laying in the bed and

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hadn't waked up cause we talked in whispers, and when he got ready to go, he walked over to the bed and looked down at him, and I really think something come into his rotten little heart. He stood there with his hands in his pockets a long time and then said, "So that is the kid! Well—well—he don't look like me, does he? But he is mine, and if I ever get out of this scrape I'll take him." That made me sick and I nearly said, "Well, I hope you won't get out of this scrape then." I felt for a minit that if I thought he would get Billy that I would peach on him, though that is the lowest trick and ain't done by no one who is white.

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I went down stairs first to see all was right, and then he sneaked out. I come back and sat down in a chair and set there till morning. I was just all in. Now when everything was coming along so nice, why did he have to come and butt in and spoil it all? It is just that way all my life. If it ain't father getting in trouble, it is you or Jim. And the nerve of him to say he would take Billy! I suppose he would bring him up to be a swell second story man or something big in the profession, so as he could live off him. Well, he won't get him, I tell you, and I most hope they find him, although that is rotten in me to even think such a thing.

When it come light and nothing happened, I laid down on the bed by Billy and put my face against him and cried till I woke him up, and he was so sweet. He said, "Poor Nanny, somefing hurt her. Let Billy kiss it," and then I broke all up for sure. I got to get some of my money out of the bank so I can have it handy when Jim sends for it.

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Well, good night, Kate, don't worry, I'll keep you posted, and I'll send you some money next week.

Nan.

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XXIX

Dear Kate:

I can't write much, I am so nervous I am near crazy. The police are hot after Jim, and they haven't done a thing to me but give me the third degree twice. Once they had me up before the captain of the police station here, and once they had me at the central office where the old man himself took a turn at me. I was there four hours, and they done everything they could to make me tell short of putting me behind the bars. They promised me that they would see you got better time, but I know that is only hot air, and they coaxed and bullied and tried to scare me for hours. I told them that it was on the level, I didn't know where he was. I said "yes" that I'd seen him, that he came to me but left the same night. The Captain was rotten with me, and if it hadn't been for Tom Cassidy, I think he would a locked me up until Jim was found. But that great big cop stood up for me and said, "Oh, Captain, take my word for it, she is all right. She ain't lying. I watched her for years and she is on the level. The only thing to do is to watch her." He talked quite a lot with the Captain and they let me go, but I tell you setting four hours with a police captain who knows you and your people from the time they entered the ark, and who thinks you are lying just because your relations are crooks, ain't a rest cure for nervous women. I can't dance worth a damn, and I am so fidgety that if I hear a door slam I go all to pieces.

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That ain't all either. When I was just turning our corner the other night a man came out of Sweeney's saloon and handed me a note from Jim asking me to give the bearer fifty dollars. I had been expecting it so I went down in my sock and give it to him. I don't know who he was, but I was dead scared for fear that he'd been seen.

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Don't worry, things will come right some way. They can't be much worse. I will write you all the news.

Nan.

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XXX

Oh, Kate, can't you get word to Jim some way and call him off? He is just bleeding me to death, and every time I turn round there is some one with a note from him asking for money. I have drawn most all I have in the bank, and will soon be flat broke if this keeps up. I want to help him all I can, but it just kills me to see all the money that I have saved so careful and gone without things so as to have some for you when you come out so as you could rest a while and see what you wanted to do, go to that cheap crook and his friends. I suppose he is a paying them dear to hide him, cause they are a rotten lot and won't do nothing without pay. It scares me cold every time I see a man with a note in his hand, because the police are bound to get on to it sooner or later, and they will follow the fellow and find Jim. I have give him enough to get to Australia, why don't he go? Oh, I don't want them to get him of course, but I wish something would happen that would call him off of me.

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Nan.

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XXXI

Dear Kate:

I am worried near sick, and I can't sleep nor eat nor nothing. I refused to send Jim any more money and the other night a man walked along the street with me and said, "Jim wants you to send him fifty." I said, "I haven't got it to send, I am busted." He bent his head toward me and said, "Jim said to tell you that if you didn't send the dough, he would take the kid." I just near went cold at that, and the man saw it scared me white. I had my week's pay in my bag and like a fool I gave him twenty, which tipped my hand off to them, showing I was scared for the kid. I went home and I ain't let Billy out of my sight since, except when I am working, and then I take him up to Myrtle's, and tell her to keep the door locked, and not to answer it for nobody. I tell you, Kate, if he touches Billy, I will peach on him as sure as I am a living sinner. I am dead sore. He has got all my money, and I am in all wrong with the police, but I will help him anyway I can, so long as he keeps his hands off Billy. Now, if you or your friends have got any way of getting word with him, you just let him know it.

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Nan.

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XXXII

Dear Kate:

Billy is all right. I got him planted in a place where Jim would never dare look for him. I was in an awful fix. Every time I turned around it seemed I saw some one from Jim, and I got so scared I couldn't do my work, because every time I come home, I thought perhaps they might have copped him. Did you ever know Tom Cassidy, a young cop at our Station? His father was captain there for years and years and years, a great big good-looking Irishman. Well, young Tom is just as good looking as his dad, and he has been awful nice to me. He is the one that took my part before the captain, when the captain tried to give me the third degree. He walks down to the corner with me every once in awhile, and he likes Billy. The other day he walked home with me and Billy, and I was all in, as I just had a rotten note from Jim. He was so kinda nice, I started a crying in the street, and he said, "You poor little thing, let me go up with you and tell me all about it." First I thought it might be a plant, then I thought I didn't care, for I had to talk to somebody who had some sense, and it would not be peaching on Jim, for I really didn't know where he was. So he came up to the room, and I made some coffee to give me time to get my feelings collected so I could talk, and he sat down and played with Billy. Then I told him all about it, how I didn't know where Jim was, but that he kept a touching me all the time, till I didn't have a cent left, and now he was threatening to take the kid. He was awful nice, and patted my hand with his great big hand, and said, "You poor little red head, it has sure made you peaked looking. Your eyes are bigger than your face. What you going to do?" "That's just it," I said, "I don't know what to do. I've got to work, I can't set around and watch Billy all the time. I just don't know *what* to do. If I could only get him away somewhere where they couldn't find him, I'd tell the whole bunch to go to Hell."

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"Say, kid," he said, "I got an idea. Why don't you send him up to my mother's? We got a swell little house up at 225th Street, lots of room, a big yard where he could play, and ma would be tickled to death to have him. She is dippy on kids, and since me and Jack grewed up, she says her hands have been empty." I nearly fainted, a thinking of Billy in the home of a cop, cause that is the last place on earth they would think of looking for him, and then I got suspicious again. You know, Kate, I have got an awful bad suspicious disposition. I am looking everywhere for a plant, but I studied it all over, and I couldn't see none in this, and I was so tickled that I couldn't say even "thank you." Tom said to me, "Now, you put his little duds in a bundle, and when I go off duty at four o'clock, I will come and get you, and we will go up on the subway." Then I got a thinking after he went away that some of Jim's friends might be watching the house, so I went down to Cassidy's beat, and told him I would meet him at the Grand Central, where there wouldn't be so much danger of us being piped off.

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Talk about a grand little home, Kate. Tom Cassidy has sure got it, and his mother is the nicest little Irish woman that ever lived! And *Irish!* You could cut her brogue with a knife. But she just laughs all the time, and her face breaks up in the funniest little wrinkles that make you laugh with her. She came to the door herself, wiping her hands on her kitchen apron, and when she saw Tom and me and Billy, she looked at us funny for a minit and then she said, "Say, Tom, ye ain't been married all these years, and just now a bringing your family to your old mother?" Tom laughed and said, "No such luck, mother, but I've adopted a family. I think the house is lonely without kids." She took Billy and me up to a little bed room, and she helped take off his hat and coat, talking all the time, Billy talking back, not a bit scared of her. Then we went down to the kitchen to finish getting supper. Another son came in named Jack who is studying farming and he is crazy about it. Tom introduced him to me by saying, "This is John Cassidy, farmer, greatest onion expert in the world." The kid, who is about nineteen, said, "Ah, cut it out, Tom," and Tom's mother said, "Now, don't plague the bye." Then we sat down and had the dandiest dinner. We ate in the kitchen, and then I had to go to work. Billy was all right, didn't seem to feel a bit bad about me going. Jack had him in the back yard, building something with little pieces of wood. Tom went

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to the station with me, but I wouldn't let him go no farther, cause I did not want to be seen too much with him. I told him I wouldn't come and see Billy, cause I might be followed. I tell you, I went home feeling better than when I went up there, cause Jim can do his worse now, he can't get Billy.

I got your letter, Kate. It was an awful nice letter. You seem all different, and it makes me happy way inside. [Pg 165]

Yours,
Nan.

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XXXIII

Dear Kate:

I don't know how I'm going to tell you, so you won't feel too bad. Jim is dead. He sent two or three times to me asking me for money, and I wouldn't send it to him, cause I didn't have it, and when the last fellow threatened to take the kid, I told him to go to the devil, that the kid was where they couldn't touch it. Well, that night I just got home from work and had taken my waist off and was starting to brush my hair when I saw my door open sneaking like, and Jim crept in. I was paralyzed for a minit and couldn't move, just stood there with the brush on my hair. He had been drinking and looked awful. I said low like, "Jim, for God's sake, Jim, why do you come here?" He said, "Where else am I to go?" I said, "Jim, go—go—don't stay a minit." He didn't move, just stood and looked at me. "But, Jim," I said, "the police, they're watching the place." He come up to me and put his face close against mine and I backed away, and said, "Jim, get out. You've been drinkin'." Then he sort of got sore and he said, "What do you mean by sendin' me the messages you have?" I said, "I mean just what I said, I ain't got no more money to give you," and he sneered at me. "Oh, you ain't got no money, and you ain't hauling down thirty a week, are you?" "Well," I said, "suppose I am, it's mine, ain't it?" And then he said I ought to divy up when a feller's in trouble, and at that I got mad. "Divy up?" I said. "*Divy up*. What have I been doin' the last month but divy up. I've give you all I got. Why don't you get out of the country, you'll be pinched the first thing you know." And then he said fierce like and with an awful look on his face, "You take it from me, Nan, they'll never pinch Jim Sheridan. If the bulls git me it'll be because I can't handle a gun." I didn't know what to do with him and I said again, "Get out, Jim, I'm scared to death you've been seen." He said, "Gimme some money. I got to have money." I asked him, "What've you done with all I sent you. I've give you enough to take you to Australia." He said, "I've had to pay for my hidin' and I got to put up some more." That kind of made me sick and I said, "Well, you'll have to get it from some one else then, I've give you the last dollar I've got. I'm busted." He kind of saw it was true I think, cause he started looking around the room, then he said, "Where's the kid?" I said, "Never you mind where he is," and he got sore again and said, "Never mind my own kid. Well, believe me, he's mine, and I've got an idea I want him. Where is he?" and I said, "He's where you won't get him." Jim come over to me again and stood in front of me and says, "He is, is he? Well, I'm going to have him," and then I got mad clear through and said, "Well, you can't have him. So help me God, Jim, if you try to touch Billy, I'll peach on you as sure as I'm alive." Jim laughed and said, "Yes, you will, you ain't that kind," and I said quick, "Oh, I ain't, ain't I. No, I ain't that kind. I been brought up to believe that it's the last trick to peach, but I'll go back on all I ever knowed, and put you behind the bars if you ever try to touch that kid." Jim kind of sneered. "What do you want of him?" he said; "he ain't no better off with you than with me." I said, "Perhaps he ain't. But he won't be raised with crooks and grow up feeling that crookedness is straight. He'll know decent people, not a lot of cheap second story men and dips." [Pg 167]

Jim laughed. "You're a nice one to talk, old Bill Lane's daughter." And then Kate, oh I said awful things, and I remember every word and go over it all at night. I said, "Yes, and Kate Lane's sister. I know, I've had it rubbed in enough. No one ever says Nancy Lane, they always say Bill Lane's daughter, Kate Lane's sister or Jim Sheridan's sister-in-law. Hain't I had that to fight against all my life? Ain't I lost every good chance that I ever had to work in the good places, just because I've had to buck against the reputation of my family? And then when *you* come in the family, I might a carried the others, but no one could carry you. Why, you dirty crook, you're known from San Francisco to New York, and I've had to work in cheap shows and dirty cabarets just because of you always coming and queering me when I got started. Look at the crowd I go with," I said. "Do you suppose I'm crazy about them? But I have to go with that kind, the kind that don't fall dead, when they find out who I am." Jim looked at me a minit, then he said, "You're getting dam nice lately, what's the matter with you?" I thought a minit and then I said, "Yes, I'm different, I know it, but I've had most two years of not havin' to be scared to death, not having to look over my shoulder for fear a cop was following me to find out about some of you. I've been able to read the papers without being scared I'd see some of your names in it, and I've been allowed to work in peace. And I've done good work too, I've been able to leave the rotten joints and I'm workin' up, and I'd get to the top if I was left alone. Why the only peace I've had in all my life has been the last year when you and Dad and Kate was all in jail. I been able to sleep nights knowing where you all was and that you couldn't be doing nothing to get in trouble." [Pg 168]

Jim said, "Oh, can the hot air. I want the kid, I'm going to get out, but I'm going to take him with me." I said, "Yes, you are, *nit*." Jim looked at me kind of curiously for a minit and said, "What are [Pg 169]

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you so crazy about him for, why do you want him?" I said, "I don't know what I want him for. I don't know, but you won't have him. He's the first thing I ever had in my life that's sweet and clean, and he's the first thing that ever loved me without thinking what they could make out of me. Why, when he was in the country and he'd come to the gate to meet me, with his eyes shining with love and his face all dimpling with laughs, I'd choke up and some times not be able to speak. Billy's made me *live*. He's made something new come to me, he's made me see all life different, and I'm going to pay him back for what he's done for me by giving him a chance." Jim laughed, "You give him a chance," he said, "what kind of a chance can you give him?" I said, "I don't know for sure. I ain't got it all figured out, but he's going to have his chance to grow up like other men." Jim acted sore again and said, "Ah—what's the use of talking. We're wasting time. I want money and I'm going to have the kid. If I can't find him I'll put the gang wise, and some of them'll find him all right." At that I think I just went off my head, and I didn't care whether the police heard me or not. I said, "Jim, don't you *dare* to try to take Billy. Don't you *dare* to put any of your dirty gang on to get him away from me. I tell you I'll peach on you. I'll find out where you're hiding and I'll bring the police there myself. I'll fight for Billy. I'll fight as any woman'll fight for a baby. If you dare to touch him or let any of your sneakin' pals come near him, I'll follow you till I see you behind the bars if I have to follow you till Hell freezes over." Jim seemed as if he couldn't speak for a minit, then his face got red and he come towards me. He said, low and fierce like, "Tell me where that kid is." I said, and moved away from him, "I won't tell you." He said again to me, "I say, tell me where he is." I said again, "I won't tell you. He's planted where you'll never find him." I was standing by the bed and he grabbed me by the throat, and bent me over backwards, and his eyes just burned into mine. "Oh," he said, "You won't tell me, you won't—we'll see if you won't, by—" and just then the door opened and three plain clothes men and two cops walked in. I don't know how it happened. I don't know nothing that happened after Jim turned and knew the game was up, but there was three quick shots all at once, and when the smoke cleared away, Jim was lying on his back on the floor, one of the plain clothes men had a bullet through his shoulder. They bent over and found that Jim was all in. Pretty soon an ambulance come, and he was took away. The sergeant talked to me, but I can't remember nothing he said. It all happened so quick, that it seemed an awful nightmare, and I just sat there, saying "yes and no" to the sergeant, not understanding nor caring. When they all went away, Tom Cassidy stayed behind, and he come up to me, and put his arms around my shoulders and said, "You poor little red head, you do seem to be getting more than your share, don't you?" And at that I just all broke up, and I put my head against his great big chest, and I cried all down the front of his uniform. He just patted me quiet like, and let me cry, and then when things quieted down a bit, he said, "Now, I will tell you what you do. You just put on your bonnet and I will take you up to the old lady's. You don't want to sit here alone, and Billy will be tickled to death to see you." I said, I didn't want to be a trouble to him, that having one of us was enough, and he said, "My grandmother's grey cat's kittens, why you won't be no trouble, mother likes somebody to wipe the dishes, and Jack likes somebody to talk onions to. We have all heard it, but it will be new to you." Well, he helped me find my hat, and he almost put the hat pin through my brains, and he helped me find my blouse, I had been a setting all the time without a waist and didn't know it, and he was awful nice, never showed by the bat of an eye that I wasn't dressed in a mackintosh. Then when I had powdered my eyes, we went over to the station. He wasn't on duty, but he had heard the men talking about Jim being at my place, and he come along with them to see that nothing happened to me.

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I am going to stay here a week. I can't work and Tom went and saw the manager and Fred Keeney, my dancing partner, and got me off for a week. Mabel Sullivan is going to take my place. She dances a good deal better than I have the last month since I have been so worried, so it'll be all right. Billy is looking fine. He calls the old lady "granny" and talks as Irish as she does. She is crazy about him, and says she will never let me take him away.

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Now, don't feel too broke up, Kate. I am afraid I haven't told you very well about it, but I had rather have you hear it from me, so you will get it straight. There is no use a telling you I am sorry, cause I ain't. I always hated Jim's eyes, yet I wouldn't have peached on him, nor done nothing to hurt him.

Yours,
Nan.

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XXXIV

Dear Kate:

I am having a dandy time! This is an awful pretty place. It is kinda in the country, yet it is right in the city. Captain Thomas Cassidy must have been a very saving man, or else he didn't let many things get by him, to be able to buy a nice little home like this. Yet, perhaps, he bought it when this was real country, and cheap. The house has got a parlor and a dining room and another room and a kitchen and a laundry down stairs, and up stairs there are five bed rooms and a bath, and a great big attic where Billy can play when it rains. There is a big yard, both front and back. The front yard has flowers and belongs to Mrs. Cassidy, and the back yard has a vegetable garden, and belongs to Jack and Tom, half and half. You would laugh to see them two great big babies quarreling over their vegetables. Tom comes home and takes off his uniform and his collar and

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fusses around his garden every night. He weeds and sweats and swears, and his garden ain't nothing like Jack's. All Jack has to do is to look at a cabbage and it grows, and their poor mother has an awful time keeping peace in the family. If they have lettuce from Jack's garden, Jack says to her, "Mother, ain't that the finest lettuce you ever et?" And Tom drops his knife and looks up sudden at her, and she says careful-like, "It is awful good lettuce, Jacky bye, but that we had yesterday was most as good," and then Tom goes on eating. Jack has just finished his farm schooling, and he is dippy about it. Onions is his graft. Why, he will talk about an onion for an hour. He got me in a corner one day, and he talked about the money there was in raising onions, how many bushels there was eaten in the world, and how many thousands of bushels there was brought in from some place down south, and the price of onions a bushel, and how many million could be raised on an acre, well, my head whirled before he got through, and I felt as if everybody had made a mistake by not turning the whole earth into an onion farm. I said to him one day, "What are you studying farming for, that don't pay? Why don't you go into the police like your father and like Tom?" "Ah," he said, "who wants to walk up and down a hot street all day and bat a drunk over the head or pinch a kid for hooking a watermelon. I am going out in the country where I can see things grow." His mother said, "He do be taking after my people. He is just like me feyther, who always had to have his little bit of garden and his pig." Here Jack started in again talking so fast you could hardly understand him, he gets so excited and his eyes get bright and he waves his hands around in the air—he is awful funny. Tom and his mother set back in a chair and laugh at him, just like I did when he started on pigs. He said, "Now for pigs, there is more money in pigs—" Just then Tom hollered, "Choke him, Nan, choke him, if he gets started on pigs we are done for. Onions is bad enough, but pigs is pigs." Jack gets awful mad and hates to be laughed at, and his mother has to smooth him down. She says to him running her hand soft up and down his coat sleeve, "Never you mind, Jacky me bye, it is yourself that will be making the family fortune one of these days, with your onions and your pigs." Tom laughed and says, "Yes, if he feeds the onions to the pigs." But I think Jack is right, and I hope some day he has a chance to get a farm, cause it would be a shame for a person to love a thing the way he loves it, and not be able to work at it. I asked him one day if he thought he could make it pay, and he said, "Sure, don't the Italians and the Chinamen out West make truck farming pay? The trouble with us is, we don't go at it right. We go at it too big, and raise corn and oats and barley instead of vegetables. Why, a farm near a big city like this, if it was run right, ought to just coin money."

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I am teaching, the boys to dance. You would kill yourself a laughing watching them. After supper we push the kitchen table back, cause the kitchen is a big old-fashioned kind, and Tom takes off his coat, because he goes at it as if he was going to saw a load of lumber, and Jack runs the phonograph and I try to teach Tom to dance, but you might just as well teach an elephant to walk a tight rope. Tom is all feet. To begin with, he is six feet two, and I come to about the second button on his coat, and I have an awful time trying to get him around. He tries so hard, he puckers his face all up in worried lines, and he sweats and he breathes hard, and then when he gets through, he falls into a chair just done up, mops his face and the back of his neck with a handkerchief or a handy towel, and says, "Talk about work, why I would rather load a dray all day." Then when he gets cooled off, he runs the phonograph for Jack. Jack dances lovely. He is awful light on his feet. You don't have to show him a step but once when he knows it, but he don't care much for dancing, not half as much as Tom does, who would never learn the tango if he lived a thousand years. But it is funny to see Tom. When Jack is a dancing Tom will take an onion and go in front of Tom, holding it just out of reach and moving just as Jack moves, as if he was trying to chase the onion. When I say Jack is a good dancer, Tom says, "Sure, he is, cause he thinks he is chasing an onion. Now if we only had a pig, no tellin' what he'd do."

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The one that can beat them all out is Mrs. Cassidy. At first she wouldn't get up and try, and said, "The likes of an old woman like me dancing around," but I gave her a great line of talk, told her how all the old ladies was dancing, that if she went down to the restaurants where I danced, she would see women old enough to be her grandmother, having the time of their lives. First she wouldn't listen to it, and said, "Gwan, they are trying to make a fool of me in my old age," but finally I got her to try, and say, she done grand. Like all Irish girls, she used to dance when she was young, and it all come back to her, and she took to the new steps just natural. It was fun to see her. Her face flushed, her eyes got bright, and she didn't seem to be old no more. Tom and Jack were tickled to death. When she got through, they clapped their hands, stamped their feet on the floor, just like the hoodlums do in the gallery, when the hero rescues the maiden. Mrs. Cassidy flushed, was half ashamed, and half tickled, and said she would never make a fool of herself again, but she does and she likes it, and she and Jack can do the hesitation waltz beautiful.

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I mustn't write you any more, Kate. I am awful happy here. I think of you all the time, and your letters are so good.

Yours,
Nan.

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I got your letter and I know how you feel. If Jim was no good, he was your husband and you cared for him, and you were a mighty good wife, too. I am sorry if I said things that hurt you about him, but oh, Kate, I am glad for one thing, that is, you begin to see that crookedness don't pay, whether it is right or whether it is wrong, it just *don't pay*. Look at Jim and his crowd. He is dead and five of his friends are in prison, and most of the rest of them are afraid to lift their heads for fear they will see a cop a watching them. I am so glad you see it that way now, and I like to hear you say you have had enough of prison. You will never see one again, Kate, except to admire the architecture from the outside.

You are right about one thing. You can brace up in New York just as well as outside of it. There is no reason in the world why you should leave this little old berg. We will get up in the Bronx somewhere in a little flat like Charlie Haines', and you won't never need to see the old crowd. Something will turn up some way for you to do, and anyway, I can make enough to keep us three. Why, Kate, I would dance my legs off to have you and Billy with me, and you a playing the game straight. So cheer up, old lady, everything is fine and dandy, and you are going to be the happiest woman one of these days in the buzum of your family.

Yours,
Nan.

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XXXVI

Dear Kate:

What do you think? Billy is an heir! Before the Smiths went away they tried to sell their place over in New Jersey, but they was going away too soon, and an agent couldn't sell it for them in such a hurry, so they made a will, that if Mrs. Smith died, the place was to go to Mr. Smith, and if Mr. Smith died first the place was to go to Mrs. Smith, and if they both died, the place was to go to their adopted son, William Smith, and that is Billy. Now, what do you know about that? A lawyer came to me and told me all about it, and the will has been done something to in court, and I have had to sign some papers, and Billy is a landowner. Why, we was all so excited when we heard it, we all talked at once, and when Jack heard it was a farm, he talked onions and pigs at the same time. We went over there last Sunday, and it looked just as pretty as ever. It made me feel awful bad about the Smiths, and I cried at first a lot. The house seemed lonesome with blinds all shut, and no pigs nor chickens or cattle around the barn, or in the pasture. The house inside was just as Mrs. Smith left it, cause they had hoped to sell it furnished, and there was even pickles and preserves in the cellar. We ate our lunch on the kitchen table which we put under the big tree looking out over the lake. It was awful pretty. The water was just like a looking glass, and once and a while a little spurt of wind would come and ruffle it all up and then it would die down quiet again. Mrs. Cassidy said it made her think of her home back in Ireland, which is by a lake, and she talked a long time about her man who has been dead ten years, "who was one of the finest" in New York and that meant something in those days. Mrs. Cassidy set down in the shade with Billy, and Tom and Jack and me went over the place. Jack was crazy about it. He would take little handfuls of mud and smell it or taste it, and say, "too sour," or "it needs salt" or "there ain't lime enough," just kinda talking to himself all the time. He found the pasture with a brook running through it, and said it would be just the right thing for pigs, and he saw about ten acres he said the Lord intended for an onion field. He made over the barn in his mind, and filled it full of holsteins, and I think if it had not begun to get late and we had to catch a train, that he would have all the holsteins mothers of growing families, cause he just located the right kind of a calf pen when we took him by the coat-tails and dragged him away.

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We got home awful tired, and everybody went to bed except Jack, who set down with a pencil and paper to figure out how much money it would need to make Lake Rest the model farm of New Jersey.

Good bye, Kate, don't feel too bad. Remember you are going to be just as happy as me some day, and that's going some.

Yours,
Nan.

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XXXVII

Dear Kate:

I got the grandest idea. I just can't wait to tell you. I thought it all out in the middle of the night, and I had to talk to somebody, so I got up and went into Mrs. Cassidy's room and got in bed with her and we talked till most morning. She was awful nice, and we talked it over and over. Here it is now, Kate, don't you think it is wonderful? You and Billy and Jack can live at Lake Rest when you come out! now what do you think of it! The house is there all furnished, and Jack will do the farming. He is just crazy about it, and he says sure he can make it pay. Tom says he will cough up

and buy the things Jack needs to start, if the little money Jack's father left him ain't enough. You give the farm and the house, and Jack will furnish the farming things and the work, and you can go halves. That sounds all right, doesn't it? Anyway, even if you don't make much the first few years, you get your living, which is about all we get anyway, ain't it, Kate? I feel awful bad that I can't do much, but my money all went to Jim, but I will live on eggs and buttermilk, and every cent I make will go into the place. You can't help but get along, Kate, and out there the old crowd will never get on to you, nobody will ever know nothing about you, and you can begin again as if you was new born.

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Oh, I think it is grand, Kate! I can see Tom and Mrs. Cassidy and me coming to see you on a Sunday morning, and you and Billy and Jack waiting for us at the station when the train pulls in, and we will drive over to the place and look at the chickens and scratch the pig and pick the cabbage and hear about the onions, and then after supper we will set on the porch and listen to the frogs and the whip-o-wills and see the shadows come on the lake, and feel that everything is all right, and Somebody must be a sure taking care of us.

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Write me soon, Kate, and tell me you are as glad about this as I am.

Nan.

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XXXVIII

Dear Kate:

I feel so kind of shamed, kind of choked up and happy, that it is awful hard for me to put down on paper just what I am a feeling, I don't know what you will say about it, Kate, and I know that you will nearly drop dead when you read this, but I am going to get married and—wait a minute—I am going to marry a cop! Can you beat that? Me, Nancy Lane, who has been brought up since a kid to feel that cops is her natural enemy, and to hate a uniform as the devil hates holy water. But some way I never think of Tom as being a policeman, he is so kind and good and big hearted, always doing something nice for people, and he is so nice at home, just like a great, big boy. He loves his little mother and jollies her and laughs at her, he is just like a good pal to both her and Jack, and they simply worship the ground he walks on, and I don't blame them, Kate, because—

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put your head down close—dear, I do too. It is the first time I dared say it out loud even to myself. I didn't know what was the matter with me, I used to be so anxious to get up in the morning to see him at the breakfast table, and I liked to pour his coffee, and fasten his stick in his belt and go to the gate with him. It seemed like the day would never go by until he got back. Sometimes he would call me up on the telephone. Why, Kate, I couldn't hardly talk to him and he would notice it and his voice would get worried and he would ask me if I was sick. When he would come home at night, we would all have supper, and set around and josh and laugh and talk, him and Jack half quarreling in a good natured way over their vegetables, or we would dance, or just set out on the front porch with some of the neighbors who'd come in. I didn't know I was loving him cause I wanted to be close to him, but when he was a setting by me, I didn't want to talk or nothing, I was happy just being near him. One night everybody went in and left us on the porch together. He was quiet for a long while, then he moved over closer to me and put his arm around me and he said soft and quiet-like, "Nan, are you happy here with us?" And I said, "Why, I ain't never been so happy in my life," and he said, "Do you think you could stand it to stay always," and I kinda edged away from him and said, "I can't stay always, I must go to work next week," and he said, "No, you ain't going to work no more, Nan, except for Tom Cassidy. You have got a life-long job teaching him to tango." I laughed kinda nervous-like. "That ain't no lie. It would take more than one life to teach you to tango." Tom took hold of my face and leaned my head back, and said, "Nannie, little girl, I just want you. Won't you marry me?" "Oh, Tom," I said, and I couldn't say no more, and he said, "I don't know how to make love much, but I do love you, Nan. From the first minit I laid eyes on you I wanted to take you up in my big arms and take care of you, you seemed so little and alone—and you crept right inside of my uniform and stuck around my heart till there ain't room for nothing else. Why everything I hear says your name, and your face goes dancing before me as I walk up and down my beat, and when I looked up sudden the other day at the captain, hanged if for a minit he didn't have red, curly hair. Say you will marry me, Nancy, and we will be the happiest bunch in the Bronx." When he had been talking to me it seemed I was just choked up two ways, one with happiness and the other with misery. I said to him, "Oh, Tom, I couldn't marry you." He said, "Why not, don't you love me?" "It ain't that, Tom," I said, "but my family is all crooks. You couldn't marry *me*." He said, "Well, what has that got to do with it? I don't see how they can stop me marrying you. Most of them is in jail anyway." I couldn't help but laugh, as he was so earnest about it, but I said, "Why, Tom, if they knowed down at Central Office that you had married me, they might break you. All the bulls know father." And then Tom got mad. "Break me—what would they break me for? I guess I got the right to marry the finest little girl in New York if I want to and I would just as soon take you right up to the chief himself and say 'Chief, this is Nancy Lane and I am going to marry her. Her father is old Bill Lane, and the worst crook this side of the Pacific, but my little girl is white and clean right through.' And do you know what he would do? He would give you one look over with that clever eye of his, and say, 'Put a rose in your hair and go as far as you like, *and* because you have shown common sense for once in your life, you will be made a captain next week.'" I laughed and couldn't say nothing much, and he moved over close to me again and laid my face against his coat, and put his head

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down on my hair, kinda patting my face soft with his big hand. He said, "Nancy darling, you do like me a little bit, don't you? I will be so good to you, little one, and I will stand between you and all your troubles. You have had your share, and you never need to have no more, cause when things don't go right, all you need to do is to run to big Tom Cassidy, and rub your little face up and down the front of his big coat, and squeeze a little water out of one eye, and put a little tremble in your voice, and he would go out and lick a St. Patrick's Day procession for you." Then he was quiet but went on after a while soft and tender like, "I sure do love you, little one. Don't you care for me a little?" "Oh, Tom," I said, "it ain't little, it is lots." Then he said, "Why won't you say we will be married?" And I said, "Tom, I care more for you than for anything in the world, but I wouldn't hurt you for nothing." And he said, "The only way you can hurt me, Nan, is to say you won't have me and you don't say that, do you dear?" I looked up at him for a minit and he must a saw what was in my eyes, cause he was quiet, just a looking deep into my eyes. Then he drew my face to him with his two hands and kissed me. Kate I went all of a tremble and it seemed my heart came right up on my lips when I felt his touch mine, and when he said, "Say, 'I love you, Tom,'" I only needed to whisper it for him to hear, and I was glad cause I couldn't have spoke it out loud to save my soul.

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Oh, Kate, I didn't know there was such a thing in the world as what I am feeling. I am so happy it keeps me quiet, and I like to set by myself and think of Tom, how big and strong he is, how he will always fight my troubles. But I feel I will never have troubles if I live with him, cause he is so good and kind and gentle, that sorrow could never come near him or his.

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I won't write you more, cause if I wrote you a hundred pages, I couldn't say more than that I'm the happiest girl in the world, cause I love him, love him, love him.

Nan.

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XXXIX

Dear Kate:

Tom told his mother this morning at the breakfast table and she put down her saucer of coffee, and come over to me and kissed me, and said, "Faith, the Gosoon, I thought he never was going to do it. Sure he's not the son of his father, or he'd a asked you the question the second day you was here. I've always wanted a daughter and now I've got one that couldn't a suited me better if I'd ordered her making."

She was so happy, she spent the whole morning making plans for the future, how she would pass part of the time with me and Tom, and then when we got tired of her, she would go over to see you and Jack. And Kate you sure will love her. She is just a dear little Irish woman who has always had a great big husband or a son to stand between her and anything that might hurt her. And just think, dear, I won't never have to be alone no more, never have to worry about things all by myself, cause I, too, am going to have a great big man all my own.

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Your happy
Nan.

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XL

Dear Kate:

We were married this morning by the priest at the church near here. Mother was there (oh, Kate, it is nice to say "mother"), and Jack and the Captain of the station that bullied me so, but he is really all right when his uniform is off and he was a great friend of Tom's father. It was over awful sudden. It seemed they just had begun, when he said, "Kiss your wife," and I found we was married.

Now you are out on Saturday, Kate. Tom is coming with me, and we will be there at 10:30. Now, I don't want you to feel, like you said in your letter, that you are ashamed to look anybody in the face. You don't need to be, and when those old doors close behind you, you just forget them, and think of what is before you. Why, you went in there with nobody but me and Jim and Billy, and you come out having a great big family, a mother and two brothers, a kid and a sister, not to speak of a farm and two live pigs and a black and white cow that is a waiting for you, and we are all a loving you, and ain't a thinking or a caring nothing about your past, just going to help you make a future. When we step out of the gates, we will look up at the great big, blue sky and though none of us ain't long on prayer, perhaps who is ever watching above there, will know just what we feel and will start us right. Anyway, Kate, we will be waiting for you, and we are all going to be so happy, that there will never be a grey day, they will all be blue and gold with the sun a shining.

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Yours,
Nan Cassidy.

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LIVING UP TO BILLY ***

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