

Beauty

ALLYN WOOD

It was some time before she could evoke anything but an empty sound from the inside of the shells of houses. The one she was trying to rouse, separated from the others by a November garden, had lace curtains; of the other three which leaned on each other's gutters, one had newspaper cut into filigree. The silence and her knocking made her feel unimportant, as she remembered the vital missions of her mother, years before, into this same neighborhood. She had come as a Public Health nurse; the daughter was trying to find a good home for a dog. She came eagerly respectful of the families whose bambini and pickaninnies now were young people like herself. What they had, they would share; she felt safer giving something alive to them than to some who were more prosperous, to whom one might give only mechanisms.

A voice called, "You lookin' for Suwannee? She's washing next door."

The girl returned to the garden to wait. A thin wind vibrated and twanged through the low picket fence, and she looked about with a hollow sudden feeling of love and despair. She looked west over the roofs of innumerable shacks with their red ash paths in brittle gardens, toward the ash-red streak of setting sun; watched the smoke rising out of stacks, and the sombre drift of sky. Love and despair! Besides, tonight she would be going to the ballet, and it seemed a wonder, almost an enchantment, that she should be—only two hours before—here in this garden: then transformed home to the sparkle of preparation, then to the scent of a November night mingled (just as she crosses the theatre threshold) with the packed per-

fumes of an audience—

"I'm sorry to be late. You came about the terrier-dog, didn't you?"

The other girl, Suwannee, dark and slender, stood in the door. She glanced at the floor, and a baby crossed the sill on all fours, and would have gone on down the steps to seek his fortune if she had not shoveled him up and in.

"I can't stay more than a moment. You're busy, too! But when I heard that you'd be interested in having a dog, I came—"

"We certainly should. You rest assured that he'll have everything that we have. You see we've a nice little garden—in summertime—flowers that come up every year just the same, without much attention even. When they bloom, and that Tree of Heaven comes out in leaf, it's beautiful. He can run around there with our little boy."

Suwannee watched the other girl's eyes travel across the garden dubiously as if it were a history, a map, or an omen, she did not know which.

"Some people wonder why we don't grow vegetables," she said softly, in a tone that made the girl understand everything she meant, more than she was going to say. Suwannee was mistaken in supposing that she had been thinking about vegetables.

The first wind of night spread evenly across the garden, lapsing against her throat as if she were neck-deep in water, and after it the brief, sweet odor of wood smoke, and after it a tingling of frost on her cheek which, lost in a sense of awareness, she seemed to see as a scintillation of tiny sparks and glistening disks.

Now she moves toward the brilliance of the theatre. The cold tingles on her forehead at the edge of her sequin cap; it is like cold on one side of a pane of glass when heat is on the inside, for heat and light are in her head. She parts from the stars; they seem to come off of her velvet cloak, taking some of it with them into space; she enters the realm! There is talk, then silence, then music. Her breath

comes soft as a sleeper's through "Swan Lake" danced only as Markova can dance, to make the moon turn its other face as it did in the days of enchantment.

Yet afterward, she finds her thoughts returning again and again to the garden. Somehow, she does not know quite why, it seems as if she holds it in the palms of both hands, there with the programme de ballet.

The Powder Train

BARBARA GENE LUCAS

The December day was fading into a mist varying in shades of gray as the leaden skies hovered over the snow-blanketed ground. The tint of the cloudy air was deepened now and then, as an exhausted locomotive plowed along the unseen trails of the railroad yard. The black smoke hung densely around the scattered little red buildings which formed the nerve center of the railroad's activity.

Inside the shanty, Bill Green looked up from his work at the desk and gazed intently at the empty yard. It was clear of the freight cars for the first time since early morning. He stretched his arms over his head and shoved his black wool cap back from his forehead. "Somethin's up, Kid. Here comes the Boss."

The youth was sitting on a tool box lacing up his arctics. Beside him on the box lay his oil-soaked gloves stiffly imitating the hands which had recently been withdrawn. His oil bucket and wrenches were on the floor near the radiator. From his bent position the boy only muttered, "Hope not."

"Let the next trick worry about it. We're always getting the rub," said Brandy as he hung his wet gloves on the radiator. "I've wrecked three pairs of gloves on those rotten air hose today. Lucky I didn't get burnt."

"You work too hard, Brandy. Would think you were winnin' the war all by yourself," returned the Kid.

"Mind your dope buckets, boy."

The door of the shanty opened with a creak and the red-faced Boss stamped his feet to clean off the snow. He slammed the door, and the windows over the desk shook violently. "Well, boys," he began, "gotta work over tonight."

"Over?" broke in Brandy. "We're almost done." He started wrangling through the pockets of his mackinaw in search of his watch.

Bill looked up from his yellow book. "Why, what's comin'?"

"Plenty, Green, enough to blow up the whole country," the Boss said with a half-smile.

"You mean powder?" asked Brandy