The Eleventh Virgin
Part II, Chapter I
(second part) ==========

By Dorothy Day

1924, Chapter I (second part)

Summary: (DDLW #882).

On four sides of a square hall four doors opened into the lodgers' rooms. June heard them open and shut in the morning, but she never saw the occupants in all the two months she remained there and since the doors were never open, she didn't have a chance to peep in to see if they were as bleak as her own. Her room was on the side next to the church and Sunday mornings as she lay in bed, the mournful music of the organ seeped into her open window and lit up the greyness about her. Even in the middle of the day it was never a light room and on cold nights when she heated it by means of a gas stove which was attached to a solitary burner, she had to read by candle light. There was no carpet on the floor and no curtain at the one window which faced the church. It was perfect in its dreariness and silence, and when June came in after a busy day and evening when she had interviewed and notated and written and lived the day with the clatter of voices and of typewriters in her ears, she stood still and drank in the silence. She enjoyed the damp old smell of the house, she enjoyed her complete apartness from the city.

On one occasion when she paid her rent, Mrs. Gunther detained her for a moment in chat. The subject of their conversation was the iniquity of a little servant whom she had employed.

"The girl was fourteen and I paid her three dollars a week to work for me, sleeping at home, of course. It was a great help to her family–poor Irish and very shiftless. Anyway, one morning I caught her on the front porch (I'd sent her out to shake a duster) dancing to the music of a street piano, and what do you think–she didn't have any pants on. I had her brought up before the children's court for misconduct and she was put on probation. Any more looseness and she goes right off to a reform school."

"Pants!" June thought, with disgust. What an idiotic word, especially when you considered the disastrous consequences. She might have said "drawers," but then, nobody wore drawers nowadays. It's envelope chemises, teddy bears, bloomers or more elaborate still–pettibockers. On the East Side–from what June saw of the children, they didn't wear anything. And the little maid-servant was only fourteen.

Yes, "pants" was just what a Mrs. Gunther would say. She couldn't have said anything else.

The conversation left a disagreeable impression on June's mind and was increased the next week when her landlady informed her that she had just had the tobacco store on the corner closed because she was sure that it was the hang-out of gangsters.

But the reform tendencies on the part of her landlady didn't linger long in June's

mind, unfortunately, and when, two months later, she was confined to her room with the grippe, she didn't hesitate to telephone Ivan (who by that time had become her close friend) to drop in after work and bring her cough medicine, lemons and some whiskey. She had been in bed for two days, only dragging herself out twice to get some milk toast at a nearby bakery. Mrs. Gunther had not been near her.

According to June's instructions, Ivan whistled "Poor Butterfly" as he came along the silent street, in order that he would not have to ring the front doorbell. June kept her window open and soon after one o'clock slipped down to the door to let him in.

"Hell of a place for you to be sick in," he grumbled as he deposited lemons, oranges, whiskey and cough medicine on the table by the side of June's bed. "Why in the world don't you move up to Eighth Street where the rest of us live?"

She liked the piquancy of an Episcopalian parish house in a Jewish neighborhood, she said, and she liked the ancient odor of her surroundings. She liked the sound of the organ on Sunday mornings and she liked to feel solitary. She wouldn't move.

She hadn't told her mother she was sick for fear she would visit her and display the same distaste for her surroundings which Ivan had. She didn't want Ellen or Billy near her, because Ellen would talk chastity and Billy would talk about men. She was enjoying being sick–having a great reading-fest and she'd probably be able to come to work in a day or so. So he might as well join her in having a hot toddy and tell her all the gossip of the office.

The paper was getting along the same as usual. Mr. Bright was still insisting on giving a lot of space to the A. F. of L. and the Board of Control continued to row about it. Ivan himself favored the Amalgamated Clothing workers and every time he gave a column to them Mr. Bright rowed. It was a three sided feud and probably the latter would have to give up his job. On the whole the socialist board was more hostile to the A. F. of L. than they were to the Amalgamated. The very fact that the latter union was fighting the American Federation inclined them to look with more latitude on the clothing workers. It was a mixed-up affair and the more they bickered, the less faith Ivan had in the working classes.

Chester had found some more evidence and was going to start proceedings for a divorce. But then he'd been doing that for a long time. Vic had left the paper for higher pay on a Connecticut sheet. Benny Leonard had contributed largely to the Clarion bond issue. June was to take Benny as an assignment next week and have lunch with him. A good story for the sporting page–the class-conscious prize fighter.

Emil had left the paper for a job on a magazine as reader. They had two new men, not much good.

Several more pacifist meetings had been raided and there was talk of declaring war on April first.

He (Ivan) had brought her an article on Maxim Gorky to read and he had written two poems. He read them to her. They would appear in the Guillotine tomorrow. What was the book he had brought with him? "Gosta Berling". It was marvelous–a masterpiece. That woman certainly could write. Nobody could

equal the Scandinavians these days. Wait, he would read a chapter or so to her. And so the night wore on.

At seven Ivan left her and brought in a huge cup of hot milk and six slices of thin buttered toast from a nearby bakery and when she had assured him that he had saved her from the complications of boredom, pneumonia and slow starvation, he left her to sleep. Which she did all that day.

That night she was able to show up at the office to assist in rewrite work although Ivan refused to send her out on any assignment.

The next noon the blow fell. She had just stepped out of a cold tub and was leisurely dressing when a tap came at the door and Mother Grace came in.

"Well, my dear, *I've* come to your rescue."

"How in the world did you know that I've been sick? Did Ivan call you up? I told him not to. I'm all right now–went to the office last night."

But Ivan hadn't called her up. Mrs. Gunther had taken note of June's midnight visitor and had called up the office that morning, asking for Miss Henreddy's home address, saying that she was ill. The business office, contrary to the policy of the office had given it and the result was that Mother Grace had been forced to listen over the telephone to a long diatribe against June and her loose habits.

"I was absolutely furious, my dear." But not at June. "Nothing in the world is worse than having somebody light on you over the telephone. It was so difficult to put her in her place. I dropped into the office to find out how to get down here and fortunately ran into Ivan there. He told me that you'd been sick and that he had dropped around after work and that your brute of a landlady hadn't come near you for the two days you kept to your room. Oh, I told her just what I thought of her!"

Then after Mother Grace had announced casually that it wasn't considered quite the thing in her day to receive young men in bedrooms at any hour of the night or day, she made herself comfortable on the bed with a glass of whiskey and water and lemon which June had prepared for her, listened to the records, commented on the quality of tone of the phonograph. Then, with June's packed suitcase they went out to lunch together and that was all there was to that.

June was always making discoveries in the way of homes for herself in those days. She hadn't lived in Eighth Street for more than a week before she came across the Shelter for Probationers from Blackwell's Island and Bedford Reformatory. At least that was the name given it in the women's night court by the deep-bosomed matron when she sat down to fill out the prisoners' reports. When you spoke of it, you said Miss Prince's. The judge called it Miss Prince's. Whenever a girl was brought before him who had broken probation and who was given the name of "flagrant repeater" by the other probation officers, he'd say, "Well, call up Miss Prince. Maybe there's room up at her place."

There wasn't another place exactly like it in New York. The only thing like it in literature was Jo's farm in "Little Men" where she coddled and nursed and educated her waifs and strays.

The girls who were sent there were a distinct type, too. Actually "flagrant repeaters" who couldn't be trusted with a probation officer were always given another sentence in the reformatory.

Those girls who had no previous record in the court were lectured on the sacred flower of womanhood and motherhood and girlhood, while the probation officers who sat on a bench in the first row beamed and nodded at each other, and then they were turned over to one of the latter.

The judge who was fat and Rabelaisian and always in a high humor at life and the part he had to play in it was inclined to favor the youthful and attractive type of offender.

"That girl has something in her, I'm sure," he would tell Miss Prince solemnly. "She's young and her face isn't so hard, do you think?"

"She does seem to have better taste in rougeing," Miss Prince would agree dryly.

As far as June could see, it didn't matter whether they were young or old with Miss Prince, as long as they weren't of the "moron type."

"Give me a girl with some brains to start out with, who is half way normal and I may be able to do something with her," was her ultimatum as to what she wanted in the way of raw material. "It's hopeless work enough without wasting time on the regular 'hooker'."

It was her occasional slang probably more than her attitude towards her work which attracted June. Certainly Miss Prince was unusual. She didn't regard her charges sentimentally as fallen women as the other probation officers did. Education, not religion, was her panacea for the social evil.

After she had heard Miss Prince use the word 'hooker' she asked to be allowed to visit her home to write a story on it for the paper. An invitation to lunch was the result and June went up there the next afternoon.

Somewhere around Fiftieth Street the island of Manhattan juts out into the East River and forms a little promontory across which a side street runs for two blocks. If you absent-mindedly walked for more than two blocks in either direction you would find yourself walking through some iron railings, down a steep cliff and into the river.

There are prim brownstone houses on either side of the street and it is a stark, plain unprepossessing place, at first view. There are no lawns, no trees to soften its hard outlines. But all the houses on the east side of the street have back gardens with lilac and syringa bushes and beds of early purple orchids and lilies of the valley. If you look over the back fences of these yards you will see that on this side, too, the land slopes down in a steep cliff.

It isn't a city-like cliff at all. It is fascinatingly irregular, offering many nooks and crannies for small boys' foothold. If you climb down you will find that there is a natural beach extending for two blocks. It is a narrow beach, but it is not too narrow to sit there even when the big steamships and freighters pass and the waves wash in.

Before June pulled on the bell of number twenty-seven she walked up and down the street (for she was early) charmed with this quiet haven where there was not a sound of trolley car or a rumbling elevated train. The tall, quiet houses seemed to be hiding with their skirts, and protecting with their tapering railing fingers, that little beach. All the rest of the east shore of Manhattan had been gobbled by great corpse-like buildings and rotten creaking docks that jutted out like the tentacles of some mighty insect into the river.

As June described the place to Adele–"It's four stories high counting the basement where the kitchen and dining-room are. You've seen some of the tea rooms in Greenwich Village. That's exactly what this kitchen and dining-room are like. Painted to indulge a kindergarten whim, and all bright and shining. The kitchen is immense and old-fashioned with a huge stove that fits into what once was a fireplace. There's an enormous white sink and plenty of hot water to make the housework easy because the girls divide it up among themselves, taking turns at kitchen police the way they do in the army. The tables in the dining-room are long and painted blue and have blue runners down the middle of them and yellow curtains at the windows and there's a fireplace at one side that makes the room even more cheerful.

"On the first floor there's a big sitting-room and sun parlor facing the river with a grate fire there too and couches and easy chairs and books and a piano and phonograph and every night the girls play ragtime until ten o'clock and then they all sing Nunc Dimittis before they go to bed. The big front room belongs to Miss Prince and her assistant, and they share it so they'll have more room for girls. All the lovely furnishings go in the sun parlor and sitting-room for the girls.

"On the two upper floors the rooms have been turned into dormitories and it's as though there were upper and lower berths. One hall bedroom has been made into a nursery and they have two new babies. Two other girls are going to have babies. One of them comes from a small country town and before she met Miss Prince she was going to commit suicide.

"Down the street Miss Prince also keeps a house which has been made over into a nursery for babies whose mothers have to go to work. She only charges ten cents a day.

"Who supports the homes? Miss Prince herself. Every day she goes out among rich friends (she seems to have a lot of them) and collects money and clothes and food, free tuition to business colleges, anything that she can use to go on with her work. Her idea is to start a whole chain of these homes with an idea to do away with prisons."

"Rather hopeless in this generation, I should think," judged Mother Grace.

That was the trouble, June decided–the hopelessness of it all. For every girl who turned out well, there were five who went back to the cabarets and eventually the streets. Miss Prince confessed it herself, acknowledged the apparent futility of any kind of social work, but saw no reason why that should prevent people from doing what they could.

And just when June began to mourn the futility of all endeavor, birth control was given to her for an assignment and through her newspaper work she was able to fling herself into another cause and forget the fallen women.

Of course birth control would solve all the troubles in the world. With birth control you wouldn't have any more children than you could afford to support and educate. Economic necessity would no longer be an excuse for the woman of the streets; and with education, a moral and social sense would be developed. No more poverty. And when women were not forced to have more than two children, they would have time to look into the laws. There would be a better

educational system and a better industrial system. Given two children instead of nine and there was room for the maternal instinct to work. All you need is birth control.

These were the things June wrote for her paper every day when she had attended meetings where the leaders of the Birth Control League spoke. A clinic had been started somewhere around Havemeyer Street in Brooklyn and there was daily expectation that a raid would take place. June had to keep her eye on it all day. Sure enough, there was a raid and the next development was the trial of Edith Burns, a trained nurse and worker in the movement.

Then came those thrilling days after Mrs. Burns had been taken to Blackwell's Island and started her hunger and thirst strike. The first prisoner in America, the Clarion pointed out, to hunger strike for a cause. Forcible feeding began and June found an English suffragist who had hunger struck in a London jail and wrote a column on how it felt to be forcibly fed. Even the capitalist press was aroused and printed headlines on the condition of Edith Burns. One afternoon she was dying. The next afternoon the jail doctors vehemently denied the report. As a matter of fact, they said, it was all bluff and the prisoner had probably secreted cakes of chocolate on her person when entering the jail with the intention to strike. Five days and there were rumors of brutal treatment. Four men, the papers reported, had held the frail little woman to the bed while nourishment was being poured down her throat through a tube. They clamored for the governor to take action and pardon her. Birth control as an issue was disregarded. The important fact was than an American woman was being brutally treated by jail authorities and it was up to the chivalric American press to object. These things might take place in England, but not in New York. Here the Anglo-phobes had their chance.

Then the governor signed the pardon and dark rumors went around that clemency had come too late. There was a mad rush among the reporters to see who could get the first interview from the released prisoner, who would take her dying words.

"She's not to be released until eleven to-night," the Sun reporter said. "That'll just give us time to [missing text in original]

"That's the trouble. Can we get ahold of her¿'

"Well, there's four of us. We'll work together and if one gets the story first, he's to call up the others when he gets back to the office."

One reporter chose the Twenty-third Street ferry house where the Department of Correction landed their prisoners from the island. Another took the Fifty-ninth Street ferry. Another heard Mrs. Burns was to be brought to the Central Hospital and took the train uptown.

"And I've got a hunch on sticking around her home," decided June, and proceeded to the artistic little apartment on the west side.

Mrs. Burns had several rooms in an old house which had lately been redecorated and fitted with modern improvements and rented out as studios to artists. She had furnished them very tastefully. Pongee curtains, a shade darker than the ivory tinted walls hung at the windows. The huge couch at one side of the room, covered with brown corduroy, served also as a bed. Between the couch and the

wall was a bookcase stacked with modern poets, sets of Wells, Conrad and Hardy, books on nursing and several sociological works. There was a grate fire opposite the couch, several easy chairs, a low phonograph and cabinet of records. There were no pictures on the walls.

June, as a radical and reporter for the socialist press, was treated with more familiarity than other reporters and when she lifted the brass knocker that night, she was ushered into that more intimate room of Mrs. Burns. Mr. Waldor, the long-haired young poet whom she had met at Joel's, was there alone, dismally trying to arrange huge bunches of yellow daffodils in green vases. Having failed in trying to establish a magazine of new verse he was at present acting as secretary to the Birth Control League.

"I wish I were a madrigal," he murmured wistfully as he accepted June's offer of help.

"I wish I were a madrigal
Upon a crimson stem.
I'd ask the yellow daffodils
The how and why and when."

Or do you like this–

"Oh, if I were a madrigal
Upon a crimson stem
I'd lean down o'er the daffodils
And yerl around at them."

"Don't think much of either," June decided. "You've been drinking."

"Miss Henreddy, if you knew how my heart bleeds for that noble woman who has sacrificed her life for the cause–"

"Good Lord, you don't mean to say that she's dead," June burst out, more overcome at the idea of a big exclusive story for the paper than with pity for the fate of Edith Burns.

"No, but she's dying."

"Rot! That's newspaper talk. You know she isn't dying. You don't really think she's seriously ill, do you?"

"According to the reports of her doctors, she is in a very serious condition," said the young poet with dignity.

"Yes, and both of her doctors are radicals and will give out misleading reports for the benefit of the League. The newspapers are making a big story of it just because there isn't a murder on hand to serve up in headlines every night. I don't think five days of hunger-striking could hurt anybody. The only way she's suffered is from forcible feeding and that must be uncomfortable to say the least. Use you common sense, Waldor, if you have any. And you know she's going to be brought here tonight rather than to any hospital. Otherwise why would you be here making a fire and putting daffodils around?"

"Where are the other reporters?" he asked with a gleam of sense that June had asked for.

June told him. "And don't try any of your sob tactics on me, because you know I quote you and the doctors with the understanding that you're faking. Save that for the capitalist press."

Impatiently, June turned to the phonograph and the bookcase. She hoped to goodness Mrs. Burns would arrive on time so that she could telephone the story to the paper before twelve. She had no patience with poets or with long hair. And she had no patience with the League when they over-reached themselves in providing sensational stories for the press. She thought of the other three reporters tramping around in the cold, waiting for a first interview with Mrs. Burns.

Two hours passed and she was beginning to philosophize on the idiocy of modern newspaper work, to wonder whether it were not rather debasing work, when she heard a taxi hooting downstairs. Immediately she was as full of glee as a child playing a game. She raced with Waldor down the stairs, raced across the curb to the taxi where the two doctors who were on the case were helping Mrs. Burns, somewhat pale and languid, out of the car. She got her interview in three sentences (the most interesting one of which was that Mrs. Burns' teeth had been knocked out while being forcibly fed) and raced to the telephone across the street. It was ten minutes to twelve and she had been just in time.

And then June was hit by a police club. That was the next exciting event in her life as a reporter. The surprising thing, she discovered, was that you could enter into the spirit of the mob even when [missing text in original] descended against her ribs with a hollow sound did not call up any resentment in her breast. She felt it, but it did not hurt. She felt it, but it did not disturb in any way the curious, detached, mad feeling that flowed through her veins as the crowd seethed and shouted and fought. June looked at the policeman who had used the club and perceived that he could see but dimly through a veil of blood that clouded his eyes. He had a cut across his forehead. At the moment of the blow, as she looked up at him, he smeared the blood from one eye and glared forth like one of the giants that Jack killed.

"Excuse me," he said politely, "I can't see." And went on clubbing at the crowd to keep them from obstructing the patrol wagons which were gradually being filled. The crowd continued to surge and howl.

That it seemed was all they could do and after June realized that they couldn't shout themselves to a more bloodthirsty pitch and she could not push through to see the fighting that was going on, she lost her enthusiasm and turned to the bloody policeman.

This time, he could see the police card that was pinned to the front of her coat and allowed her to stand at the wagon and survey the prisoners as they were pushed through the crowd and handed in. It was impossible to find out names. There were too many of them. One after another, five wagons drew up, received their load and departed. When no more arrests were made, the crowd dispersed. June found time to observe from her position of vantage that nine-tenths of the prisoners were well-dressed youths, quite totteringly drunk. By their tattered American flags they were in favor of the war which was to be voted on the next day. It was harder to tell which were pacifists and which bystanders who had become involved.

But it was easy enough to complete the story by calling up the Baltimore police station where the prisoners had been taken. There she found that five were

professed pacifists. The captain was affable enough to tell her that most of the crowd had been enthusiastic young city men of reliable parentage who had been released on cognizance.

"My dear," she told her mother, "it was just fun. It was like a holiday or a picnic and I'm tickled to death that I got the assignment. There were four young women in the party and about fifteen young men, all from Columbia, but me." (It was when she had returned to New York and was relating the exciting adventure. She had left on such short notice that there was not even time to telephone her mother that she was going to leave the city for several days. She just arrived at the office in the morning, found a note there from Ivan to take the Chinatown bus at Union Square and go to Washington.)

"The two drivers of the bus were such a strange contrast to the students who were so enthusiastic. It seemed to me that they typified the American people. They were just ordinary bus drivers and didn't have any conviction one way or the other. Their usual work every day is to station themselves on the corner of Thirty-fourth Street and Broadway and make up excursions of sight-seers. And here they were hired for this funny job.

"We rolled out of New York, crossed the river on a ferry and went through Newark with placards all over the car demanding peace. Some people cheered, but most of them were indifferent. They didn't seem to care whether war were declared the next day or not. And everywhere we'd stop and some of the students would make speeches in favor of peace. Or at least try to make speeches. Most of the time, a policeman would come along and tell us to move on. They were very good-natured about it and accepted it as a lark.

"We stayed in Philadelphia the first night and had a long, long drive the next day to get to Baltimore that evening. We all were sunburned and our lips got chapped and we had lunch at a farmhouse. A professor from Columbia chaperoned the party and paid all the bills.

"And then Baltimore and the riot. After that it seemed that the declaration of war on Monday was an anti-climax–at least in personal experience. It's really too huge to realize, even to think about.

"I was treated as a person of authority because I had to send stories by telegraph once or twice every day–on the condition of the countryside on the brink of the declaration of war. Most of it was imaginative, because the country people were all quite solid, too solid even to care whether we were rabidly pacifists or not. And then we got to Washington, too worn out and dirty to care whether war was declared and that was the end of the assignment."

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