

Here's a Home In Which Girls May Bury Past Woes

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Miss Young cares for Homeless Refugee Women in Home without Capital "H"

Summary: Describes the caring hospitality of a home for women released from jail. , (DDLW #90)

There is a delightful, homelike dwelling on the corner of Beekman Place and Fiftieth Street, where girls from Blackwells Island, Bedford Reformatory and Queens County Jail are taken in after they have served their sentences and are allowed to recuperate.

According to stories given out by Mrs. Ethel Byrne and Margaret Sanger, birth control advocates who have recently had practical experience in these matters, a period for mental and physical recreation is needed after a definite or indefinite sentence in our prisons.

Miss Virginia Young, an Episcopalian deaconess, has charge of the house. There is no name for the dwelling. It is not termed House with a capital letter or a House for Fallen Women. It is merely a rooming house. Girls who have no money live there, rent free, until they can get a position and many of them stay on after they begin to work and pay one-half their wages for their room and board. Thus, a girl who earns eight dollars a week, pays four toward the expenses of the house and the rest, she keeps for herself.

Questions? No. Not Here

There are no questions asked of the women who enter there. If they want to tell their stories, they are free to do so. Any girl without a home is taken in, whether she has served a prison sentence or not. Because most girls in the City of New York do not know of such a dwelling house, the majority of the occupants are those who have served a term. Most of the girls were sentenced for soliciting, for using dope or for drinking.

I visited the house last night after supper. Down in the basement, which had the cozy old-fashioned look of the Mad Hatter in Greenwich Village, a girl was setting the tables for this morning's breakfast. There were large iron antique lamps in the center of each table; there was blue and white linoleum on the floor and quaint blue and white paper on the wall. The ceiling was low.

In a large and cheery kitchen one woman was mixing dough for today's bread and a young girl was washing out a shirtwaist. Her hair was bobbed and surrounded her face bushily.

"I cut my hair," she said, "because I had bleached it and it was getting all faded. See, it's all turning brown again, ain't it? Guess I'll let it grow." She smiled as she rinsed her waist deftly.

Upstairs the girls were singing hymns in the living room which faces the East River. Out of the French window you could see the river boats flickering up and down stream and occasionally tooting hoarsely. It was all dark and wet and murky outside but within there was a grate fire with twenty or so happy looking girls clustering around it. There had been a Valentine Party and all of them had hearts and cupids and things pinned on them.

From Blackwells to Altar

On the way upstairs to visit the bedrooms, Miss Young told me about some of the girls. "We had a wedding here a week ago," she said. "Did you notice that girl sitting on the couch beside the bright-faced Italian boy? She had been at Blackwells Island for soliciting and she was termed incorrigible there. She has scars all over her hands from breaking windows. I don't know how many times she was in the cooler for it. She came here 14 months ago and, at first, she hated all of us but she stayed until she got some work. Then, when she got a job, she still stayed. She liked it so, she couldn't go. She had made up her mind that she was going to go straight and she did.

"Then one day on her way to work she met this young Italian that you saw downstairs. They fell in love at first sight. The next week the boy came to me and asked me if he could keep company with her. She had told him her story and where she was staying. The outcome was that they got married, and she still comes back every week or so to visit the rest of the girls. They all come back at some time or another.

Babies Happy There Too

Upstairs, the dainty dormitories and single rooms hold not only twenty-six young girls, but three small babies. One of them was awake and cooing. All you could see of it in the mass of covers was a snub nose and a gurgly mouth that bubbled blissfully.

Another girl is expecting a baby soon. She came some weeks ago from a distant city; with no questions, no rebukes, no lecturing, she was taken in and made to feel at home and to wait for her child with joy instead of sorrow.

Not far away, a Jewish home for girls has been started and run on the same line as Miss Young's. "The time will come," said Miss Young, "when homes of this character will be the norm and not the exception."