

CALL'S DIET SQUAD FIGHTS HARD AGAINST SOLITUDE OF TEEMING CITY

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Everyone in Tenement Street Can talk but She—the Cats, Dogs, Kids and Even
the Signs—She Talks, Anyway—Makes Friends of an Exile.

Dull monotony and yet more dull monotony in the way of food. How can one afford anything but monotonies in the way of food on a five-dollar a week salary? Potato soup and rice still predominate in the menu of the diet squad, only instead of cooking them separate and wasting time, I cook them together. Gradually I am coming to combine a crumbled roll and butter with the soup. Then, when the food is all in one plate, I can eat and read at the same time with no disastrous results.

The problem that presents itself to me is how shall I mix in the inevitable cup of cocoa without spoiling the taste. It is becoming tiresome drinking a whole quart of milk a day. But the charities insist that I must to obtain sufficient calories.

A Grunt Dialogue

Mrs. Janowitz came into my room the other day and watched me cook my supper. She was silent usually around me, as we speak different languages. Our talk is all in grunts and gestures. Thus:

She—“Ugh.” (Shrugs her shoulder, sneers and grabs the knife with which I am peeling a potato and with swift strokes, peels the vegetable in a second.)

Me—“Yah! Slow! Thanks!”

She—(pointing to potato, stove and milk) “Huh?”

Me—“Soup.”

Then with many gestures and little crows of delight, she runs to the kitchen and brings me a bit of parsley and pepper, and a piece of home made cake. I grunt and crow and grin, and otherwise express my appreciation. This is our only conversation for days at a time. When I awake in the morning, I hear the children singing or crying or talking and when I come back to my supper at night, I hear the man in the next tenement fighting with his wife and swearing at his children. The cats keep up a continual line of conversation among themselves

and the babies that throng the stairs. Every animate and inanimate object around can talk but me.

Even the furnished room and shop signs hang drearily in the wind as I come home late at night, and the papers rustle in the deserted streets. One cannot read poetry aloud in a room with blank, silent walls. And even salmon pink scenery becomes depressing. Would that there were a mouse in the room!

For the sake of some one to talk to, for the sake of some company, I stop and pay a penny for chewing gum every night at a soda stand at Pike Street, just as the man is closing. I do not want the chewing gum. I want to talk. The man at the stand wants to talk too, evidently, so we have become friends. He came over from Russia five years ago, yet he can speak the English language very clearly. And he pours into my sympathetic ears a long soliloquy about the Russian Government and the United States government and the industrial war that is coming. He has a very kind heart.

Man Moved to Tears

The tears came into his eyes as he told me how he had worked in a munition factory but had to give it up when the war began for thinking of the poor devils that were being killed.

There is the little old woman that I walked with for an hour one night at 1 o'clock, while she was looking and calling up and down the street for her boy. But who hasn't found him yet, and, because I meet her often, I have come to the conclusion that she is "cracked."

The policeman on the corner of Cherry street exchanges friendly greeting with me every night. And the cat on the tenement stairs just before I go up, the third flight, always meows inquiringly as I come in.

There are 60,000 women boarding alone in the city of New York, and the majority of them are underpaid, underfed and cheerless. They haven't even the nerve to talk revolution to the Russian at the corner soda stand or to exchange remarks with the policeman on his beat. God pity them!