

DOES HEAVEN PROTECT WORKING GIRL? TAXI, COP, MATRON, ANSWER

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The police department of the city of New York is the most efficient protective body in the United States, yet they turn a young girl out into the streets at 3 o'clock in the morning and will not allow her the protection of the station houses.

I lost the key of my rooming house last Sunday morning at 2 o'clock, after I had finished work. Everybody is prone to lose keys and things, so what happened to me might happen to any working girl in the city of New York. Around the corner on Madison street, down on the lower east side, there is a police station that I have passed often and [illegible] me to it. I felt awfully desolate and sleepy and pathetic and alone - in fact, just as a poor "working goil" is supposed to feel as she walks the city streets at night. There wasn't a soul in sight, as the dance halls with their cheering strains are several blocks further uptown. Only cats and [illegible], rocking Madison street car broke the silence.

Females Ain't Allowed The station house (of the 7th precinct) felt warm and comforting as I opened the door. I spoke up hopefully to the man at the desk. "I've lost my key," I said. "And I've rung and rung and rung and nobody answers. May I sit in here till morning? Its's awfully cold out and I really wouldn't like to sit on a doorstep all night." I thought this would touch his heart sure, but the man behind the desk, blinked one sleepy eye, chewed his pen and said decidedly:

"We ain't allowed to have no females in here because we ain't got no matron."

Some further chewing on his part. Then the other man who sat behind the other desk spoke up. "I'll call up the two nearest station houses and ask them if they can accommodate you, miss." He did. They couldn't.

"Where yuh live?" asked the first man. "In a private house? That's unfortoonate, very unfortoonate. If it was a tenement we could use some key or other and get you in. Well there's a matron over at Charles street. Take an 8th street car over at Delancey and Clinton and git off at Umdghiby" - The words died away, lost in his moustache and the pen that he was chewing. As no more attention was paid to me and my forlorn countenance, I "went drearily out into the night."

—*Down Goes the Inebriate*—

Clinton is a very cheerful street on Saturday night and early Sunday morning. I had to dodge my may between men lost in the joys of alcohol. Men and girls stood before the dance halls

and flirted and reparteed. While I watched one group who were arguing gaily I heard a dull thud. An inebriate who had been tottering my way had fallen down six steps into a cellar. The dull thud, his gasping snores and the darkness of the cellar all frightened and sickened me, but because he had probably been trying to get out of my way and had miscalculated distances, I felt in a sense responsible. So I went down to pull him to an upright posture. His head was at the foot and his feet somewhere at the head of the steps, and I was afraid of the effects of this position. Otherwise I would have fled with maidenly timidity.

In righting him I discovered that his head was bleeding profusely, so I had to call a policeman. He jerked him up and shook him a bit, pushed and prodded the wound on his head and with the remark, "That nothing," sent him on his way.

So She "Hands Him One" Across the street the argument increased. One militant young woman, with her hair in dips and a loud fox fur around her neck, yelled, "Shut up or I'll hand you one!" I paused to await results. As the fellow she was with did not shut up, she stamped her foot and swatted him. He reciprocated, but not in kind: catlike, he spat at her. Don Quixotes and Cyrano de Bergeracs are not lacking even in Clinton street. Another youth came to the rescue with a resounding blow, then ran down the street with a gang at his heels. I was too weary to join pursuit, so meandered on.

After waiting half an hour, I finally got a car, but, due to the fact that I was unable to separate words, moustache and pen, I didn't know where to get off. I looked out of the bleary, misty window and said "Eeny, meeny, miny, mo" to all the streets, and got off at the street designated by fate. But it wasn't the right one, and I had to wander desultorily for blocks, in fear and trembling all the while that some scrawny hand would reach up from some cellar and grab me. At last I saw the cheerful lights of the police station.

I felt that my nose was red and that my hair was dragging around my ears, and, gee! but my feet were cold, but none of these facts seemed to impress the lieutenant behind the desk.

Place Only for Prisoners

"We have a matron here, yes," he said, gruffly. "But there are no accommodations, except for prisoners. Now, if you were a man, we could put you in a chair in the corner. But we can't have young girls sitting around here. We have no authority for it. Here's the matron. Tell her your troubles."

But the matron had no cheer to offer. "We have lots of girls come here," she said, helplessly, "but we can't take them in. The only place that I could put you is in my room upstairs, and there are things there that do not belong to me. I don't know who you are, you see."

I shuffled my cold feet, clutched my coat closer around me and looked at her appealingly. "I'll tell you," she said brightly, "you can go down to the ferry house and sit there till morning. It's nice and warm and you only have to pay 3 cents to get in, and, if you go to the ladies' waiting room, no one will come near you."

Tries Subway Instead

I turned hopelessly toward the door. The breeze was all from the river, so I turned my steps subwaywardly and got on the first train that came along, which happened to be a Van Cortland. It was 4 o'clock by this time, but the crowds were still coming from the theater,

dance and beer garden. Even the antics of a 200-pound baby doll across the aisle did not keep me awake. Propped up between a fat man with a newspaper and a woman with a baby, I snoozed uncomfortably till we got to the end of the line. Even the distorted slumber that I had enjoyed for the last hour was preferable to further adventure, so when I went out on the platform I had fully decided to ride back to the city. But a bleary, sodden man spoke to me leeringly on the platform. Everybody was hastening to the car. Fearing to be left alone on the platform, I went with the crowd and took the surface car up to Getty square, thus eluding my bacchantic – is that the word? – pursuer.

In a lunchroom there I dined royally on pancakes and coffee. Breakfasting too long, I just missed the car to take me back to the subway. Cold gleams of day, shone down. Newsboys and two taxicab drivers were stamping up and down the sidewalk, trying to keep warm by blowing their fingers. A policeman standing near was talking to them familiarly, calling them by their first names.

“When is the next car to the subway?,” I asked, chatteringly.

“Twenty minutes,” he said. “Take one of these taxis, why don’t you? They’ll get you down to the subway for 10 cents.”

Despite the fact that an efficient police department had indifferently chucked me out into the cold that night, I trustfully entered the taxi. A guardian of the peace had referred me to it, although my brain was chock full of warnings against lonely girls, and automobiles, and dissolute drivers.

*Settled comfortably in the corner, I closed my eyes. When I opened them 10 minutes later and peered out I saw that we had departed from the road to the subway, had changed our direction entirely, in fact, and were speeding up the Hudson river.

In some consternation I rapped on the window of the taxi. “Say,” I shouted, “I want to go to the subway!”*

As he turned around to answer me, I saw that he was only a child. He was a typical street tough of about 15, with a dirty face and black hair and blue eyes. He wore about three sweaters under his ragged coat, and all were pinned close under his chin with a safety pin.

“I’m treating yuh to a ride,” he called out. “Be a sport cantcha?” At further protest on my part, “Calm down, me goil, calm down. I’m taking yuh up to the underwoild of Yonkers. Sit back and enjoy yourself.”

By this time we were outside of the city. I had a police whistle in my pocket, but why whistle to trees and shrubs and an icy river, I reasoned. The car was going too fast to jump out, so I had to “sit back and enjoy myself.” I tried to do so philosophically, but it was hard work.

Stops at Lonely Graveyard At last, opposite a Jewish cemetery that was too desolate-looking for ghosts even, the young chauffeur stopped the car and got out. As he came in one door of the back, I went out the other.

“Wasn’t that a glorious ride?” I said. “Now, let’s go back.” And I hopped up and down to keep warm. There was not a house nor a soul in sight. Only a bird, far off in the distance, called out shrilly. The branches of the trees by the road creaked as the wind bit them.

“Come on in here and give us a kiss, and I’ll take you back.”

I refused.

“Well whatcha think I brought you up here for, huh? Charity? Come on. Give us a kiss. Will yuh?”

Further refusal on my part. He misinterpreted my motives – suspected me of coyness, in fact. So he tried the caveman stunt. As he grabbed hold of me, I bit him as hard as I could. And, although I felt dreadfully sorry at seeing the blood on his hand, I preserved a calm and cold exterior.

“Wild cat!” he hissed. “You can walk back.”

“Good-bye,” I said sweetly, and started back along the road. I had gone about an eighth of a mile when he caught up with me. “Come on, get in. I ain’t that kind of guy. I won’t make you walk, although I ought to.”

Trustfully I got in the front seat and we rode back to the subway. I would have preferred silence, but the ride was accompanied by outbursts of philosophy on the part of the chauffeur.

“Whatcha so stingy for, huh? Afraid, huh? You’ll die some day and then the worms’ll eatcha. Why can’t yuh give a feller a little of whatcha got, huh?”

“You talk like Omar Khayyam.”

“Quit your kidding.”

To stop the flow of profanity and argument I gave a moral lecture during the remainder of the ride, which was greeted with a disgusted silence. Then, as he stopped the car, “Kiss me, won’t you, kid?”

“Heaven will protect the working girl,” I hummed all the way back to civilization. And it seemed to me the lieutenant with the moustache and much-chewed pen who sits behind the desk at the Seventh precinct station house, and the matron who sits comfortably all night by the stove crocheting “hug-me-tights,” piously took up the refrain. Yes, “heaven will protect the working girl.”