

April 12, 1933

for the keyhole. She wanted all that gas to stay swirling right in her room, and enter her lungs, and force out the drab life from her pretty body. No other way.

Then panic struck her, as it does every victim of self-pity who tries to end his worthless life. What was she doing? This was life she was leaving, not merely something she could order back again. No postponement of life! Once it was gone, there could be no more. And what was death? Was there a hell? Or a heaven, on the other side? Or was it just black senselessness, a soul killed with its containing shell? And life; it had been pleasant, so sensuous, so..... yes, so sweet.

But had it? No. Humanity had teamed together to form an intricate system of civilization, and that civilization had



"You're fired! Get Out!" he bawled.

stifled her to death. Had stamped out her life because of one of its flaws. She was a martyr. Her life was snuffed because of the world's incongruities. She was doomed. And life? Would have to be lost. It was the only way.

Quickly, before she could change from this frame of mind, she gulped the powder, dry. It stung her mouth a little, so she put her lips to the hydrant and sucked in its cool moisture. Now to write some kind of a note. Who to? To her landlady, to whom she owed a month's rent. What to say? Simply that she could not get employment, and that she had done it as a sacrifice to let one other person in this world take the place that she might have filled one day, had life not treated her so muddily. Oh yes—and that she hated to muss her place up and cause the trouble, but would she forgive? Yes, that would touch her. To touch a landlady is quite a feat—but so is committing suicide.

The powder was acting fast. A dull hum, which grew in volume, sounded in her ears. Legs and arms were getting limp and light. Her head felt like a bubble. She arose from the table, dropped her pencil and raced for that stove on the other side of the room. She must get there before those powerful powders worked.

She turned on all four burners, and was greeted with the faintly-scented gas arising from the iron jets. The powders were good; they worked fast. Sleep and death. Death and sleep. What was the difference? She must lie down now, before she fell, face down. She rolled her head to one side, to breathe better; to breathe the poisoned air better. She could not smell it over here yet, but it would come—would come. She felt pleasantly restful and strangely unreal, as if she were floating in the air. The little gas jets were making the hiss—the hiss—the—

If Mr. Berk had not decided to put off his 'phoning until tomorrow morning Freida would not have spent the night in that room where the gas fumes were rising, twirling, curling, swirling. But after he decided that he could not get along without the gum-chewing little Freida as his stenographer, he delayed in calling her to inform her of his decision.

This change of heart was due to the attempts of breaking in several new girls who showed inferior intellect to Freida. They could not grasp the complicated and entirely different system of his, could not keep his files straight. Mr. Berk was a methodical man; he liked to have everything in order. When others failed to measure up to the standards of Freida, Berk came to miss his erstwhile secretary, stenographer, and file-clerk. It took him only three days to discover all this, and he was for getting a capable worker back at all speed.

But as his hand grasped for that telephone at five-fifteen o'clock and Freida was even then trying the gas jet out, he decided to wait until morning. Another night of fearsome uncertainty would do the little wag good, he thought. And the morning would be soon enough. And so Mr. Berk drew his hand away from the instrument, and ten minutes later Freida was dropping off into the dreamless oblivion, to spend the night in that room where the gas fumes were swirling.

The next thing Freida was conscious of was a grim-faced doctor working over her laboriously. She awoke with a severe headache and painfully smarting eyes. Sluggishly, painfully, she pulled herself upright on the bed and saw—the same world she had tried to leave. There was the landlady over by the door, sniffing into a handkerchief and kicking the rags that had been under the door into a corner. The doctor worked on.

"An overdose of some sleeping drug," he said.

Freida pieced the fragments of this scene together and gathered that the landlady had smelled the gas and found her there, stifled. Then the doctor had been summoned, and he had brought her back to life. She fell back on the bed and groaned. She gazed at the stove; the gas had been turped off. Morning sunlight streamed through the windows. The doctor was regarding her in silence, contempt showed on his face. She looked at him quizzically, plainly puzzled by her escape from death. How could they bring one back to life from asphyxiation? Modern science and medicine were wonderful. Too wonderful, she thought cynically.

"It was a good job", remarked the doctor sarcastically. "Very good, indeed, but you forgot to put the windows down."

