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JANUARY, 1917

THE NEWS



HE buzzer boomed, and instantly the clang
Of hammers dropped, just as the fendered
 bow
Bumped with soft splash against the wharf;
 though now
Again within the Yard a hammer rang—
A solitary hammer striking steel
Somewhere aloft—and strangely, stridently
Echoed as though it struck the steely sky—
The low, cold, steely sky.

 She seemed to feel
That hammer in her heart—blow after blow
In a strange clanging hollow seemed to strike
Monotonous, unrelenting, cruel-like,
Her heart that such a little while ago
Had been so full, so happy with its news
Scarce uttered even to itself.

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

It stopped,
That dreadful hammer. And the silence dropped
Again a moment. Then a clatter of shoes
And murmur of voices as the men trooped out:
And as each wife with basket and hot can
Hurried towards the gate to meet her man,
She too ran forward, and then stood in doubt
Because among them all she could not see
The face that usually was first of all
To meet her eyes.

Against the grimy wall
That towered black above her to the sky,
With trembling knuckles to the cold stone pressed
Till the grit seemed to eat into the bone,
And her stretched arm to shake the solid stone,
She stood, and strove to calm her troubled breast—
Her breast, whose trouble of strange happiness,
So sweet and so miraculous as she
Had stood among the chattering company
Upon the ferry-boat, to strange distress
Was changed. An unknown terror seemed to lie
For her behind that wall, so cold and hard
And black above her, in the unseen Yard,
Dreadfully quiet now.

Then with a sigh
Of glad relief she ran towards the gate
As he came slowly out, the last of all.

The News

The terror of the hammer and the wall
Fell from her as, a woman to her mate,
She moved with happy heart and smile of greeting—
A young and happy wife whose only thought
Was whether he would like the food she'd brought,
Whose one desire, to watch her husband eating.

With a grave smile he took his bait from her,
And then without a word they moved away,
To where some grimy baulks of timber lay
Beside the river, and 'twas quieter
Than in the crowd of munching, squatting men
And chattering wives and children. As he eat,
With absent eyes upon the river set,
She chattered too a little now and then
Of household happenings; and then silently
They sat and watched the grimy-flowing stream,
Dazed by the stunning din of hissing steam
Escaping from an anchored boat hard by;
Each busy with their own thoughts, who till now
Had shared each thought, each feeling, speaking out
Easily, eagerly, without a doubt,
As innocent, happy children, anyhow,
The innermost secrets of their wedded life.
So, as the dinner hour went swiftly by,
They sat there for the first time, troubled, shy—
A silent husband a silent wife.

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

But she was only troubled by excess
Of happiness; and as she watched the stream,
She looked upon her life as in a dream,
Recalling all its tale of happiness
Unbroken and unshadowed, since she'd met
Her man the first time, eighteen months ago. . . .

A keen blue day with sudden flaws of snow
And sudden sunshine, when she first had set
Her wondering eyes upon him—gaily clad
For football in a jersey green and red;
Knees bare beneath white shorts, his curly head
Wind-blown and wet—and knew him for her lad.
He strode towards her down the windy street—
The wet gray pavements flashing sudden gold
And gold the unending coils of smoke that rolled
Unceasingly overhead, fired by a fleet
Wild glint of glancing sunlight. On he came
Beside her brother—still a raw uncouth
Young hobbledehoy—a strapping mettled youth
In the first pride of manhood, that wild flame
Touching his hair to fire, his cheeks aglow
With the sharp stinging wind, his arms aswing:
And as she watched, she felt the tingling sting
Of flying flakes, and in a whirl of snow
A moment he was hidden from her sight.
It passed, and then before she was aware,
With white flakes powdering his ruddy hair

The News

He stood before her, laughing in the light,
In all his bravery of red and green
Snow-sprinkled. And she laughed, too; in the sun
They laughed: and in that laughter they were one.

Now, as with kindled eyes on the unseen
Gray river she sat gazing, she again
Lived through that moment in a golden dream. . . .
And then quite suddenly she saw the stream
Distinct in its cold grimy flowing. Then
The present with its deeper happiness
Thrilled her afresh: this wonder strange and new;
This dream in her young body coming true—
Incredible, yet certain none the less;
This news, scarce broken to herself, that she
Must break to him. She longed to see his eyes
Kindle to hear it, happy with surprise
When she should break it to him presently.

But she must wait a while yet. Still too strange,
Too wonderful for words, she could not share
Even with him her secret. He sat there
So quietly, little dreaming of the change
That had come over her. But when he knew!—
For he was always one for bairns, was John,
And this would be his own, their own. There shone
A strange new light on all since this was true.
All, all seemed strange: the river and the shore,

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

The barges and the wharves with timber piled,
And all her world familiar from a child,
Was as a world she'd never seen before.

And he too sat with eyes upon the stream,
Remembering that day when first the light
Of her young eyes, with laughter sparkling bright,
Kindled to his; and as he caught the gleam
The life within him quickened suddenly
To fire, and in a world of golden laughter
They stood alone together; and then after,
When he was playing with his mates and he
Hurtled headlong towards the goal, he knew
Her eyes were on him; and for her alone,
Who had the merriest eyes he'd ever known
He played that afternoon. Though until then
He'd only played to please himself, somehow
She seemed to have a hold upon him. Now,
No longer a boy, a man among grown men,
He'd never have a thought apart from her,
From her, his mate. . . .

And then that golden night
When, in a whirl of melody and light,
Her merry brown eyes flashing merrier,
They rode together in a gilded car
That seemed to roll forever round and round,
In a blind blaze of light and blare of sound,
For ever and for ever, till afar

The News

It seemed to bear them from the surging throng
Of lads and lasses happy in release
From the week's work in yards and factories—
For ever through a land of light and song
While they sat, rapt in silence, hand in hand,
And looked into each other's merry eyes:
They two, together, whirled through Paradise,
A golden glittering, unearthly land;
A land where light and melody were one;
And melody and light, a golden fire
That ran through their young bodies; and desire,
A golden music streaming from the sun,
Filling their veins with golden melody
And singing fire . . .

And then when quiet fell
And they together, with so much to tell,
So much to tell each other instantly,
Left the hot throng and roar and glare behind,
Seeking the darker streets, and stood at last
In a dark lane where footsteps seldom passed—
Lit by a far lamp and one glowing blind
That seemed to make the darkness yet more dark
Between the cliffs of houses, black and high,
That soared above them to the starry sky,
A deep blue sky where spark on fiery spark
The stars for them were kindled, as they raised
Their eyes in new-born wonder to the night;
And in a solitude of cold starlight

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

They stood alone together, hushed, and gazed
Into each other's eyes until speech came:
And underneath the stars they talked and talked. . . .

Then he remembered how they two had walked
Along a beach that was one golden flame
Of yellow sand beside a flame-blue sea—
The day they wedded, that strange day of dream,
One flame of blue and gold. . . .

The murky stream

Flowed once again before his eyes, and he
Dropped back into the present; and he knew
That he must break the news that suddenly
Had come to him last night, as drowsily
He lay beside her—startling, stern and true
Out of the darkness flashing. He must tell
How, as he lay beside her in the night,
His heart had told him he must go and fight,
Must throw up everything he loved so well
To go and fight in lands across the sea
Beside the other lads—must throw up all,
His work, his home. . . .

The shadow of the wall

Fell on her once again, and stridently
That hammer struck her heart, as from the stream
She raised her eyes to his, and saw their flame.
Then back into her heart her glad news came
As John smiled on her; and her golden dream

The News

Once more was all about her as she thought
Of home, the new home that the future held
For them—they three together. Fear was quelled
By this new happiness that all unsought
Had sprung from the old happiness. . . .

And he,
Watching her, thought of home too. When he stepped
With her across the threshold first, and slept
That first night in her arms so quietly,
For the first time in all his life he'd known
All that home meant—or nearly all, for yet
Each night brought him new knowledge as she met
Him, smiling on the clean white threshold stone
When he returned from labor in the Yard . . .
And she'd be waiting for him soon, while he
Was fighting with his fellow oversea—
She would be waiting for him. . . .

It was hard
For him that he must go, as go he must,
But harder far for her: things always fell
Harder upon the women. It was well
She didn't dream yet . . . He could only trust
She too would feel that he had got to go,
Then 'twould not be so hard to go, and yet . . .
Dreaming, he saw the lamplit table, set
With silver pot and cups and plates aglow
For tea in their own kitchen bright and snug,
With her behind the tea-pot—saw it all,

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

The colored calendars upon the wall,
The bright fire-irons, and the gay hearth-rug
She'd made herself from bright-hued rags; his place
Awaiting him, with something hot-and-hot—
His favorite sausages as like as not,
Between two plates for him—as, with clean face
Glowing from washing in the scullery,
And such a hunger on him, he would sink
Content into his chair. . . .

'Twas strange to think
All this was over, and so suddenly—
'Twas strange, and hard. . . .

Still gazing on the stream,
Her thoughts too were at home. She heard the patter
Of tiny feet beside her, and the chatter
Of little tongues. . . .

Then loudly through their dream
The buzzer boomed; and all about them rose
The men and women: soon the wives were on
The ferry-boat, now puffing to be gone;
The husbands hurrying, ere the gates should close,
Back to the Yard. . . .

She, in her dream of gold,
And he, in his new desolation, stood.
Then soberly, as wife and husband should,
They parted with their news as yet untold.

Wilfrid Wilson Gibson