

# HIGHLAND PARK NEWS-LETTER

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## HER SOLDIER BOY

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It was the day before Thanksgiving; an elderly couple by the name of Muran were sitting quietly beside the old fireplace. As the clock struck nine the man said slowly, "It's about time you were going, Mary?"

There was nothing in the weak old voice to make her start as she did. She hesitated in pinning her shawl over her thin shoulders. "The day is very beautiful and the walk will do me good", she said hastily.

"Hum, no doubt about that, you have been kept in the house quite steady with that pneumonia of mine. Will you be gone long?"

There was a shy look in her face, as she glanced at the white, stooping head beside the table. "Jim, you know for yourself that the town is a considerable distance from here. I'm thinkin' about goin' round the farthest way for I might get things at a more reasonable price." The thought suddenly occurred to her that it was near Thanksgiving Day. "It's our Thanksgiving dinner that I'm going to get," she concluded.

"Well, I would not buy anything too extravagant, Mary. I guess that scamp Rody that you think so much of has clean forgotten us. There was no use writin' to him for help." As he sat huddled and bundled in a home made rocker, he spoke again. "The doctor and medicine must have taken a heap of your savings. I would not buy what might be called luxuriant."

"I won't," promised Mary. "You can trust me for that, Jim".

She did not leave the room at once, but stood at the door and looked around at the barest, plainest, but cleanest of rooms.

Her busy hands had polished the few chairs, the stove and table. Had kept the furnishing of the bed in the corner without a blemish and had fashioned the bright patchwork spread upon it. On the table was prepared a little luncheon, plain and scant, yet enough for one who was recovering from sickness, and up to this the old man's chair was drawn.

"It may happen", she declared, speaking rapidly as if the thought had just occurred to her. "It may be a good while, Jim, till I come back for I was going round to see Mrs. Piper if you think you can stay alone till then."

"Well, all right; I feel my strength returning stronger than I ever dreamt of. But you had better be on your way, Mary. I won't be looking for you till half-past noon. You better hurry." His voice still followed her to the door. "I would not get a luxuriant dinner."

Mrs. Muran was hurrying along the country road toward town when she almost fell over a boy with a fist full of marbles, who seemed to rise from her feet.

"Hello! why are you hurrying so, Mrs. Muran? Is he worse?" cried the boy.

"No. No, Pat, I'm going shoppin'. Pat, will you run down to the house and see if Mr. Muran wants anything before I get back?"

The reckless faced youngster looked around for a moment; then he said: "What will you give me?"

"Glory me! I hav'nt anything to give", and she hastened on her way.

She reached the outskirts of the town. At last overcome by walking she paused a little to rest then walked on more slowly. She met Mrs. Piper whom she was going to call on, and this shortened her way a little. Mrs. Piper had been a neighbor when the Murans lived in their brick house and the children went to the same school. She wore a cloth skirt and a skirt of electric seal plush; on her hat a long beaked bird perched in a grove of leaves. She extended to Mrs. Muran her strong hand, which was wonderfully draped in purple kid.

"How do you do?" asked Mrs. Piper. "It's a dog's age since I saw you last. I heard that Jim was taken sick a few weeks back. Is he better? I hope he is. You're not looking very well yourself. Not going to walk all the way down town, are you?"

Yes, I am going to walk down-town, for I have some shopping to do", said Mrs. Muran, slowly.

"Isn't it an awful nuisance—shopping", said Mrs. Piper. She was looking over on the other side of the street at something which did not seem to interest her, when she said carelessly, "I've just spent the last dollar Sam gave me except this fifty cents. I am going to stop in his shop on my way home. It is lucky that I met you for, as I suppose, you can buy something with this fifty cents which I have owed you for the last two years for the cabbages. Now please take a car with some of that and don't walk down for you will ruin your health. Well, I must be going," said Mrs. Piper hurriedly. "Have you heard anything of your boy Rody, lately Mrs. Muran? I hear he went for a soldier?"

"Not lately" answered Mrs. Muran.

"Good afternoon with you", said Mrs. Piper.

Walking slowly up to a policeman standing near the corner, Mrs. Muran asked what direction she should go to reach a certain street and number. He knew the place; and when he looked down at the meagre face and worn dress, he knew why she inquired for it.

Following the policeman's directions she walked timidly on. Tired from her long walk, she paused a little and said half aloud: "I must have gone by the place." But looking across the street she saw a large, red brick building with Tell Place written above the door. She walked slowly up to the door in the front of the building where she was greeted by a short, stout woman who introduced herself as Mrs. Smith, matron of the place. Mrs. Muran told her reasons for coming. She was led into a large

room with white walls and ceiling to wait for Mr. Miller, who managed such affairs.

While waiting she gazed around. Through the window she saw a group of old men, some bleary-eyed and stupid-looking, others limping on canes or crutches, all untidy and infirm.

At this point a man came up to her and said, "Good day. What is your name please?"

She turned slightly and found herself looking up at a thin, middle aged man, with the eyes and beak of a hawk. She looked down embarrassed. Again he said, "Name, please."

"Mary Muran," she said, hastily.

"Did you ever get help from the county before?" he asked.

"No, no, never," she answered.

"Married, widow, single or deserted?"

"Married forty-nine years to Jim Muran."

"How many children? Sex, married, employment and live where?"

"Tears stood in her eyes, her heart beat hard and she said with a choked voice, "one child, named Rody, left father and me to join the army."

He asked her so many questions that she grew tired and faint. The long walk had told on her, she grew dizzy and began to wonder whether if anything happened to her, they would put it in the paper or not, and whether if Jim should find it out, would worry him sick again. But she answered the questions as best she could.

"Visitors from the county house will be sent to your place sometime this evening" he said, while leading her to the door.

Now her only desire was to get home before these visitors should arrive. The fresh air revived her and she walked back through the town. "Surely, surely, some folks are prosperous this year; this will be a grand Thanksgiving for some," she thought to herself. She could not remember when she had last seen so many turkeys hanging in the windows. She walked the whole way back; but as she neared the poor dwelling place she thought for the first time of the fifty cents still held tightly in her hand. It would buy something good for Jim's supper, and she turned back to go to the nearest grocery a mile away. She had nearly reached the place when as she was crossing the street, a car caught the skirt of her gown. She fell and rolled over and over. A large crowd soon gathered and Mrs. Muran was helped to her feet. But she trembled with nervous fright and stammered out, "don't say any-thing to the man—it was my own fault," then she fainted. She had not given her name or address, and the bystanders wondered who she was.

At this point a tall, well dressed young man, in a soldier's suit walked up to the crowd and asked what the trouble was about and why the crowd had gathered. A man standing near said, "old woomin get rolled mit die car, already der she is!"