



## THE ARTIST SEES LIFE

The artist turned her car into an alley beside a dillapidated tenement house, on the northerly shore of Staten Island. Looking down the alley, she could see the boats swinging lazily at their moorings in the harbor—streaks of red, yellow and white against the background of the sunlit waters of the bay. A woman was hanging clothes on a line and the artist asked her permission to paint the scene. "I dunno," said the woman, "you ask Mrs. Kirsten." She pointed to a half-open door. "She's in there."

The artist called up a narrow stairway, and a thin voice answered—"You paint—picture? I come down. Ingrid! Ingrid! You should come down! You ain't never seen a artist." A sad figure, in a ragged, linen duster, appeared in the doorway. "I watch here," she said; then turned away. "Excuse me, please, I ain't feelin' so good. My husband, Eric, he be down soon."

Heavy steps sounded on the stairs and Eric Kirsten, a big man, with snow-white hair, lumbered through the back door. "I can't tell what it is you do," he said, glancing at the canvas. "It's all mixed up. I go to store now; you paint!"

At last, the daughter Ingrid appeared. "The boats, yah!" she exclaimed. "My boy paints at school; I go get him." She returned shortly with a bare-foot urchin of six. He scampered up to the easel and stood, with mouth

agape, at the artist's elbow.

When Kirsten returned, the painting had taken form. "Yah! Yah! I see. It is beautiful—the boats! I go get some bread and a pickle and you paint all that! Mamma! You should see now!" . . . "I see," replied a voice from the window above, "I watch here all the time."

A limousine drove into the alley and Kirsten hurried up the stairs. "I came for the chairs," said a smartly dressed young man. "You should talk to my friends up there," the artist answered. "Your friends up there!" he repeated, doubtfully, and hurried up the stairs. The artist heard talking in the room overhead; then the two men came down, carrying folding chairs which they placed in the car. The young man bowed to the artist as he drove away.

The artist was closing her kit when the boy called, "Please, lady, don't go." He went to the fence and picked a fading morning glory. "This is for you, lady; I like you."

Kirsten walked with her to the car. "It is good of you to call us friends," he said. "You see that church over there? That is a Catholic Church. I ain't Catholic; I'm a Norwegian. Catholics believe in saints. If I was Catholic, I would believe one of their saints sent you here to make my mama feel better. She cried all night. If you hadn't come, she would be crying now. We buried our only son, yesterday."

—From the Day Book of Mrs. Mary Bender.