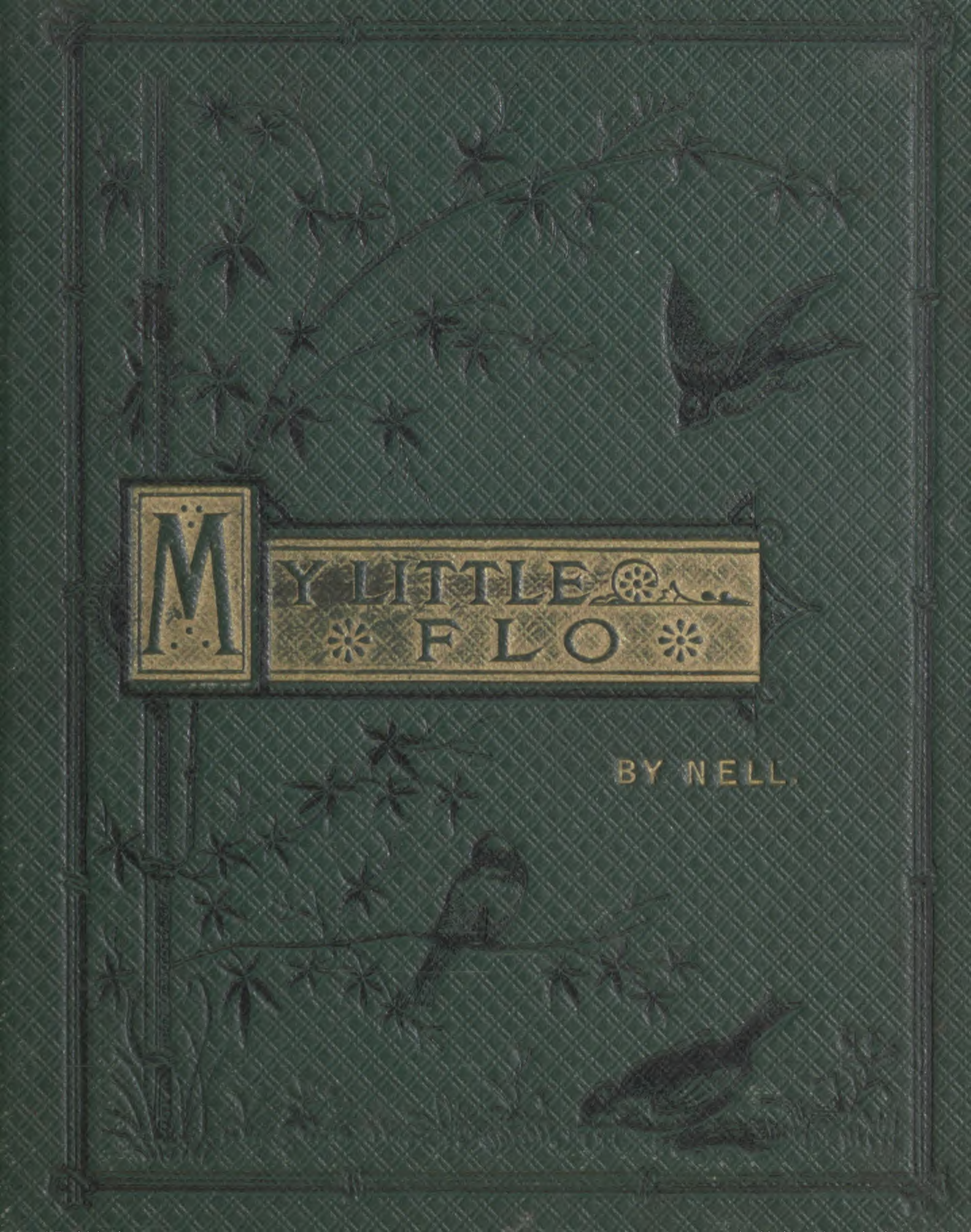
MY LITTLE FLO
BY NELL.

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Great Britain
Europe
The World

"MY LITTLE FLO."

Page 28.

"MY LITTLE FLO."

"LIKE AS A LITTLE CHILD."

BY

NELL.

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JOHN S. MARR & SONS,
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"MY LITTLE FLO."

CHAPTER I.

IN CHAINS.

"FLO, don't you wish we could get out?" I say, leaning my elbows on the ledge of the bedroom window and gazing with a sort of melancholy delight at the bright golden hayfield, the nice hayricks I so dearly love to tumble in, and Billy Marston, my favourite companion and playfellow. He is sitting on one of the aforesaid hayricks, busily engaged in taking my portrait, and all I can see beneath the brim of his straw hat is the end of a very long nose.

At first, I get no answer to my whine, for Flo is lying full length on the bare bit of floor between the two beds, reading "The Wide, Wide World." She declares that that bit of floor is the only cool place in the house, and there she spends all her Sunday afternoons, varying the pleasure sometimes by disappearing altogether beneath the bed. Flo always did settle herself in such funny places.

When she was a little girl, we used often to find her asleep beneath the table, or up in the attic, and in winter the only place where she seems happy is the kitchen fender. She looks not unlike a soft, little kitten just now. I wonder how she can keep quiet so long, but when I take a nearer view, I behold two tears trickling unheeded down her cheeks and pattering on her book.

"Poor thing," I say, sympathetically, "have you got to the place where Alice dies? Isn't it awful nice! and when I have delivered this grammatical speech, I place my chin on my two hands and return to my duty as lay-figure.

Flo and I have had a step-mother now for a year—a year of tyranny and injustice, I think; and it is one of her many laws and decrees concerning us, that we should remain indoors during the hottest part of the day, no matter how beautiful the meadows look, nor how we sigh for fun and liberty. Many have been the "whistles" sent to us by lads from without, which we, with sad shakes of the head, have left unresponded to. Our step-mother has engaged a governess to aid in the task of controlling us; a tall, broad, black-haired French governess, with a bland French manner, and a beautiful French accent, at least, so mamma says.

I am dreamily drumming my fingers on the window-pane, and humming:—

"Gentle Zitella, beware, oh! beware!"

I only know one line, and I am wondering who Zitella was, when Flo, seized with a spirit of mischief, catches me by the feet and almost precipitates me from the window. I scream lustily and kick vigorously, but she is a strong little thing and holds on, till my screams and yells for help bring mademoiselle sweeping along the corridor and into our room.

"What noise, mesdemoiselles! you are not lady-like," she exclaims. We certainly are not. Flo looks more like a little milkmaid just now. She is short and stout, with a broad, healthy face, merry china-blue eyes and short frizzy brown hair, standing just now straight on end, as if she had been seeing innumerable ghosts. Flo is not in the least like me, for I am tall, thin and scraggy, my dresses are always too short for me, and I have thin hair which has a perpetual parting straight down behind and flows gracefully over each shoulder. Flo has really pretty hands, while mine are long, thin, and full of knuckle bones.

Mademoiselle lays hands on my hair and ties it behind, lifts up Flo from the floor, where she has been sitting regarding her with staring, careless blue eyes, gives her a shake to settle her dress, and then catching sight of our friends outside, she shakes her head till I think all the hairpins must fall out. Mademoiselle is a woman of much energy, and then she is so tall and broad and strong, I often think that is why mamma chose her for a governess.

Mamma is "nervous," and does not think she can manage us without help, and certainly, mademoiselle manages us with a vengeance.

We put on our evening white muslins before going downstairs. They are made exactly alike, and trimmed with very pretty embroidery. When I am ready I survey myself in the long glass with much satisfaction; but Flo, not having my vanity, appears very starchy and uncomfortable. All the way downstairs she hitches one shoulder out of her dress, screws her nose and shakes her head with impatience at the very tight ribbon which confines her frizzy mop.

We cross the cool tiled hall, and enter the shady drawing-room, where mamma is lying on a couch reading. She is a tall, handsome woman, and her long floating white dress suits her remarkably well, but to Flo and to me there is always something so forbidden in her face and manner that we are never longer in her presence than we can help. Flo gets into a corner with the book which she has smuggled downstairs, and I sit in a very straight and uncomfortable attitude at the window.

I begin to think discontentedly how pleasant it looks just now in the orchard, and what is the use of sitting in a drawing-room, when we might be out with papa and Harry on the lawn, and a small lurking spirit of vanity whispers that pretty white dresses are of no use when there is no one to see them. I do so like people to admire—a sigh from

Flo distracts my thoughts from their wonted subject, and I see little Flo gazing out wistfully at papa and Harry. The joy of her life is centred in these two. Papa is her idol, and she will stand any amount of teasing from him or from Harry, and her love is very often put to the proof; for when they do notice her at all, it is to tease her.

She comes and stands beside me and nods at the two outside, and is greatly delighted because they lift their smoking-caps to her.

"Do shut the window, Helen," mamma calls, "you will give me my death of cold. How often have I told you that I cannot bear such a draught. Flora, do move away, and do not grin out of the window like that. Where is your governess?"

"I don't know," I answer, crossly, as I shut the window with a bang that almost breaks the glass.

"Such nonsense," I mutter, "and such a warm night, too. Why should *she* catch cold any more than other people? I do hate to be called Helen," I add, a little louder.

"To whom are you speaking?" frigidly returns my step-mother. "Please, remember to call me by my name."

I vouchsafe no answer to this but a curl of the lip. Flo comforts me by little pats on the shoulder, but my temper is ruffled—it takes very little to ruffle it—and it is no till papa and Harry come in that I cool down again.

The blood rushes to Flo's face with delight as they come in, and my wrath boils up again when papa passes her without a look, and throws himself into an easy-chair beside mamma. Before she came we were his only companions, and Flo was never away from his side."

"She is only a little girl yet," I think, with indignation, "and he very seldom speaks to her. I wish I were grown up, I would take care of her."

Papa is very handsome still. He was married when he was twenty, and he is thirty-eight now. He is very fair, with a long beard which we admire very much.

Harry is seventeen. Dear, handsome Harry? How we admire the little curl in front he takes such care of? He uses a good deal of pomade, and his hair is so shiny and smooth. He comes and sits down beside us.

"How very starchy you look," he says to me; "but never mind, you look clean."

"Don't I look nice?" I say, slightly disappointed.

"Well, you'll do," he says, gravely, scanning me from head to foot.

CHAPTER II.

I MAKE UP MY MIND TO RUN AWAY.

TO say we are not two happy little girls would not be true, for papa, when he does take any notice of us, is kindness itself, and Harry is the dearest brother in the world; but for two years before papa's marriage we ran wild over the country, and my pride revolts at the restraint now put upon us by our stepmother and mademoiselle. Flo takes it all very patiently. She has a wonderful faculty for endurance, and often when I am trembling with anger for her sake, she will stand meekly by and hear all mamma has to say, and then quietly return to her book again.

I must tell you that on my last birthday—I was eleven—papa bought me a dear little cottage piano. It stands in the schoolroom, but we practice on the old one. Flo and I both love to pick out tunes on the piano. She is so shy that she will never play when any one is listening, but sometimes she makes up the prettiest tunes I ever heard. One day when we came in from a walk with mademoiselle, I am taking off my things and I hear Flo beginning to play. She begins with a frightful crash and bang, and fierce chromatic

scales, and I laugh to myself, for I know what she is thinking of. Mademoiselle had been telling us of the opera.

But alas! It is of no avail that Flo begins to be soft and tender; the door of mamma's room opens, and I hear her swoop along the passage like a great eagle pouncing on some tender little animal. I tremble for Flo, for mamma has been indisposed all day, and that means a very bad temper.

I hear a lecture beginning about "strumming instead of practising," and "not practising at proper hours." I know that Flo will not answer, and that this will aggravate mamma's wrath, but I am not at all prepared for the sound of a slap, and of a sob from Flo.

I rush from the room shaking with anger, and with burning cheeks and blazing eye, I confront my stepmother:—

"How dare you? Oh! how dare you?" I burst forth, while she stands tall and haughty, looking down on me with a sneer.

"How dare you strike my little sister? I'll tell papa and he'll, he'll.—" It suddenly strikes me that he will not do anything, and I become speechless and white with anger.

My stepmother sneers—

"I'll teach you that I dare do anything," she says, and she turns to the piano, locks it and takes away the key.

I am too much afraid of ridicule to say anything about this to papa, but in my breast burns a desire for vengeance,

I make my retreat good, not to the schoolroom, but to the garret—the dear refuge of all my sick and lonely moments. There "I sit down and weep," or rather gulp down my passion, and shake my fist at imaginary step-mothers. There is a sky-light low down in the roof, and an old trunk before it on which I mount, and gazing out over the orchard trees to the distant village and church-towers, I make a project of escape from this tyranny. I do not know in the least where to go nor how Flo and I will manage to live, but to go I am determined. I shed a few tears when I think of the sorrow and remorse that papa and Harry will feel, but I derive some consolation from the thought that they should have taken better care of us, and at last, wearied out, I fall asleep.

I am awakened by a soft hand touching my shoulder, and I see Flo standing beside the old trunk. The sun is shining straight down upon her through the garret window, making her frizzy hair look like a golden halo, and just at first I think she is a little white angel. But in the one hand she holds a plate of bread, and in the other a glass of milk.

"What is it, Flo," I ask. "Why have you brought my bread and milk up here."

Flo blushes as if she had been doing wrong herself.

"Poor Nell," she says, "mamma says you are not to come down again to-day, and she sent your lunch to you."

"I don't want it," I say hotly and crossly, "you can take it away again." But Flo coaxes until at last I allow her to set it on the trunk. She sits beside me, trying to smooth the crossness from my brow, but there is a call for her from below, and she goes away leaving me a parting kiss. The sunshine seems to go with her, and in a passion I throw the bread out of the window into the garden, and the milk, tumbler and all, after it. Ah! I do not know how soon Flo and I may be glad of bread and milk. Then I curl myself up, and when dusk comes on, my plans are all formed, and I feel as satisfied as hunger and weariness allow me to be.

CHAPTER III.

WE SET OUT FOR LONDON.

FORTUNE seems to favour me, for next day, as we are both pretending to work arithmetic, but in reality watching Jim the gardener at his work, we hear the little phaeton drive up to the front door, and after nearly twisting our necks off, and making our noses as flat as pancakes against the window, we have the satisfaction of seeing mamma sweep down the front steps, and papa helping her into the carriage. He gets in himself and they drive off, and then Flo and I look at each other.

"Where can they be going?" she says.

I smile grimly and shake my head with gloomy satisfaction, but not till evening do I dare to tell Flo of my plan. I feel rather shaky now when I think that perhaps she won't come, but my mind is made up, so when it is conveniently dusk I broach the subject.

We are both seated in the deep library window. Mamma left orders that I was only to use the schoolroom and my bedroom, but I am sorry to say that I am in far too bad a temper to obey.

"Flo," I begin, when I have paved the way by recounting all our wrongs and misfortunes. "I won't and I can't stand it. Flo, I am, I mean *we* will—*run away*."

My voice sinks into a whisper, and I clutch Flo, afraid that she will be too timid to follow me.

She starts up, and grows pale, and then stammers out—

"Oh!" Nell, dear, how could we. We have no place to go to, and then, oh! Nell, what would papa and Harry do;" and she stops, terrified and half crying.

"I don't care," I say sullenly. "Better to starve than to be tyrannized over by a woman like that," and I clench my hand and shake it at a pair of her dainty slippers, thrown carelessly and lazily beneath the study table.

"I'll tell you what we will do," I say, when Flo again protests that we cannot do it. "You know Harriet, our old cook? Well, I remember quite well when she left us two years ago that she told me to come to her if—if papa's wife treated us badly, and she said she was sure she would. Well, Flo, to-morrow when we are out for our walk—and we must get out without mademoiselle, we will walk to Carsie station, then to Hellerslie junction, and then to London—I mean, we will take the train to London from Carsie. I know how to do it quite well."

"But have you any money? gasps Flo."

"Yes, I have quite enough to go second class. You

know I saw papa take the tickets last time," I say, rather proud of my cleverness.

"But, oh! I can't leave papa and Ha—Ha—Harry," sobs Flo again.

They should have taken better care of us," I answer, doggedly, reasoning to her as I had done to myself.

We sit in the window seat till it is near our bedtime, talking of their consternation when they find out that we are off, and we both agree that papa will come to fetch us home again, but there we will stay until he promises to grant all the conditions in the treaty—this grand idea is borrowed from the history.

We go to bed quietly, and with a strange guilty feeling and lie awake half the night planning what we are to take with us. We agree that we must venture into the pantry and get something to eat. As for clothes, it is impossible for us to take any with us; and if we could, we would have no need of them, as we shall probably be house maids or cooks when we grow up. The idea of being a servant has many charms for me, except when I am asked to do anything in the way of tidying up.

Next morning Harry goes back to his rooms and his tutor, at Hellerslie, and we kiss him in a choky sort of way that makes him look at our faces in wonder. We go through our morning lessons in an oppressive silence, and with my heart beating almost audibly I ask mademoiselle if we may

not walk alone to-day. She seems glad of a respite, and I know that she will shut herself up in her room and write letters, and so be safe for an hour or two. Flo keeps blushing and turning pale all the morning, and sometimes I almost feel as if I could shake her, she looks so conscious.

We generally take our walk between twelve and one, and at twelve we retire to put on our walking things, which we do with much trembling and guilty looks at the door. Flo's face is red all over, but I know that she will not draw back now when she knows that I am going, so I hurry her on, and at last we issue from our bedroom, each carrying a waterproof and an umbrella; for, although it is not in the least likely to rain, we think it is not the proper thing to travel without them.

We are very much afraid of meeting mademoiselle. She would be sure to ask what on earth we were going to do with our waterproofs.

Under mine I carry a large paper parcel containing provisions, enough, I think, for a week. We begin to descend the stairs. How they creak! as if they must tell our secret to everyone; but, at last, with a sigh of relief, we find ourselves in the road!

I struggle on carrying waterproof and parcel, and bearing aloft an umbrella to shield us from the sun. We have a whole mile and a half to walk, and the sun is broiling hot,

and we have only gone a little way, when Flo gives a great sigh, and looks up at me with a wistful little face.

"Aren't we almost there, Nell?" she says, and I feel as if I had been very cruel, forcing her to walk all this way in the broiling sun.

"Never mind, darling," I say; "We'll soon be there, and I'll buy you a book at the bookstalls to read on the way up."

A little further on I stand still with fright, for suddenly I remember we do not know when the train starts. However, it is too late to draw back now. What would mademoiselle say if she saw us returning, spent and weary, lugging along umbrellas and waterproofs? We would never get another opportunity. So we trudge along, past the dear old church, the one street of the village, the fields where our bugbears —the cows—stare at us with big eyes, and the mill, then round the corner to the station.

When we arrive there, Flo is pale with fatigue; and I inwardly reproach myself, though outwardly I console her with some very nasty sweets which I have purchased. There is a stupid, country fellow loafing about, who stared at us so much that we are frightened and feel obliged to keep in the waiting-room, notwithstanding its mingled odour of new paint and musty air.

I go timidly up to a big porter and enquire when the next train will start for Hellerslie. He says there will be

one in half-an-hour, and I feel considerably relieved. We lunch on some of the bread and cheese contained in my parcel, and at last the train comes in.

We get into a second-class carriage, and Flo sits down disconsolately in a corner, while I stare out of the window at the people. I am looking at a very fat woman with a basket, when I hear some one call out, in a voice which I know,—

"Here you are, Harry, my boy," and immediately I try to hide myself in a corner, for there are Harry and Billy Marston. Flo hears their voices, and I am obliged to hold her by force or she would be out of the carriage. She cries and struggles, but, at last, the train starts and they have not seen us. I feel a little sorry at leaving home, but still, I think I have done the best both for Flo and myself, and as she grows calmer I comfort her by telling her how happy we will be with Harriet.

At last she falls asleep, and I lay the poor little tear-stained face on my knee, and sit gazing forlornly out of the window. At the next station a young gentleman enters the carriage. He looks curiously at us, but when I indignantly return the look, he takes refuge in his newspaper, and I forget all about him. One thing troubles me very much—I do not very well know where Harriet lives. I know it is somewhere near Kensington, but how to get there I have not the slightest idea. I wonder I have not

thought of this before, and a sickening fear of being lost enters my mind. I try to think of some way out of the difficulty. I have not much money left for cabs, and certainly not enough to keep us in a hotel.

Flo has been asleep about an hour when she awakes with a little cry. I put both arms round her and try to hush her as if she were a baby, when I see our fellow-traveller regarding us over the top of his paper.

"Would not your little sister have my rug to rest on?" he asks kindly, and I thankfully accept, for I am growing weary with Flo's weight.

CHAPTER IV.

MR MOSS.

THE young gentleman leaves us at the next station with a pleasant "good-day," and I see him go with a longing for some one to help me in my perplexity. We arrive at Euston Station about three o'clock. We are hustled out of the carriage, and find ourselves standing forlorn and miserable among all the rustling and struggling people on the platform.

I know that we must go elsewhere, and I resolve to try and find my way to Mrs Holloway's, where I was once with my own mamma three years ago.

I take Flo's hand, and begin to thread my way through the crowds of people, when an old gentleman, with a healthy, countrified face, comes forward and asks me,—

"Who is with you, my dear?"

"No one," I answer, blushing hotly.

"Your little sister seems very tired," he says, kindly, "you had better take her home as fast as you can."

Home! How can I take her home? I walk slowly along, keeping hold of her hand, but I know that he is watching us.

I think we *may* find our way, so we set out and wander along the streets, asking policemen to escort us over the crossings, and getting more puzzled and perplexed every minute. At last Flo begins fairly to cry with weariness, and in despair I go into a baker's shop and ask the way to 10 Gretna Street. The very gay young lady behind the counter looks over at me with scorn and answers.

"Ten Gretna Street! You are about three miles away."

My heart sinks within me as I look at Flo's pale face and heavy eyes, but we go out and wander about the streets again. I hear a church-bell ring out four o'clock, and we come to one of the dingiest churches that ever graced or disgraced a city. We hear the sound of an organ, and as the door is open, Flo begs to go in and rest awhile. We steal in and sit down in a pew near the door. The organist is practising, and we sit quietly and listen. He is an old man, and plays so beautifully that we almost forget our troubles in listening. There are stained glass windows in the church, and rays of mellow light fall on the old pews and on his gray hair, and I have the strange, solemn, happy feeling that music in a church always gives one. But at last he rises and shuts the organ, and we come back again to the dreary world outside. We are a little refreshed, but we do not know in the least where to go. The people seem to be getting poorer in this quarter and the shops smaller. We come to an arch which leads into

a queer, quiet, old square, and beneath this arch there is a little three-cornered bookseller's shop. After much cogitation we make up our minds to go into this shop and ask for shelter.

A very old, snuffy little man looks up as we enter. He is dressed in a mouldy-looking old green coat, and on his nose are a pair of green spectacles, over which he looks at us.

"Please," I begin in a flattering voice.

"Well," he says rather sharply, "has your mother sent you for the paper? You're Angeline Tomkins? ain't you?

"No," I say again more timidly than before, and I begin to jumble out a story about trains and beds and sleeping in the streets, which makes the snuffy old man regard me much as if I were an escaped lunatic.

"Ah! you're tramps are you," he says at last, "get out o' this. Meg," he shouts, "come and turn these varmint out."

I am indignantly protesting that we are not "varmint," when a stunted-looking girl or woman, who may be either sixteen or sixty from her appearance, appears at the door.

"What is it, father?" she says.

"Turn these beggars out," the old man rejoins.

"We are not beggars, I say indignantly, and turn to go, but a sob from Flo makes me stand still. The poor child is so overcome with fatigue that I see she cannot go a step further, and I say imploringly—

"Oh! please, let us stay for to-night, we have no place else to go."

The girl stares at our clothes, and then whispers in a low tone to her father—

"They don't look like common children, father. They are well dressed."

The old man stares at us again with his blear old eyes, and then says to me—"Come here, child."

I go up to him, "have you any money with ye? he asks.

"I have two shillings," I answer.

He shakes head. "If I gives you bed, supper and breakfast, two shillings will 'ardly pay me; but we'll see. Supposin' you gives 'em nothink but bread for supper, Meg, that's the best thing for young folks."

"I thank him, and then we follow Meg up a stair so dark that we stumble more than once, and into a little room at the top, which smells as if the window had never been opened. There are old books round three sides of the room, piled up on the floor, and the windows are thick with dust. There is a little fire in the grate, and a kettle singing on the hob. This looks very comfortable, and from the oven comes a smell very appetizing to our hungry nostrils.

Meg seems a little kinder than her father, and she makes us wash our dusty faces and hands. Then she busies herself putting tea into the teapot and setting it on the hob to

infuse. We have not yet had courage to ask the old man's name, but when he comes in he shouts out—

"Hallo! what's ye'r name?"

"Helen Osborne," I answer.

"Come on with yer "'Elen Hosborne," he says, "and be thankful for the food as Providence 'as sent yer," and he cuts two slices of bread from the loaf and gives us each one. Then he turns his back on us and begins to devour the pie which he has taken from the oven, while we both stare with dismay at the dry bread he has given us.

"Vy don't yer eat it?" he inquires at last, turning round

"I can't," I answer, "please give us some tea."

He holds up his hands—"Two shillin'," he says; "two shillin', for supper bed and breakfast, and she asks for tea—That beats all!"

"I don't think I shall give you two shillings," I answer, stoutly.

"Get out of my 'ouse then," he shouts, angrily; but I am frightened, and finally implore him to let us remain.

At first he will not consent, but when I have given him all the money I possess he seems grudgingly satisfied, and returns to the shop.

Our whole anxiety now is to get to Harriet, and I ask Meg if we cannot go there to-morrow, but she is equally ignorant of cabs, coaches or trains. We retire to the shake-down bed next the fire, which Meg has made for us, and

half the night lie awake watching the old man, like the king in the nursery rhyme, counting out his money on the kitchen table, while he mutters to himself, "Two shillin' is somethink—two shillin' is somethink; but I'll make some think more on 'em than that."

I fall asleep at last, to dream that we are safe at home again, that papa has repented of his coldness, and that mamma has promised to love and cherish us.

But, alas! It is only a dream, and I awake to reap the reward of my foolishness in finding myself in a dismal, dirty, little room, which looks even worse than it did last night. Two lines of poetry I keep repeating to myself again and again as I lie awake,—

"'Tis better to endure the ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of."

But I still think that if we can get to Harriet, we shall be quite happy.

At breakfast the old man watches greedily what we eat, but it is only very weak tea and dry bread, and he has not much better himself. I summon up courage to ask him how we can get to Kensington, but he only shakes his head.

"'Ow can I tell yer?" he says. "'Ave yer any money left," he whispers, greedily.

"No," I answer.

"Then 'ow do yer think I can pay your fares."

"But you might please lend me the money," I say.

"No, hindeed," he answers. "Very nice, hindeed—coming 'ere to rob a poor hold man loike me. No, hindeed, yer must get thar as yer came 'ere."

CHAPTER V.

TWO LITTLE CHARITY GIRLS.

The next day passes away, and Flo and I do nothing but sit at the window, and peer out at the people. Meg and her father take hardly any notice of us, and we dare not set out on our travels again.

About twelve o'clock, old Moss—for we have learned his name—comes up and whispers something to Meg, scowling at us meanwhile.

"I do hope he is not going to turn us out," Flo whispered, catching hold of my hand; I am so frightened in those streets."

When he has gone away, Meg says to us, half-pityingly, "father says he won't keep you any longer unless you promise him a reward from your people, for we both think you have run away."

But I cannot endure the shameful thought of being taken home again; and Flo cries out, clasping her little hands, "oh! please, please take us to Harriet, and we will give you money as soon as we get it."

Meg shakes her head and goes away to consult with her

father. He soon comes up, but his manner is strangely wheedling and coaxing.

"Come, my little dears," he says to us, "I will let you stay 'ere—I feels quite like a father to yer—but you must come and 'elp in the shop, and you, my little dear," he says to Flo, "you can 'elp Meg hup 'ere. And yer knows yer must not wear sick fine clothes 'ere, so my darter 'as kindly got some for yer, and yer will take off these and put 'em on."

But when Meg comes in with two charity girls' blue frocks and two long coarse aprons, we both protest against the change, and it is only by mingled threats and promises that we can be induced to take off our pretty dresses and entrust them to Meg, who makes off with them as fast as she can.

Old Moss commands me to go and stand behind the counter while he goes out on business. I am too much afraid to refuse, and as I go out of the door I catch a supplicating glance from Flo, who looks terrified to be left upstairs without me.

"Oh!" I think, as I sit behind the counter, and bury my burning face in my hands, "I, who was too proud to pick up my stepmother's pretty dresses, to be the servant of this vulgar, little cockney," and in weak and useless rage, I scowl at the ugly old books which look so like himself. I wonder more and more at myself for submitting, but how

can I turn poor little Flo out into the streets again without food or shelter, or any one to take care of her, and I shudder as I think of my own folly and wickedness. Yes, I am quite sure it was wickedness now. And then—I tremble to think of it—God might have left us to sleep in the streets all night.

Moss comes in looking much crosser than when he went out. I wonder what has induced the old miser to keep us, but I dare not mention Kensington to him again.

"What are we to do?" I whisper to Flo that night. She looks at me and smiles, and I look at her in astonishment.

"It will all come right, dear Nell," she whispers, "God will take care of us."

"Oh, but I have been so wicked," I sob, "I thought it was for your sake, but I know now, it was because I was so angry at *her*."

"No, no, you can't help it," Flo whispers again. "You thought we should soon get to Harriet's. "But, oh! papa and Harry," she cries, and following my example she drops a few tears.

"There, never bother your head, Flo," I say; "I have thought of a plan." Flo smiles through her tears.

"You are clever enough for anything, Nell," she says.

"Clever enough to get into this scrape," I mutter.

My plan is to watch for some kind-looking person to

come into the shop and to ask them, as carelessly as I can, how one can get to Kensington.

Three days have passed, Mr Moss still goes out at a certain hour every day, and every day returns scowling at us. Meg keeps Flo running errands for her, and I am in terror lest my darling should come to any harm.

Flo patiently does whatever she is told, just as she did at home; and every night repeats, with her arm round my neck, and with sweet faith and hope which I despairingly long for but cannot possess—

> "Forgive me Lord, for Thy dear Son,
> The ills that I this day have done;
> That with the world, myself, and Thee,
> I ere I sleep at peace may be."

and then she falls sweetly asleep, like an innocent child, as she is, leaving me groaning and tossing in the dark.

Next day I watch eagerly for a friendly face, but the only person who enters the shop is a horrid old woman and some children for evening papers. I feel weary, hungry, and desperate, and when I go upstairs and see Flo, with a white face, looking the very picture of a miserable little charity girl, and trying in vain to keep back her tears, I feel worse.

Mr Moss gets gloomier than ever, and at last declares that he will send us both to the workhouse if nothing turns

up. I wonder very much what he has been expecting, and look more earnestly for my hoped-for friend.

At two o'clock precisely he locks the drawer containing the till, and departs for his afternoon stroll; and, after gazing despairingly down the street for a long time, I try to forget my troubles in reading an old yellow book which I have found beneath the counter. It is a most horrible story, and have just seen Lady Blanche murdered in cold blood, Lord Harry poisoned, and Emma, the heroine, gain both her fortune and her husband, when I hear a voice saying"—

"Have you got the 'Saturday Review?'" I rise to look for it, for I have become quite "*au fait*" in shop-keeping, and glancing up I see the same old gentleman who spoke to me at Euston Station. My heart rushes into my mouth, and I look for the paper in silence. I feel his eyes on me, but I suppose my strange costume keeps him from recognizing me, for he turns to go after another curious look.

He has nearly gone, when I cry in despair,—

"Please, oh! please, tell me the way to Kensington."

He turns round in astonishment, and then kindly asks why I want to know. My only answer is a flood of tears. He pats me kindly on the shoulder, and says,—

"If you very much want to know, I can write down the directions."

"Oh, thank you," I falter, and he writes down instructions in pencil. Then, with another curious look, he is gone, and I almost devour my precious bit of paper. As soon as I can, I fly up-stairs to tell Flo; but she receives the news with a weariness and languor which terrifies me.

"Oh, Flo, darling," I cry, "don't go and be ill. We'll be all right soon; only keep up."

"Could you not write home?" she asks, timidly.

The blood rushes into my face. I cannot bring down my pride, and I try to persuade myself that we will both be happier with Harriet. I try to make Flo think so, but she only assents wearily to everything I say.

My misery is extreme. We are almost starved. Flo is taking ill, and I have the dreadful consciousness that if she dies I shall have killed her; but so great is my pride that, even with all this, I cannot write home.

CHAPTER VI.

A DRIVE IN THE DARK.

MY thoughts are now full of getting away again, but I have not much time to think; and as for Flo, she seems so weak and ill that Meg is softened, and allows her to lie on the bed for the most part of the day. The scantiest supply of food is all that we get, but when I burst out with a longing for something better to give her, Flo only smiles, and says,—

"Dear Nell, we might have been dead before this if we had not found a shelter."

I begin to think with terror that soon she will not be able to leave the house at all, and all day long I go about trying to decide whether I shall write home or not. "After all," I try to think, "they would not take any better care of her at home than I can, and if we could only get to Harriet, she would give her good food and everything else that she needs."

I have thought it all over, and have decided that if we cannot get the money from Meg to take us, I must wait for my old gentleman to come again and beg it from him. My

cheeks burn when I think of it, and there is the awful thought that perhaps he will not come again.

That evening Flo becomes worse. I see that she is trying to keep from crying out, and every little while she starts up with a frightened, wild look. I am sitting beside her bed, terrified and lonely, when Mr Moss enters smiling till his mouth seems stretched from ear to ear, and all his yellow fangs of teeth are seen to advantage.

"Come, my dears," he says, "Come, I am going to treat you to a drive." I shrink back alarmed, for he looks so very wicked.

"Flo is very ill, I say, timidly."

He looks down on her, the smile vanishing from his face, and Flo opening her eyes just then, gives a shriek.

"Oh! take that wicked man away," she cries, clinging to me.

"Don't let him touch me. Oh! don't!" and she trembles and hides her face on my shoulder.

"Vicked man, am I," Moss hisses between his teeth, "anyhow, ill or not, come she must. I can't be a burdened with two 'elpless gals hany longer. Hi! Meg, you there, come and get these gals ready."

To my surprise she brings in our pretty dark blue dresses, and old Moss mutters—Lost pawn money and hall. 'Opes they 'll tuck it out."

Poor Flo is shaking in every limb, and almost fainting,

when Meg dresses her, and I am too stupified to care much where they are going to take us. We are taken down stairs and hustled into a cab. It is almost dark, but I see that old Moss gets up outside with the cabman.

We drive for a long, long time through crowded thoroughfares, and then through quieter streets. Flo has fallen quietly asleep again, and I feel as if I were dead, but yet knew everything that was going on.

The cab stops at last, and I see Flo lifted out and then I am lifted out myself, all done in silence. We are carried into a dimly-lighted, cold-looking hall, and I see a tall, grim woman regarding us. She is haggling with Moss at the same time, but at last he departs and she half-drags us into a room which is quite bare, except that here and there are long narrow beds. She puts Flo quietly, but not roughly to bed, and then after bringing me a thick slice of bread and some water, she again leaves the room and locks the door on us.

Oh! How dreadful it is! Worse than any dream. Flo and I to be locked in a great bare room, we do not know where, and Flo ill and I terrified! I sit down trembling, afraid to move or to look into the dark corners of the room, when I hear Flo murmur something, and thinking she wants something, I bend down to hear what she says.

"Keep me, dear Lord," she murmurs, and somehow as I

see the smile on her sleeping face, my loneliness seems to vanish, and I lie down beside her and fall asleep.

Next morning the grim woman brings our breakfast. She seems not unkind, and when she sees that Flo is really ill, she brings her some warm milk and puts a little fire in the room. I venture to ask her where we are, but she only smiles grimly, and answers nothing. I cannot help thinking that she has not got a tongue, because I have always heard that if a woman has one she cannot hold it. I hint as much to Flo, who gravely remarks,—

"Perhaps she is not a woman, I know she has a beard."

We both laugh at this, and I am so overjoyed at hearing Flo laugh again that I ecstatically exclaim,—

"Why, Flo! You are better. Are you not?"

Flo smiles, and owns she is better, but I do not tell her the dreadful fear that has been oppressing me.

She has turned perfectly white and thin, and although we are allowed out every day, it does not seem to do her much good, for we are only allowed to walk in a square yard, surrounded by high walls, and containing nothing but straight gravel paths and plots of grass.

"Flo," I say one day, "Isn't this like the man that was shut up in the prison with the eight windows, and every day there was one less, and one less, and one less, till at last—"

I never finished my bloody story, for Flo screams and rushes away with her fingers in her ears.

Our curiosity is growing more unbearable every day, and our hearts ache to see something beside a big white-washed room, and a square, straight up-and-down garden with four ugly dead walls.

"I think I shall soon forget what the line of beauty is," I say; "everything is so square here."

"All square," says Flo, with a very faint attempt at a pun.

At last one day Mrs Grim takes pity on us and changes our quarters into a front room, whose window looks out on a quiet but pretty side street, where the evening sun loves to linger. The greatest amusement now in our day is to watch a very small, sharp baker's boy who comes whistling down the street every morning at eight o'clock.

Every morning Flo gets up, saying,—

"I wonder what little Bakerie will have in his basket to-day;" and then, when we hear his whistle afar off, she gets quite excited.

"There he is!" she exclaims, and out goes her head to meet him.

Little "Bakerie" soon gets to know us, and salutes us in various ways. One morning he lays down his basket to make "coach-wheels," in the air for our edification, causing peals of laughter from Flo. Another time he makes polite dancing-master's bends and bows, scraping back his feet in

the most approved manner. Sometimes he makes signs too vulgar to describe, and at these Flo shakes her head and tries to look severe, hiding to laugh when she can contain no longer.

One afternoon she sits for a long time thinking, and then says in a low voice,—

"Don't you think we might ask Bakerie to give us an idea where we are," and accordingly next morning I sign for him to stop, and Flo says in a loud whisper,—

"Bakerie,—I mean, boy. What place is this?"

"'Ullo, little moonshine," says the boy. "We're in Kensington, in course, where else 'ud we be?"

My heart beats with delight.

"Oh! do tell me—do tell me," I gasp, eagerly. Do you know where 10 Gretna Place is?"

"Vell, rather," says Bakerie.

"And do you know Mrs Borthwick?" I say, with my face red with excitement. The boy nearly doubles up with laughter.

"Does my mother know I'm hout?" he says, and vanishes, leaving us nearly crying with excitement and impatience.

Next morning we wait for him in trembling joy, and when he comes he looks rather sobered. Somebody seems to have been reading him a lecture. He makes a very gentlemanly bow, and then says politely,—

"Beg parding, ladies, for my conduc' yesterday, but 'oping you wont be hoffended, mother's a-coming to-morrow mornin'."

CHAPTER VII.

WE FIND HARRIET.

WHAT does the boy mean? Who is his mother, and why should she want to see us? We ask ourselves these questions, but they are not immediately answered, for that day a strange thing happens.

We are taking our daily exercise in the garden, with only our hats on, when our grim protectress passes through on her way out. There is a door in the garden wall which has always till now been kept bolted. Through this she stalks, and oh! wonder of wonders! forgets to lock it after her.

Flo and I hesitate only a second or two, then with one accord we rush out, and Flo would be half-way down the street if I do not remember that we must wait till Mrs Grim has turned the corner. Trembling we at last essay forth and try to walk unconcernedly along the street. We are almost caught, for I catch sight of Mrs Grim in a butcher's shop, making some purchases. But fortunately she does not look out, and we turn trembling round a corner and then round another, our hearts beating with fear and horror of being imprisoned again. We meet a kind-looking policeman who

shows us the way to 10 Gretna Place, and at last—oh! at last—after all our troubles, we find it.

We knock at the door—it is a very little house—and in what seems a second we are both crying and clinging to Harriet with all our might.

"My precious children," she says, "and you lost all this time too, as your dear papa did write and tell, which it was very naughty of you to run away, although yer poor hold 'Arriet is nearly 'art broken wi' joy to see yer. Oh! my precious," and she hugs us both till, what with hugging and tears, we are spectacles to be seen.

When at last we are able to see, we behold a small boy sitting at the table with a huge pie before him, and grasping a knife and fork in his hands, while he is grinning with delight and satisfaction at us.

It is our own Bakerie! I am obliged to restrain Flo from rushing up and embracing him; but his mother does it for us, kissing him till he looks cross and rubs his cheek.

"And it was this dear boy," she cries, "my hown Tom, 'as did it. He found the poor horphelins for me, he did," and she nearly strangles her son again.

The next two hours are spent in telling Harriet every thing, but there is something so mysterious about Mr Moss' actions that we all agree he must be found out.

Harriet quite agrees with me that our stepmother is an unbearable woman, and she says we must remain with her

for the present, but I know quite well that she is very poor. Her husband is dead, and Tom's wages are very small, so she lets two rooms of her little house and takes in sewing, "which it is 'ard enough work to keep alive," as she says.

She persuades me to write to papa and tell him we are safe, which I do in a very hesitating and uncertain manner.

Poor papa! He has been advertising and running about the country looking for us, which proves that he is not so indifferent to us as I thought. After the letter is written, I am in terror at the thought of him coming and sternly taking us home again; but I am resolved to make a final struggle for liberty before I give up.

Next day we are perfectly happy, and in good spirits. It is so nice to have Harriet to pet us, and to run about and help her, and do as we like all day; but as evening approaches, I become terrified at the thought of meeting papa, and beg Harriet to take my part.

But the evening passes and we do not hear from him, and next day is the same, and added to my shame is a feeling of terror that something has gone wrong, and that not only have I caused suffering to Flo and to myself, but even to dear papa and Harry. That anything should ail my step-mother never occurs to me, and if it did, I am afraid that I should not care very much.

Next day comes a telegram from papa,—

"Glad to hear my little girls are safe. Tell them my wife is hardly expected to live."

What a feeling possesses my breast! Can I be a murderer in thought if not in deed? I try to shake off the dreadful feeling, and the sight of Flo weeping and crying out,—

"We did it—she will die," makes me feel worse than ever. Poor papa! to have to bear so much, and no one there to comfort him. I know perfectly well that my place is beside him, but when I say so to Harriet, she assures me that we should only be in the way.

So the days go on, and, beyond brief bulletins, we hear no more from home.

"Harry might come," Flo says, although I know it is more than I deserve, and I am frightened to wish for him.

Every night I try to wish that my step-mother may live, and every night Flo earnestly prays for her. I cannot pray; I feel a great deal too wicked. At last, on Saturday night, comes the message,—

"To-night is the crisis," and the struggle in my breast grows worse every moment. Flo seems to have forgotten that our step-mother was ever anything but kind, and I feel almost savage with her for forgetting.

Next day, I resolve to go to church by myself, for Harriet and Tom go to the Dissenter's Chapel, and Flo is going to keep house.

It is very hot, and I creep along the streets feeling half-dead and half-alive. When I reach the church I take my place in a pew very near the door.

It is a pretty new church, with slender Gothic pillars supporting the domed roof, and behind one of the these I screen myself from the eyes of the congregation. I feel as if they were looking at me with eyes of scorn, and when the commandments are read, and the minister pronounces the words, "Thou shalt do no murder," and the people murmur the answer, "Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law," I start like a guilty thing and look round. There is a young man on the other side of the pillar, and he looks at me half in recognition, half in pity, for I am sure I look like a miserable little "horphelin," as Harriet calls me.

I cannot remember where I have seen him before; but as the last hymn is sung, and I have no hymn book, he offers me a share of his, and behind the pillar we make friends.

"I think I saw you in the train coming to London," he says, with a smile.

"Yes," I answer, with a guilty blush.

"How is your little sister," he asks, kindly.

"Oh! she is quite well, thank you."

"I think my father spoke to you at Euston Station. He

came to meet me there, and he declares he seen you or your ghost one day since in a little shop."

"Was that your father?" I ask, my curiosity aroused.

"Yes. He is an old gentleman with red cheeks and grey hair, you know. So you did find your way to Kensington?" he adds.

"Yes," is all I say.

When we get out of church he touches his hat and leaves me, much to my relief, for I am not anxious he should see where we live.

When I get home I give Flo an account of the meeting, but the mention of the journey makes her cheek flush, and she clasps her hands.

"Oh! I wish we were home again," she says.

"Do you, Flo?" I ask, a little impatiently; "Why, you are quite happy here. Are you not?"

Flo shakes her head. "Harriet cannot keep us," she says."

Her reproof makes me feel ashamed. Where are all my grand schemes of work now? All evaporated into being a burden on an old servant.

"You shall get home, darling," I say, remorsefully, and I make up my mind at last to write to papa and ask him to take her home again.

Next day we are anxiously expecting the postman, when the door opens and Harry walks in. Flo rushes up to him

and is caught up in his arms, while I walk to the window and try to hide my burning face, and wish the ground would open and swallow me up. But he takes no notice of me, and my misery is complete. He tells Flo that mamma is better, and that he has come to take her home with him, but first they are to go for a week to Scarborough. Scarborough! Where I have so longed to go, and Flo to go without me!

CHAPTER VII.

HARRIET'S STORY.

HARRY at last tells me that for the present I am to remain with Harriet, and that he would have come long ago, but that papa thought I should be left to come to my senses, and he hints that he does not consider me a fit companion for Flo. I bend my head, and hear all he says in silence, but my pride is by no means softened, and although I am almost broken-hearted at being separated from Flo, I resolve to stay away from home as long as I can.

Harry and Flo go away, and I am left alone. When I have seen the last of them, I go and throw myself on my bed, and there I lie crying and wishing I were dead. But at tea time I become hungry, and do not feel so much inclined to give up the good things of this life, so I descend, and Harriet greets me with a kiss and a great plateful of hot cakes, which she has been baking for Tom and me.

"Come away, my lamb," she says, "and after you 'ave 'ad your bit of a tea, I 'll tell you hall about Mr Moss."

I hurry over my tea and then sit down on a low stool at her feet, and she begins,—

"Your papa did not know what to do at first when he came home and found you had disappeared. Mrs Osborne felt worse than usual, and he was kept in constant attendance upon her. Besides she kept fretting and saying she was the cause of it all. Your brother spent all his spare time in advertising and running about from place to place to find you. He came up to me but I knew nothing about you; and, after going to most of the police stations, he returned home again.

Bye-and-bye he began to see advertisements in the *Times* about N. and F. He replied and got an answer that the two little girls had been kidnapped and carried off to a private asylum, but that information concerning the parties would be given on applying to Mr Moss. Your papa came to London and saw Mr Moss, not at his own house, my dear; but he refused to tell anything unless paid four or five hundred pounds for the information. Your papa suspected him of being the kidnapper himself, and refused. He tried to force him to tell where you were, but it was of no use, and the only thing to be done was to go on advertising. Then an answer came saying you were in London, but that no information would be given without a reward. Your papa wrote saying he was prepared to give a large sum, and then notice came that you were not treated very well, but on payment of the money your release would be procured.

Your papa then came to London, and gave the whole affair into the hands of a very clever detective. This man found out by what train you had come to London, and that an old gentleman had been seen speaking to you at Euston. This old gentleman seems to have something to do with the Midland Railway. He recollected having seen a little charity girl one day in a bookseller's shop, in a low part of the town, who was so remarkably like you that he was almost sure it was the same. This little girl started him much by asking in an agitated manner how she could get to Kensington, and he had written directions for her on a piece of paper.

Of course this shop was easily discovered, and old Moss laid hands on. But try as they would they could not make him tell where he had placed you, and other cases of kidnapping being found out against him, he has been transported. I dare say the detective would have discovered you in time, if my hown Tom 'ad not been cleverer than any of 'em. At this Tom grins with satisfaction, for he is listening, and his mother hugs him afresh.

I spent a month with Harriet, and, although I get lots of letters from Flo, I am miserable without her. She likes Scarborough so much that she has only just gone home, and, to my unbounded surprise, she writes as if mamma and she were the greatest of friends.

I have made acquaintance with the old gentleman and

his son. They know all my story, and they are very kind. Will, that is the name of the son, takes me out often in the pony-carriage, and I confide to him that when I grow up I am going to have "Bakerie," dressed in buttons, to sit behind me. But Flo writes me that papa is building a new lodge, and she is quite sure he is going to put Harriet and her boy there.

One morning I am busy sewing when a letter is brought to me. I do not know the hand-writing, and opening it with some curiosity, I see it begins: "My dear Nell." Who can it be from? I look at the signature, and see it is from "Your affectionate mamma!" It is—yes, it is from my step-mother! What can have induced her to write to me?

"My dear Nell," I read, "I am quite well now, and Flo and I have made up our minds to ask you to come home in the beginning of the week. We are all longing to see you, and I hope sincerely you will come, and please 'forgive and forget.'—Your affectionate mamma,

"L. OSBORNE."

I sit in stupified wonder, and then show the letter to Harriet, who can only say, "dearie me!" but it is all quite true, for soon a letter comes from papa saying he has been induced by his wife to let me come home again, The letter begins rather sternly, but ends in a tender "Come home,

my Nell, and I hope you will be happier than you were before."

My pride melts away before these appeals, and half-sorrowfully, half-joyfully, I bid good-bye to Harriet, to, Bakerie, to Will and his father, sure that I shall soon see them all again, and longing to see dear Flo and the rest. I am even rather anxious to see mamma.

Harriet sees me off, Tom loads me with baker's stuff, and Will promises to write very often. Mr Grey gives me a fatherly kiss, and at last I am off. How different this journey is from the last! It is autumn now, and the trees are every shade of brown and red. Even the cows look contentedly at us as we rush past, and at the old station at home there is the carriage waiting, with dancing, sparkling, merry Flo in it, and Harry with the kindest of welcomes.

"Why! how thin you are, Nell," he says, "we must fatten you up for Christmas. Flo, here, is going to take a prize."

I feel rather shaky as we approach the house, and am relieved when papa lifts me out with a quiet kiss. Flo is laughing at some great secret, and she leads me softly into a warm, pretty room, where on the sofa lies mamma, not looking in the least the same; for she looks much softer and prettier, and there is such a pretty colour in her cheeks. She wears a soft pearly grey dress, and she kisses me quite

tenderly. I can only look at her in wonder and feel very much ashamed of my old thoughts and feelings. Flo whispers something to her. They seem to have got up quite an understanding, these two—and then mamma says, smiling,—

"Show Nell our new doll, Flo."

In much wonder I follow Flo to a little basinette, which I have not seen before, and there I behold—a dear, little, darling baby-boy who begins to shout and roar whenever he sees me!

Mamma and I make friends over the baby, and I know we both think we won't get tired over each other again.

That night Flo and I are seated on papa's knees, and looking into my face, he says. "My dear Nell, what a long time since I have seen my little daughter!"

"Papa," Flo says; "Nell was so good to me in London;" and when I try to stop her, papa kisses me and says—

"My dear little girl, what would I have done, if I had never seen you again?"

"Ah! but God took care of us for you," Flo answers."

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE WOODS.

MADEMOISELLE has gone back to her beloved France, and our education is put into Harry's hands for the meantime, but he is not very hard upon us, and our holidays are many and frequent.

One morning we have a virtuous fit, and about six o'clock the sleeping household is startled by loud and vigorous knocks at Harry's door, for he is our great friend in need, and no fun is quite perfect without him.

Flo opens the door two inches and inserts her nose, to the imminent danger of that feature, as Harry is giving to "shying" pillows at matutinal visitors.

"Ha-a-a-ry," she calls in a loud, rustling whisper, but—

> 'As a door on his hinges, so he with his head,
> Winked sadly at her, and lay back in his bed.'

Emboldened by the sighs and snores we hear, we venture in, and refresh his weary eyelids with a little water.

This does not mend matters much, but at last I hit on the expedient of pulling away the pillows one by one. This only elicits a louder snore, so lifting his beautifully worked

slippers, (we never could find out who gave them to him), we begin to batter the poor fellow's head in. Then without a sign he starts up, and we scud out of the door in company with pillows, bolster and slippers, making a very small noise indeed.

We go to our room and don two pair of very creaky boots. How is it that boots have such a mania for creaking, and keep up such an affectionate conversation with the stairs when you want to get out without any one knowing? I often wonder how the heroines of elopements manage to get out without door-keys, boots and stairs all combining against them.

We wait patiently, or rather impatiently, downstairs for three-quarters of an hour.

"What can Harry be doing all this time?" says Flo, and she insists upon creaking all the way up-stairs and down again to see what he is about.

While she is away I muse on the mystery of man taking so long to dress when he has so few garments to put on, and no long tangled hair to brush, and I think that Harry ought to take a lesson from us. Then big Harry and little Flo appear, hand in hand, and chattering away like magpies.

As we elope by the back gate, Harry suggests that I should return and rummage the larder. By good fortune I find the key in the door, but it is an almost unknown

region to me and so dark. The first character I meet with is a kitchen chair, which gives me a friendly and passing blow on the leg. When the noise of this interview has subsided I see with delight a large cake on the shelf. I mark it for my prey, and then remembering how fond Flo is of bread and butter, I get a nice sharp knife, butter the loaf, and cut a round as I have seen cook do. I next pounce on a little pot of honey, and bearing my spoils to the corner I get a very large newspaper and wrap them up as well as I can. I have accomplished this with much rattling when I remember I have nothing substantial. I begin my travels again, and this time get some cold chicken and three most delightful custards in glasses. They are rather difficult to carry, but I contrive to get out with my load, feeling like a very happy thief.

"Why! What a time you have been!" they both exclaimed.

"What have you got? It looks like a band-box."

"It's not," I cry, indignantly, as I display my treasures.

"Jolly," they both ejaculate.

"But isn't it wicked, Harry?" asks Flo.

"'Providence helps those who helps themselves,' as the little boy said when he stole the sugar," says Harry.

We both laugh, because we consider Harry very funny.

"Oh! you 're trying to copy Sam Weller, Harry," I say.

"I hope you haven't put any pins in my bread and butter, like poor little Pip's sister," Flo says.

We all laugh again. It doesn't take much to make us laugh this morning, and we three have a habit of considering each other very clever indeed.

Harry is very fond of improving our minds, and he begins to talk about Clive and the Indian Empire. I am unfortunate enough to bring up the subject by asserting in my innocence that that interesting personage lived in the time of Charles II., and then adding, "I mean Lord Clarendon, but it doesn't matter what his name was, he married Charles the Second's wife—I mean his sister."

Harry lectures away, trying to improve or remove my ignorance, Flo preserves a discreet silence, and I walk along, indulging in a yawn now and then and furtive glances into the pot of honey which I carry.

We pass by a dear old red brick house, with a garden full of apple-trees, where we have often been feasted with strawberries and cream, and other delights, then along by the plantation, and through a farm-yard into a field, where the cows regard us with wondering and suspicious eyes. We reach the cart-road which leads to the wood, and enter its own sylvan shades, where the only sounds to be heard are the songs of the birds and the cooing of the doves as they make love far up among the trees.

We "wind about and in and out" till we come to "our

dell." This is a deep hollow, filled with brush-wood and rather damp, but, otherwise, most delightful. There we make ourselves comfortable, and proceed to eat our breakfast. The chicken bones are very nice, the custards have all meandered over them, but this only gives them a nice flavour; but Flo no sooner begins to eat bread and butter than, with a cry of despair, she casts it from her. Awful to relate—the bread is buttered with cold soap.

At last with the help of the cake she gets the taste out of her mouth; and after I have buried the remains of the feast like the minister in the "Seaboard Parish," we separate and go on exploring expeditions. I am soon tired however, and sit down to read. The only book I could find to bring with me was the aforesaid "Seaboard Parish." It abounds in long discourses which are a little above my comprehension, but I pick out the story and try to be content with such things as I have.

It soon begins to get very hot although it is September. I was up very early, and the cooing of the doves is so soothing that I begin to feel drowsy. The Seaboard Parish merges into the field at the bottom of Cow Lane, and I hear one of the cows saying to one another,—

"You should read something more substantial than Mrs Hemans, my dear."

When suddenly I am awakened by a most terrific yell.

I start up screaming in consort, "where! what!" and gaze up and around, but nothing can I see.

The yells increase, and I jump up terrified and begin wildly to rush in their direction, but I have not gone far when I fall down on the ground in fits of laughter.

I try to scream for help, but end by rolling over and over on the ground, for there, in mid air, from the surrounding brushwood, hangs one leg—a solitary leg, with a frantically waving boot, and emitting those awful yells.

Then the noise ceases, and a sobbing child is dragged down by Harry, whose stern face sobers me immediately.

"Nell," he says, "how can you be so unfeeling? Flo might have been killed. You would not have laughed then."

"Oh, but," I gasp; "it was so funny."

"Ridicule is the sign of a little mind," he answers.

I take the inuendo meekly enough, and try to sneak out of his way, but Flo comes to my rescue by laughing herself, and peace is restored.

We soon begin to feel weary after this, for the day is very monotonous when one has nothing particular to do, and we wind our way homewards across the fields, to find that it is just eleven o'clock, and mamma and baby in the garden wondering where we are.

Mamma is reading a letter, and she smiles as I go up to take little Arthur.

"Did you know that the red-brick house is sold again, Nell?" she asks.

"No," we both cry, visions of future feasts and games of croquet and lawn-tennis exciting our youthful imaginations.

"Well, it is, and two gentlemen have taken it."

I wonder why she smiles so, but when she says—

"They are friends of yours, Nell," I guess at once that my dear Mr Grey and Will are coming to live near us, and when two or three days later the lodge is finished and Harriet and Tom take possession of it, Flo and I feel as if we had nothing more to wish for.

I do not forget my visit to London, and when papa takes us there again, we go and sit in the old church where Flo and I sat, wearied and hungry, listening to the old organist playing.

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