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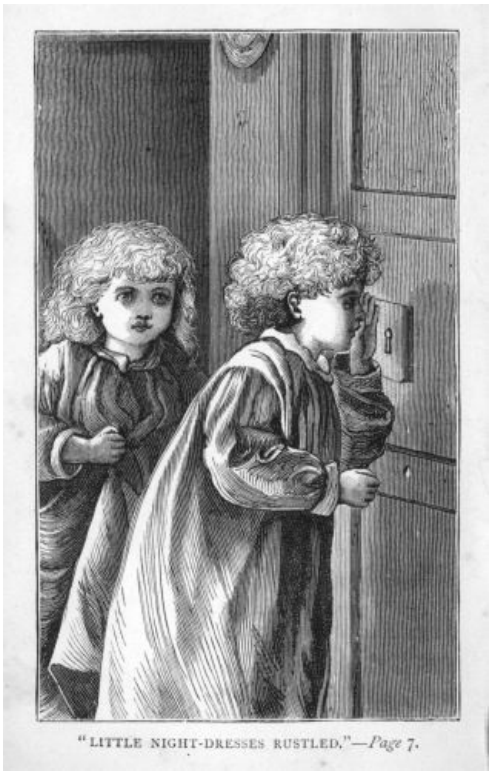

"LITTLE NIGHT-DRESSES RUSTLED."—*Page 7.*

"Little night-dresses rustled."

DAYBREAK

A STORY FOR GIRLS

BY

FLORENCE A. SITWELL

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Illustrations.

DAYBREAK.

CHAPTER I.

LIFE IN THE ORPHANAGE.

Long before it was light, little feet were passing up and down those great stone stairs, little voices whispered in the corridors, little night-dresses rustled by the superintendent's door. She did not think of sleeping, for though the moon still hung in the sky, it was Christmas morning—five o'clock on Christmas morning at the Orphanage; and the little ones had everything their own way on Christmas Day. So she sat up in bed, with the candle lighted beside her, bending her head over a book she held in her hand, and often smiling to herself as she listened to the sounds that revealed the children's joy. She was a grey-headed woman, with a face that might have been stern if the lines about the mouth had not been so gentle; a face, too, that was care-worn, yet full of peace. A tall night-cap surmounting her silvery grey hair gave her a quaint, even laughable appearance; but the orphan children reverenced the nightcap because they loved the head that, night after night, bent over them as a mother's might have done.

She was reading Milton's "Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity," and only laid the book aside as the little feet gathered outside her door, and clear, passionless voices blended in a Christmas hymn.

Then the sounds died away again in the distance, and she was left to follow in her thoughts.

Upstairs to the great dormitory the children crept; trying to be as noiseless as the fairies who filled their Christmas stockings. Maggie, being the gentlest, led the way, and was trusted to open creaking doors; the younger ones formed the centre of the little army, and behind them all marched Jane, the trusted Jane, who, though she had been one year only at the Orphanage, had won the confidence of all. She was the daughter of honest, industrious, working people, and had not the sad tendencies to slippery conduct which many of the little ones possessed. She was true in word and in deed; and no one could measure the good of such an example amongst the children.

The full moonlight was shining in the dormitory on many a little empty bed. Who could resist a pillow-fight? The sub-matron was up already trimming an extra beautiful bonnet to wear on this festive day. Jane remonstrated, but was met with a wrathful reminder that on Christmas Day Mother Agnes let them do just what they liked, a great pillow was hurled at poor Jane's head, and the fight began in real earnest.

Just when the excitement was at its highest pitch, a fierce cry rang from the end of the room. The game ceased suddenly, and the children turned to see what had happened. There was that odd little new-comer, Kate Daniels, standing with hands clenched and dark eyes flashing, in front of the last small bed.

"You wicked, rough girls," she said, "you have hurt my little sister. I shall make you feel it! I shall do something dreadful to you, Mary Kitson. I hate you!"

In their excitement the children had quite forgotten that the little bed at the end of the dormitory had an occupant, a soft curly-headed child of six, who slept soundly regardless of the noise, till that awkward Mary tumbled over the bed and made her cry. They understood it all now, and Jane and Maggie moved up to the bed-side, hoping to soothe the sisters with kind words. But Kate stood in front of the bed glaring at them.

"You treat us so because we are strangers," she said, "and I hate you all. I never wanted to come here—they made me come—and I shan't stay if I can help it. I shall run away, and take Frances."

Little Frances, meanwhile, clung crying to her sister, who went on talking so wildly and passionately that Jane thought it better to make a move to the lavatory with the younger children, and leave the new girls for a time to themselves.

A great change passed over poor Kate's face when she and her sister were once more alone together. The passion left it, and was replaced by a melancholy smile. She sat down on the bed, took her little sister's hand, and looked long into her face.

"Are you much hurt, darling?" she said, at length.

"Not so badly, but I made a great noise, didn't I!"

Kate did not answer, but wrapping a petticoat round the child, lifted her out of bed.

"Now, Frances, darling, come with me to the window, and I will show you the prettiest sight you ever saw, and we will forget all our troubles. Look at the roofs with the snow on them, and the moon making such strange, pale lights on the snow. Look at the icicles—did you ever see such lovely ones! Look at the trees—every tiniest little branch covered with frost! Look at the pictures the frost has made upon the window,—see, there are forests,—and oh, more wonderful things than I could tell.

"Nobody loves you and me, Frances. We've only got each other,—and I hate everybody but you (you needn't do that though). But I am glad things are so pretty. One might almost think that somebody had loved you and me, and cared to make everything so pretty to please us!" Kate's eyes softened as she said this,—she had beautiful eyes, large and dark. The rest of her face was plain: it showed much

strength of purpose, but little feeling. Poor Kate! the furrows on her forehead, the old, sad smile, so unlike a child's, and the bony hands, told of much hard work, much care, and deep and painful anxieties in the past. She was sitting on the window ledge, half supporting little Frances in her arms. It was no new attitude to Kate. Her figure was stunted and slightly bent from the efforts she had made years ago to carry her little sister about; but the weight of little Frances had rested upon her in another way also, and it was perhaps owing to her brave efforts to shield the child from evil and from grief that the contrast in appearance was so marked between the two sisters. Frances with her soft little pink and white face, her solemn eyes, and smiling mouth, and without a hard line anywhere, looked as if life had smiled upon her.

All through the day the little strangers kept close together, and took very little notice of what went on around them. They ate their Christmas dinner in solemn silence, and declined to join in the games. Mother Agnes was disappointed, for her whole heart was bound up in her children's happiness; and least of all she could bear to see sad faces on Christmas Day. She watched Kate with much interest, but could not wholly understand her.

Before many months had passed, a curious transformation came over Kate. She became the recognised leader of the children. Mother Agnes saw with despair Jane's influence waning before that of this strange new girl. Jane was so safe, so true, so dependable; and Kate, well, who could trust Kate, with her odd ways of going on? Sometimes she would keep the younger ones awake half the night telling them the wildest of tales. She had laws of her own for the play-hours, and a secret system of rewards and punishments. But, worst of all, she was not straightforward. Mother Agnes, with her true, honest nature, was cut to the heart to find that Kate could act a part, and did not scruple to do so, to shield herself and her little sister from punishment.

Kate was popular now, and yet no one loved her, and she loved no one except little Frances. She never thought any trouble too great to be taken for her little sister. If any one said a rough word to Frances, Kate contrived to punish the offender in a way that was not easily forgotten. She helped Frances with her lessons; shielded her from blame; dressed dolls for her through whole long summer afternoons; told her stories that aimed vaguely at having a good moral; answered her childish questions with infinite patience.

The summer and autumn passed, and Christmas came and went; and after Christmas an event happened, the memory of which no lapse of years could ever efface from poor Kate's mind. A certain morning dawned, just like other mornings, bright and cold; lessons, house-work and play went on as usual, only, as the day was drawing to its close, some men came to the door, carrying a little prostrate figure; and Kate was standing in the doorway, and saw it all—saw her poor Frances lying unconscious in the men's arms, her head terribly bruised, and her pretty, fair curls all tossed over a deathly white face.

She was fond of clambering about by herself, and had slipped from the roof of a little outhouse, and fallen on her head.

She was put to bed in the sick ward, and the doctor sent for. For three days and three nights Mother Agnes and Kate watched beside her; on the fourth day the doctor told them that he could do no more. Frances wandered much through those last days, talking confusedly of green fields, and birds singing, and of flowers. Sometimes she would sing little snatches of the hymns they learnt in school; and she often spoke—as little dying children do speak of Christ. Mother Agnes' tenderness to poor Kate almost exceeded her tenderness to the dying child, but Kate made no response to it. She answered in monosyllables, and hung down her head with its mass of bushy hair, and dark eyes gleaming strangely under her overhanging brow.

All was over very soon, and Kate was left with a memory, and with a tiny little grave to tend.

Mother Agnes felt for her out of the depths of a womanly heart, but Kate either could not, or would not speak of her sorrow to any living being.

She gave up all her odd ways, and became quiet, and very gentle; and as months passed on Mother Agnes began to think that Kate had really improved in character. She showed signs of talent in so many directions that the Mother thought of training her for a schoolmistress, and took real delight in planning for the child's future, except when now and then some curious little trait of character would raise an uncomfortable feeling which could not be dispelled.

CHAPTER II.

THE FLIGHT.

A confirmation was to be held during the spring in the neighbouring village; and the clergyman who prepared the Orphanage children looked upon Kate as a most promising candidate; she was gentle, and attentive, and wrote her papers with so much care.

The Confirmation day dawned as sweetly and as brightly as a Confirmation day should do. The birds were singing their hearts out in the Orphanage garden; primroses and wallflowers were blooming in every corner; the apple-trees were in festive array, and little pink and white petals floated on the breeze, and came in at the open windows.

Then a troop of little girls in grey dresses with white caps assembled, prayer-book in hand, at the door, waiting for Mother Agnes.

What could keep Mother Agnes so long? The bells have been ringing for nearly half-an-hour, and they would certainly be late! No, here she comes, but with a very grave face—much too grave—and oh, where is Kate?

"Children, we must start," said the Mother sternly, "Kate is not coming." Naturally the children wondered, and questioned amongst themselves what had happened, but they little suspected the real facts. Mother Agnes had gone to look for Kate in the dormitory, feeling that she should like to take the child's hand in hers, and say something to comfort and to strengthen her. But Kate was not in the dormitory. Her grey Sunday dress lay, neatly folded on the bed, the Confirmation cap arranged on the top of it, and by its side a note, addressed in a bold, round hand to Mother Agnes.

What on earth could this mean? Mother Agnes stared at the dress, fingered the note, and then unfastened it with a hand that trembled a little. The contents were these—

"DEAR MOTHER AGNES,—You have been good to me, so I will tell you that I am leaving, and not going to come back any more. And it is not because I do not like you, for I do, though I have never loved any one but Frances; but I cannot stay in this place any more. Oh! you do not know what the pain is that I bear. When the birds sing, I seem to hear Frances' voice singing with them as she did last spring, and I see her running amongst the flower-beds, and I cannot look at the apple-tree without seeing her little fair face peeping at me from between the blossoms. Perhaps you will not care whether I go or stay, but I hope you will not mind about me, for I shall go to London to find a place. There's many younger than me in places already. But if I do not find a place, perhaps I will drown myself in the river, for I am sick of life, and I hope you will not think about me, or mind.——KATE DANIELS."

Mother Agnes' face grew very white as she read this letter—but no time was to be lost—she sat down and wrote a little note giving information to the police, and sent it by a servant; and then she went downstairs to join the waiting children. She tried to comfort herself by thinking that Kate could not have got very far in so short a time. At the most she could only have been gone an hour, and surely she would be quickly found? And yet, strange misgivings took possession of Mother Agnes' mind.

Ten days later, a tall woman dressed in black was hastening at early dawn along the Thames embankment, near Westminster. Mother Agnes scarcely knew herself, her heart seemed bursting.

It was the old story of the one lost sheep becoming all in all to the shepherd. The days had seemed months since poor Kate was missed, and this first news of a girl who might possibly turn out to be Kate, had made Mother Agnes hurry up to town by the night train, quite forgetting that she could not disturb St. Thomas' Hospital with inquiries at such an early hour. So she paced feverishly up and down by the river-side, thinking. It did seem just what she could imagine Kate doing, rushing across the road to save a little child about the age of Frances from being run over, and both children, whoever they might be, were knocked down by the passing omnibus. They were much injured, and were accordingly carried to St. Thomas' Hospital. The younger child was soon identified through her own statements, but the elder one remained long unconscious. Her dress was very ragged, but her underclothing bore the stamp of some institution.

Mother Agnes went over in her mind every word of the short report she had received, again and again.

How strange London looked at this early hour! She scarcely knew it in the dim grey light, with hardly a sound in the streets, and there floated into her mind lines of Wordsworth's, written from this very spot at this very hour, three-quarters of a century ago—

"Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep,

But was it all so still? What of the sick in the hospitals, constrained to watch and bear the world's burdens through the long hours of darkness. Oh, if she could only pierce those great walls and stand by the bed-side of the poor girl of whom her thoughts were now so full!

Even the children's ward in St. Thomas' Hospital looked strange and un-home-like in that dim grey light. It was nearly silent too, except for occasional little moans, coming from little beds. But from one bed there came something besides a moan: a childish voice half whispered the word "Kate."

"Yes, dear," came from the next bed, in a low voice, "what is it?"

"Do you feel better, dear Kate? and would my doll help you to bear the pain?"

Kate smiled gently. "I do feel a little better; and I am getting rather big for a doll. But tell me, what is your name, dear? What am I to call you?"

"My name is Frances," said the little girl.

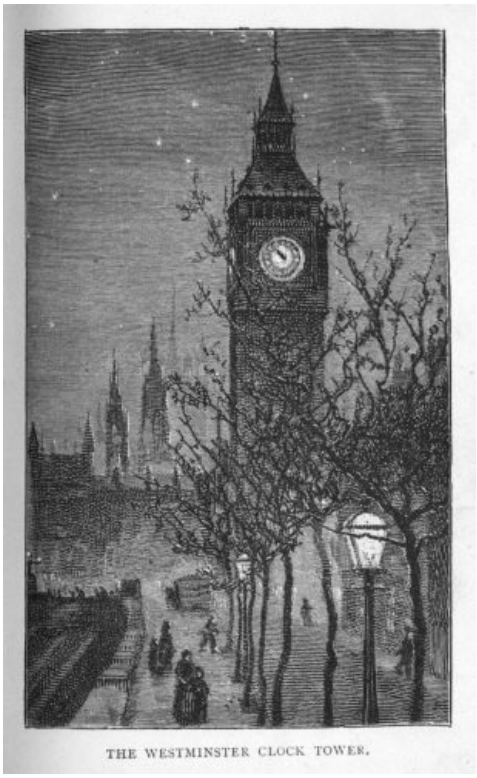
Kate shuddered, and tried to turn her head away.

"Is anything the matter?" asked the little voice, as Kate did not speak.

"No, nothing," said poor Kate, not very truthfully—and then to change the subject—"Where are your people? Where do you live?"

"I have five, up in heaven, waiting for me," said Frances slowly, "and I live with my aunt. She keeps a baker's shop, and when I am not at school, I clean the floors, and mind the little ones, and I go to bed when the baby does, to keep her quiet. And when the stars come out, I lie there, thinking of my father and our own little ones, and thinking of Jesus Christ, thinking,—thinking,—longing to see His face."

The great voice of the great Westminster clock at this moment told the hour. How solemn it sounded in the stillness; even more solemn than when it speaks out above the roar of London life in the day-time.



THE WESTMINSTER CLOCK TOWER.

The Westminster clock tower.

"I am going to sleep again now," said the little child. "Good-night, dear Kate; God bless you, and mind you wake me if the pain is bad."

CHAPTER III.

IN THE HOSPITAL.

At last Mother Agnes stood by Kate's bed side. How pale the poor girl looked and her dark eyes seemed to have grown larger and more pathetic than they used to be. A real gleam of pleasure passed over her face as her eyes rested on Mother Agnes.

"You are good to come to me," said Kate. "I did not think you would have cared. How did you know I was here?"

"Because, dear child, I took every possible pains to find out what had become of you; and heard of you at last."

"I was afraid you would send the police after me," said Kate, "and that is why I did not take the straight road to London, but went a long way round."

"Then what did you do for food and shelter all that time?"

"I had a shilling of my own," said Kate in a weary voice, "and that lasted me in bread for some days. And at nights I slept in barns and outhouses, and once under the open sky. But when I got near London, I was so weak for want of food that I thought I should have died; and I lay down by the roadside, and could not get any farther. And then some poor men who were tramping the country for work passed that way, and they took pity on me, and gave me some broken meat they had with them, and something out of a bottle,—it may have been brandy for aught I know,—but it set me on my feet again, and so I got to London.

"And I tried to think of any one I knew there. I did not dare to go near our district lady who sent me to the Orphanage, for fear she should send me back. And I thought of old Sally Blackburn, who used to live next door to us in Westminster, and made a living with buying and selling cast-off clothing and she was good to us,—and when father came in very drunk, she would take us children into her little place to be out of the way. So I hunted her up; and then, Mother Agnes, I did a very wrong thing. She is old and stupid, and very poor, and I could not take food and lodging with her for nothing,—so I gave her my Orphanage dress. She was pleased with it, and said it was worth quite ten shillings, and gave me a ragged old dress in exchange,—and something to buy a bit of print with to run up a dress for going out in the mornings to look for a place. And oh, ma'am, it was such a wretched, dismal, dark place she lived in; I didn't know how to abide it after the Orphanage; and yet I wouldn't have gone back for worlds."

She sighed deeply as she said this. Mother Agnes tried to turn her thoughts away by talking cheerfully on other subjects for a time, and made Kate tell all she knew of the little girl in the next bed.

"I shall come up again to town in a day or two, to see you," Mother Agnes said.

"Will you?" said Kate. "Thank you. I did not think you would have cared."

"I do care for you," said Mother Agnes, with her eyes full of tears; "but Kate, there is someone who cares more."

"I don't believe He cares," said Kate sadly. "I don't see why He should care for me. I know it's all in the Bible; but that was written many hundred years ago. Please forgive me, ma'am, for speaking so. I don't wish to be rude, but I really can't believe it."

Just at that moment the patients' tea was carried in, so that no further talk was possible. Mother Agnes, with an aching heart, said good-bye to Kate, and hurried off to catch her train.

Next day there was a consultation, for Kate was not doing well; and the doctors broke to her the news that she would have to lose her leg. It did not seem to distress her in the least. She took it quite quietly; but a passion of sobs broke from the next little bed.

"O doctor! doctor!" said a child's voice; "don't go and hurt dear Kate so."

"Don't be frightened about it," said Kate. "I shall be moved into another room, and you will know nothing about it till it is all over."

"I am not frightened," said the child; "but oh, sirs, if somebody's leg must be cut off, please, please let it be my leg instead of Kate's." Frances in her eagerness had forgotten her own pain; and had raised herself in bed, and stretched out her arm towards the doctors.

The elder of the two men came toward her, and bent over her. "My dear child," he said, "you are doing very well; there is no need to cut off your leg. And try not to distress yourself about your friend, for only what is wisest and best is being done for her."

"I will try and be good, and not mind so much, please sir," said Frances; and then she hid her face

in the pillow, and tried to choke down her sobs.

The doctors moved away at last, and Kate turned a pair of wondering eyes upon Frances as she said:

"What made you wish to lose your leg instead?"

"Only Kate, because I love you more than I could tell any one. And if you must lose your leg, please God, I will comfort you for it as much as ever I can."

"Thank you, dear," said Kate, very much touched,—and after that she relapsed into silence.

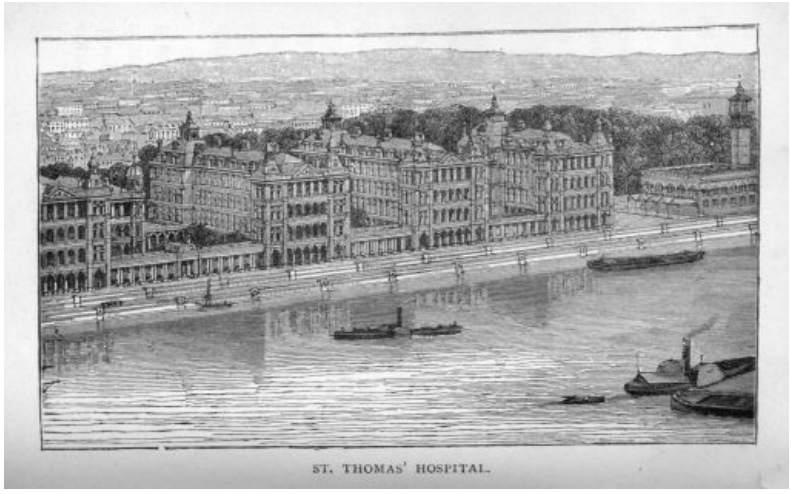
Easter fell very late that year. Good Friday was kept in the hospital after Kate had lost her leg. There was a service in the ward, and moreover, the nurse came and sat by Kate's side, and read to her the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah.

"She doesn't seem to take much notice of reading," the nurse said later to Mother Agnes, who had come up again to see Kate. They little knew that it was the first "notice" that Kate had ever taken of anything in the Bible.

Kate would not talk to-day to Mother Agnes. She answered gently, but shortly, and could not be drawn into conversation. One of her old fits of reserve seemed to have taken hold of her.

Mother Agnes was going away, deeply disappointed, when the nurse told her the story of little Frances wishing to lose her leg for Kate's sake. And also, how the children had grown to love each other; and what a dear child Frances was, and how she talked to Kate of everything that is good.

And then Mother Agnes was comforted, for she saw that all she had to do was to stand aside, and let a little child do the work. And as she walked along the Thames Embankment in the glory of the setting sun, it came into her mind how Christ had taken all that was sweetest on earth, the love and trust of little children, the love of the father for the child, of the shepherd for the sheep, and made earthly love the stepping-stone to raise us into the thought of the possibility of that greater Love outside ourselves.



ST. THOMAS' HOSPITAL.

St. Thomas' Hospital.

The next time she came to the hospital, Kate had much to ask her about the Orphanage. They talked pleasantly for a short time; and then, after a pause Kate said: "Mother Agnes, something is frightening me."

"What is it, Kate?"

Another pause—so long that it seemed as if Kate did not mean to speak again—and then she said: "The love of God frightens me."

"But, Kate, *that* was meant to be the greatest joy and comfort of our lives."

"It is always there," said Kate, earnestly, "burning into me so that I cannot forget it. It is much worse to bear than the pain. Indeed, I cannot bear it, it is almost intolerable. Night and day, I can never, never forget it. And oh, Mother Agnes, if I had killed my own little Frances, it would not have given me the trouble it does to think of the things I have done against Jesus Christ."

Kate's words, her face, and her whole manner awed Mother Agnes so much that she could not speak for some moments. And then she talked to Kate for long—gently and tenderly and more plainly than she had ever done before. Kate said good-bye to her with eyes that were full of tears.

That night, before she went to sleep, Frances said:

"Kate, does what you spoke of still burn into you?"

Kate was startled, for she did not think that Frances had heard the half-whispered conversation.

"Yes," she said, "it is there just the same. I can scarcely bear it! What can I do?"

"I don't know what you can do," said Frances, "except that you are bound to speak to Him about it."

Kate turned on her pillow with a half sob, and said no more.

CHAPTER IV.

IN A THIRD-CLASS CARRIAGE.

"Kate—I can't sing any more—I'm just tired out with happiness."

"Cuddle up against me, darling, and try and go to sleep then."

"Then, dear Kate," said Frances, earnestly, "will you *promise* to tell me all about the next stations, and the green fields, and the sheep, and the cows, and the people hay-making, and the dear little white houses. And I will dream about the sea. Oh, I am so glad that you and I are going to the sea."

So the little head with its mass of golden brown hair found a resting-place on Kate's shoulder, and silence reigned for a time. And Kate, her arm round the sleeping child, watched those green fields flooded with summer sunlight with thoughts so new and strange that often the tears would come into her eyes. She could not quite understand this new life yet, but somehow, since the day when the fast-closed door was unlocked, and the Friend admitted, she had found all her old restlessness and her hard thoughts of life vanish, and deep peace and love had come in their place.

"Is it a station?" said a little dreamy voice at length, and the brown head moved uneasily. "Please tell me when there's something to be seen besides 'Colman's Mustard.'"

"There *is* something!" cried Kate, breathlessly, "there is, Oh, Frances, such a beautiful face!"

Little Frances was on her feet in a moment, and rushed to the farther window. Before the train had quite stopped, her head was such a long way out that an old German from the next window shouted to her, "If you do not take care, Miss, some fine morning you vill get up vidout your head."

"I see her," said Frances, turning round to Kate, "all in grey, with a very, very large bunch of roses in her hands. Now she is talking to three big brothers. Now the big brothers are carrying all her things; books, and a bag, and a basket, and a cloak, and a parasol, and a funny stick with wires in it."

"Lawn-tennis racket," suggested Kate, who knew country ways.

"There is a funny old woman with a hook nose walking with them, and now the big brothers are laughing and talking to her."

"Maybe she's the old nurse," remarked Kate.

"They are coming our way; oh, do you think she will get into our carriage?"

"No, she'll travel first-class," said Kate, with a little sigh.

"No, no, I can hear them speak of travelling third. Kate, put your old hat straight on your head. Tie my blue tie—quick, please!"

The arrangements were scarcely completed when a young man's face appeared at the window, and soon after they heard a voice: "I say, Violet, if you really mean to travel third, you and Nanny had better get in there. There's only a poor girl with crutches and one other child."

"All right, Dick; help Nanny up first, and give her a corner seat with my cloak behind her. Now Nanny, darling, lean on his arm."

"Put Nanny facing the engine, or she'll think she's going the wrong way," shouted another voice, and a peal of laughter followed.. The old woman after some difficulty was safely landed inside the carriage. The brothers, carrying the things, followed. Violet with her great bunch of roses came last.

It was quite new to poor Kate to hear brothers and sisters laughing and joking together. She could not half understand the little jokes that passed, but she liked to listen. The musical voices and the ringing laughter seemed to do her good.

And Violet all the time was conscious of a great pair of wistful eyes fixed on hers. As soon as the final good-bye to the brothers had been said, and the train was really off, she whispered something to Nanny, and began unfastening her bunch of roses. Nanny, meanwhile, bent forward towards Kate:

"You've been ill, my dears," she said.

"We've both been run over," said Kate.

"Eh, dearie me, now! to think of that!" said the old woman, sympathisingly. "And you were hurt a great deal, I daresay."

"I lost my leg," said Kate.

"Well, now, I can feel for you there,—not as I ever lost one of mine, as is as good as ever,—but I as good as lost one in Mr. Fred. You remember, Miss Violet, my dear, that summer when he fell from the apple tree, and the doctor said as he'd never seen such a leg. Dearie me, what a sight of trouble we had with him to be sure!"

Violet had risen from her seat, and came towards the two poor girls.

"I want you to let me pin some of these roses in your dresses," she said, brightly. "They are so sweet. Do you care for flowers?"

"I do. Thank you, Miss, very much." Kate lifted her head, and for a moment the two girls looked each other full in the face. Such a contrast they were! Violet all glowing with life and happiness and beauty; and Kate with her old, sad face, and pathetic, dark eyes.

"Nanny, dear," said Violet, turning to the old nurse; "don't you think my other cloak would make quite a nice soft cushion? Do reach it over," and in one moment more poor Kate, who, truth to say, was getting very weary with her journey, found something that she could lean her tired back against with comfort.

Violet went back to her seat, and for some little time sat still, with a book in her hand but her eyes kept wandering off to the two poor girls in the farther corner. After old Nanny had fallen asleep, Violet at length came and sat next the girls.

"Do you mind my asking,—are you sisters?" she asked, in her soft voice.

"No, Miss," said Kate. "It pleased God to take my little sister. And this is a little girl He sent me instead, when my heart was pretty nigh broken."

"You've had great trouble," said Violet.

"It's not so long ago that I was near drowning myself," said Kate.

A look of great compassion came into Violet's face as these words were said. She only answered quietly: "Shall I tell you a true story? A lady one evening who was walking over a bridge in London, saw a poor man leaning over a parapet, and he had such a sad look in his face that she felt sure he meant to drown himself. She didn't like to speak to him; but, as she passed by, she said these words out loud, 'There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God.' And long after they met, and he recognised her and said, 'You saved my life,' and told her that that night he had had the fullest intention of drowning himself. I think her words had made him suddenly remember another city besides London, and another river besides the dark, gloomy Thames rolling away beneath his feet."

She waited a moment to see if Kate had taken in the little story, and what effect it was having upon her. Kate's head was bent down, and she had fast hold of little Frances' hand.

"Like enough the city and the river made him think of Christ," she said. "I couldn't drown myself now, Miss,—not if it was ever so,—for His sake I couldn't. And if I had to be miserable all the rest of my life, it seems to me it would be worth while to have lived to have known the love of Christ even for five minutes."

"And it isn't only for five minutes," said Violet, in a low voice, her eyes glowing, "but for ever and for ever. This is only the beginning."

They were silent for some moments, and then Violet's gentle questions called out much of the history of Kate's sad life. They were learning from each other, those two girls. Kate learned what sympathy may do, and a deep desire to minister to others sprang up within her. Violet learned how dull and sad and surrounded with dangers the lives of many girls in our great cities are, and the knowledge gave rise to new prayers and plans and work in her future life.

A cathedral town came in sight. Violet, starting up, woke old Nanny, and then began quickly putting together books and cloaks. Only a few minutes more, and she was standing with outstretched hand at the door of the railway carriage.

"Good-bye, good-bye," she said. "Do write and tell me how you and little Frances like the sea-side. I hope it will do you good," and she was gone. Kate and Frances watched with eager eyes till the tall graceful figure of the girl and the bent figure of the old woman were lost to sight in the crowded station.

"Do you think we shall ever see her again?" said little Frances.

"Perhaps," said Kate, "we shall have to wait till we reach the Golden City."

CHAPTER V.

BY THE SEA.

Two little girls were lying out, in two long chairs, by the sea-shore. The younger one was knitting, and, as she knitted, talking and laughing, and often looking up to rest her eyes lovingly on the sea. Her lap was covered with shells and sea-weed, brought to her by some pale-faced fellow-patients who were wandering about the shore.

Mother Agnes had sent both Kate and Frances to a Convalescent Home by the sea, and their delight over this their first sea-side visit was untold. From early morning, when they woke to find themselves in a pink room, in beds with white dimity curtains printed with pink rose-buds, and the smell of the sea coming in at the open window, till the last light had faded away in the long summer evenings, their days were one continued dream of delight.

Kate's face was growing sunburnt and warm in colouring. Her eyes had a soft, surprised look in them, as if she were suddenly waking up to a whole world of unsuspected wonders in heaven and on earth. There was a gladness about her, like the gladness of a little child who has been turned out of a dull, close room into a field of cowslips. She and Frances never tired of each other's company; and Kate, for the first time in her life, was guilty of laughing and talking nonsense from sheer lightheartedness.

And so the days sped by, till Kate began to have a sort of wish to see the Orphanage again, and a feeling that after all the pain might be conquered, and life there be brightest and best.

And, oddly enough, as she and Frances were talking about it one morning, who should make her appearance but Mother Agnes herself, who spoke about Kate's return as if it had been all settled long ago; and then told Frances to her great surprise that she too was to become an inmate of the Orphanage. The poor aunt had had losses, the little shop was given up, and she could no longer provide for Frances, and had entreated Mother Agnes to get the child admitted. And Frances' great love for Kate helped her over the trouble of changing her old home for a new one.

When the two invalids arrived at the Orphanage, they found a great "Welcome" arranged in daisies over the door. Kate was feasted like the prodigal son on his return, and no one thought of reproaching her for having run away. And Kate returned the love and kindness she met with fully and joyously, for now she had entered into that mysterious rest and sweetness existing somewhere at the heart of things, of which so much is written, but which so few set themselves with earnest purpose to find.

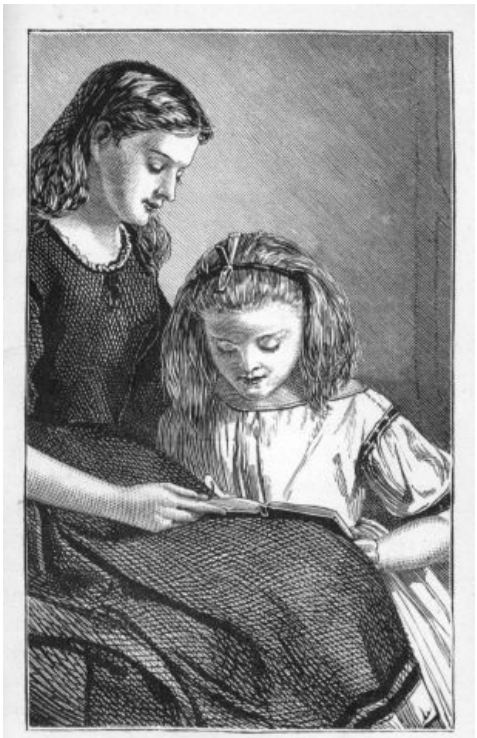
It was a surprise to every one, except perhaps to Mother Agnes, who understood the girl's mind, when Kate began to write little poems, and to receive sundry little sums of money from different magazines for them. Kate's first wish, of course, was to give back the value of the Orphanage dress in which she had run away; and then Mother Agnes started a money-box, into which all the earnings were put in the hope that some day enough would be found in it to buy Kate a cork leg. "That day, Kate," said she, "may yet be a long way off. But, meanwhile, dear child, you will remain here, and complete your education, and by-and-by I hope we shall see you mistress of a village school."

The money-box was placed in the Orphanage schoolroom, and the children dropped their pennies in, and sometimes strangers who came to visit the Orphanage were told how Kate had lost her leg, and added something to the fund. And, in course of time, the box got so full that Mother Agnes, for prudence sake, would carry it to her own room to lock it up at night.

Another frosty Christmas, but it was night now, and all the glories of a starlit sky could be seen from the corridor window, on the broad ledge of which Kate and Frances sat. The years that had passed had changed them much. Kate had a quiet power about her that could be more felt than expressed in words. Her face, quaint and clever, was lighted up by a singularly sweet smile; and nothing reminded one of the old Kate except the large, pathetic eyes. She was Mother Agnes's right hand with the little ones. Her way of managing them was so winning that she seldom or never caused vexation; and she brought sympathy, imagination, and judgment to bear in her work amongst them.

Frances had grown very pretty; she had golden brown hair, and blue eyes that were always laughing; and her face was not only beautiful in form and colour, but sensitive and refined. She had quite recovered her accident; was fleet of foot as a little hare, and full of health and spirits. Frances was always laughing, and it was a laugh so utterly joyous and free from care, that it seemed to have no

place in this weary, hard-working, grasping, eager, restless nineteenth century, but to belong to some early age, before the world had lost its freshness, or better still, to be an earnest, with all that is good and true, of the "Restoration of all things."



KATE AND FRANCES.

Kate and Frances.

She was leaning her head against Kate's shoulder, and talking eagerly.

"And then, dear Kate, as you have made up your mind to be a schoolmistress in Westminster, and to teach those poor little sickly children whom no one seems to care for, I have made up my mind to be an hospital nurse, and Mother Agnes has given her consent; and oh Kate, every spare minute they give me shall be spent with you. And you will have some dear little sitting-room looking on the river, I know. And there we shall sit together, and watch the rush of life on the river; and talk of a hundred things—of your school children and my patients, and the beautiful things that happen to us, and the comic ones. And, as we are talking, Mother Agnes will perhaps come in for a cup of tea (having come up to town on some errand), and you will give her the nicest tea possible, and then we three will sit there still when it is dark, and talk of everything in heaven and on earth. And when the girls from here are put out to places in London, they will come and see you, and have tea with you in your little sitting-room."

Voices and rushings of feet were heard on the stairs.

"Kate! where is Kate?"

"Kate, you are wanted in the schoolroom!"

"O Kate, here you are! Now, guess what has come for you from London!"

Little hands seized hold of Kate, and the children's eagerness was so great that she was obliged to remind them that she had only a wooden leg, and couldn't get downstairs quickly.

"Kate, we can't keep it back, we must tell you! It is your cork leg arrived. Mother Agnes has given the last five pounds herself, and ordered the leg to be here by Christmas."

But when Kate was introduced to her new member, with injunctions to treat it with due respect, she was quite overcome. She leaned against the wall and sobbed. She had never cried when she lost her leg; and it was only the love and kindness shown her that made her cry now. But the tears were only for a moment,—and they were followed by a great rush of gladness.

The little ones would not be satisfied without helping Kate upstairs and to bed that night, and placing the cork leg in a prominent position in the room, "so that you will be quite sure to see it, Kate, as soon as you wake up on Christmas morning."

CHAPTER VI.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

"Why, my dear old Kate, you're only half awake yet, and the little ones have been up for hours already, and Christmas Day has broken upon the world once more. There; give me a kiss, and wish me a merry Christmas in a proper manner."

"Another Christmas," said Kate, half dreamily, raising herself in bed. "Frances, what are you doing?"

"Finishing a frock for poor Aunt's youngest; but oh, Kate, I have been watching the dawn too, such a lovely dawn; I shall never forget it. There, lean your head against me while I tell you about it. The light came creeping, creeping up, so slowly, and so shyly. Then suddenly the clouds parted, and a burst of glory came, making the dull snow, and even the icicles look warm in the red light. And was it stupid, do you think? I couldn't help thinking of you and the little children in Westminster, and how you would watch the sunshine coming into so many little desolate lives."

Frances stopped suddenly, and neither spoke for some moments. Her big blue eyes were resting on the snow scene outside. A vision crossed Kate's mind of two little girls watching that same scene many years ago, in the cold moonlight with sorrowful hearts. She thought she knew well what Frances meant about sunshine coming into a desolate life.

"Dear old Kate, how tired you will get sometimes with teaching those poor little things, who are sure to be tiresome and naughty. But then, you know, it will be all work for Him, and so of course you will be quite glad to be tired. And then He will not let you bear one tired feeling alone. It will be like those verses in your favourite poem:—

"But this it was that made me move,
  As light as carrier-birds in air;
  I loved the weight I had to bear,
Because it needed help of Love.

Nor could I weary, heart or limb,
  When mighty Love would cleave in twain,
  The lading of a single pain,
And part it, giving half to Him."

"O Kate, what a life! And then to think that all these little dawnings we see in people's lives are only pictures of the great dawn coming, when all things will be made new. Kate, doesn't it make you unutterably glad?"

"Indeed, it does, Frances. And, please God, you and I will take our places side by side in the great army of watchers and workers."

One glimpse more into the lives of two happy women. Only a few years later, and Frances had a love-story and a wedding. The story began in a summer holiday in the country, where she, not being very strong at the time, had gone for rest and change. He was the village doctor, and he first met her sitting by the bed-side of one of his poor patients, and her bright face haunted him. They met again in the Sunday school; and again at a great open-air parish tea, where Frances sat next him. She pitied him for being shy, and tried gently to draw him into talking about himself and his work; and her quick sympathy soon discovered a large intellect and large heart behind an uncouth manner. And then each found that the other was working out of love to an unseen Lord, and watching for the Daybreak, and the interest in each other deepened.

They met again often during those bright summer days; and when the time came for Frances to go back to her work in London, the doctor found that he could not let her go without first asking her to become his wife; and she found that she could not refuse. And now the doctor's little wife trots with him over the snow, wherever he goes, carrying sunshine into poor cottages, and often things more substantial than sunshine, and more likely to be understood by hungry people. All his patients are her patients; and, with her nurse's experience, she is able to show them how to carry out his orders.

She rejoices in showing kindnesses to the poor Aunt who once gave her a home. To Kate she writes that the country is looking lovely, and Kate must make haste to come and spend Christmas in the happiest home in England.

And Kate herself? In some corner of the great world she still works, with patience and tenderest sympathy, amongst uncared-for children. She has seen the first rays of light come into many a sad little life. And together she and the children watch "until the Day break and the shadows flee away."

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