

At last Elsie drew away her hand and stopped.

'It be no use, Mary—we be lost, and I can't walk no further. I am tired, I am, an' I'm just going to sit down here till they find me.'

'But thee maunt do naught o' th' sort!' exclaimed Mary in alarm. 'Don't thee ken if a body falls asleep in the snow they'll never waken?'

'No, I don't, and I don't care neyther!' cried Elsie pettishly. 'It's all very well for you, Mary Scaife—you're strong and used to it; but I'm delicate, mother says, and I can't go no further for anyone.'

'If thee maun really stop, doan't let's stop here. See thee—there's a peat-stack yonder; let's gang an' set oursel's down beside it; mebbe it wain't be the same as being out in the open snow.'

It was really a peat-stack. The children huddled themselves against it, and being sheltered somewhat from the wind, Mary was able to open the umbrella and hold it as a barrier between them and the storm.

'We're lost, and it's all along of the master!' moaned Elsie. 'If we die, he'll be hanged for 't, an' mighty glad I'll be.'

This view of the case evidently afforded her some satisfaction, for she laughed.

'He didn't know, though, Elsie, mebbe, what a storm it 'ud be. Feyther sey he comes from th' south, and they haven't the same kind o' weather there as we have here,' reasoned Mary, not from any special liking for the master, but because it was a trick of hers to stick up for people when they were not there to do so for themselves.

Her argument vexed Elsie.

'You said you knew the way, an' you didn't. Why did you say so? I wad ha' gone back to the village and stayed w' Aunt Sally if it hadn't been for you.'

As a matter of fact this was the first time the idea had occurred to her. Perhaps Mary knew it, for she did not answer, and there was silence.

Then Elsie broke out again—

'I am cold and hungry. Oh, why didn't we stay at the village?'

No answer being forthcoming, she continued in the same tone, evidently finding some relief in trying to provoke the other's patience.

'If I get starved to death, it'll be your fault just as much as the master's. You had no business to tell a lie and say you knew the road when you didn't.'

'Oh, Elsie, whisht, whisht—ye shan't be starved if I can help it! See—take my jacket; I feel warm enough w'out it.'

Before Elsie could resist, the jacket that she had always silently scorned was off and wrapped about her.

'Oh, but you must not—you must not,' was all she could say.

'You just hold yer tongue,' said Mary. 'I am all right; I'm stronger than you, an' can bear a bit of cold. Cuddle up to me, and then we'll be snugger yet.'

Elsie did as she was bidden. The jacket was warm, and she fell into a half doze, whilst Mary lay with wide-open eyes staring into the gloom, and her mouth shut tight, lest the chattering of her teeth should disturb her companion.

Elsie spoke again.

'You think they'll find us, Mary?'

'Yes, yes—they must. They'll be laiking us now most like. Shall we shout?'

'Yes.'

They shouted; but what was the use of their small voices in that wide space, and against the pitiless wind?

In spite of herself, Mary's ended in a



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quavering cry—almost a sob. Elsie did not hear it, or if she did, said nothing, for when she spoke she was evidently following the train of her own thoughts.

'Mary, if so be as we had to die, wouldn't you be afraid?'

'I doan't know. Mebbe not if I knew I should see mother again.'

'But I should; an' I don't want to die, nayther. Oh, Mary, I don't want to die!'

'Don't then, dearie; don't fret theese! about it. They'll find us soon—very soon.'

Another pause, and then—

'I wonder what they're doing at home?'

'Seeking for us, I expect.'

'If I die mother 'ull wear her new black dress at the funeral,' remarked Elsie. 'But what will they do without me? Oh, I can't die—I won't die!'

Mary drew her closer to her. She held the umbrella with one benumbed hand, the other arm was round Elsie.

'Thee sall not die,' she said firmly; 'I'm sure thee wain't die.'

There was so much assurance in her tone that Elsie rested her head on her shoulder with a sob, and so sobbing fell asleep, and dreamt she was at home, eating her porridge by the fire, whilst her father smoked in the ingle-nook, and her mother ironed at the big table. And whilst she slept the other lay opened-eyed and still. A numbness was stealing over her, a strange, whirring sound was in her ears; she tried to speak, but could not; and at last she also slept.

An hour afterwards they were found. The umbrella had been blown away by the wind, and they lay there together, partly covered with the snow. Elsie was breathing softly—the old jacket had done good service—and

as her father lifted her up she half opened her eyes and smiled.

The other lay still—curiously still. The wind stirred her thin dress, yet she made no movement.

'She's all right, isn't she?' asked Mrs. Thomson.

'She'll never waken again i' this world, missus,' replied an old man, who had been aiding them in the search, and he turned the light of his lantern away from the white face.

They carried them both to their homes, the dead and the living, and it was then they found that Mary Scaife had tasted neither bite nor sup since morning.

'An' she took off her own jacket to keep our little gal warm!' exclaimed William Thomson, grasping her sister's hand. 'You shall allays find a friend in me, my dear—allays.'

'Mother,' asked Elsie, as she sat in the rocking-chair before the fire next morning, none the worse for her adventure save a slight cold, 'have you been to the Scaifes?'

'Yes, honey.'

'How's Mary?'

'She was sleeping,' replied the mother, with averted face; and Elsie was satisfied.

It was not until the next Sunday, when she saw all the little Scaifes except Mary trooping into church with black hat-bands, that she learnt the truth.

She made no remark, but in the afternoon they missed her, and the mother, going upstairs, found her stretched weeping on her bed.

'Elsie, hcney, what's the matter? What ails thee?'

'Oh, mother, to think as ever I was ashamed on her!'