

NELLIE'S GUARDIAN.—A STORY FOR CHRISTMAS DAY.

BY BEATRICE J—S.

CHAPTER I.—HYDE PARK.

It was not a pleasant day. Heavy masses of dark golden-edged clouds floated over the sky; now obscuring the sun, then allowing it to burst forth into a flood of glorious, fitful light. But it was one in which an ardent, enthusiastic temperament would have particularly delighted; all sunshine and shadow, with a glowing north wind to put new life into everything.

It was the day before Christmas, and all London was preparing to attire itself in gala costume. The shop windows presented a brilliant panorama of fashion and wealth. The nobleman's carriage, with its richly comparisoned horses, standing before the dazzlingly lighted jeweller's; the dainty dame inside purchasing diamonds and pearls to deck the brow of some fair daughter on the morrow; the tradesman passing by, loaded with innumerable parcels and packages of various shapes and sizes; his face as he turns it to the light has, for once in the year, lost its business-look of care and his steps are light and buoyant, eager to be at home, where little ones are looking very anxiously for "Papa" to-night. As he passes, another appear on the "tapis," a worn, tired looking woman, whose eyes turn wistfully to the wealth within. Is she—woman-like—wishing that some of those glittering baubles were her's? Yes, for one of those little shining stones would purchase her great, unspeakable happiness, on this Christmas-eve. It would give her children bread! One more glance, and she draws the thin shawl, tighter than before, round her shoulders, then passes on into the crowd and is forgotten. The lady inside has finished her purchases and, attended by the courteous shopman, is proceeding to enter her carriage, when the fourth actor appears on the scene. She has a heart, and daintily drops a small piece of silver into the dirty little hand extended for her bounty. Then nestling among the soft, rich cushions, the horse's heads are turned towards Piccadilly, and she is swiftly carried in the direction of Belgravia. The owner of the dirty little hand pockets his Christmas-box and proceeds to await another opportunity. Ah! he sees it, and darts off to accost a portly old gentleman in furs, with his piteous cry of "Give's a penny, sir," but the old gentleman being accustomed to the cry, calls him an "impudent little rascal" and passes on.

Four o'clock had just boomed out from the great bell of St. Paul's, as a gentleman, in a long grey overcoat, white muffler and black fur cap, turned the corner of Regent's street, and hastened with rapid steps, along Piccadilly. He did not pause once in his walk, but kept up the same brisk pace, until he had reached Hyde Park corner. Entering the row, he walked on hastily for a couple of yards, then turned and proceeded at the same pace towards a more secluded portion of the Park. Traversing each walk after the other, he struck into one whose quiet and loneliness was undisturbed, save by the swift movements of a slight girlish figure coming towards him. A sudden gleam of sunshine showed that the girl was very pretty, lighting up the large blue eyes, that were turned questionably on his face:

"Arthur, you are late?" she murmured reproachfully.