

## JANET MASON'S TROUBLES.

(From the Sunday Magazine.)

## CHAPTER VII.—(Continued)

"I've got it! Sixpennorth of it. Such a lump! Now then, look sharp!" And before Janet knew what she was about to do, she had dived in amongst the horses' legs, and was over at the other side of the street.

With trepidation, but yet with a kind of desperate courage, Janet followed her, and for ten minutes Tabby went on rapidly threading her way round corners, through alleys, along busy thoroughfares, poor Janet keeping up with her as she best could, till at last she plunged into a narrow court, and stood still before an open door. She stood here just long enough for Janet to come up with her, and then, merely giving her companion a nod of the head, she vanished inside the house, and Janet could only follow her through the darkness (for it was almost night now) by the sound of her steps.

She had begun to climb a steep narrow stair, up which she went from story to story, poor little Janet eagerly following her, and stumbling and tumbling in the gloom a dozen times over, until they reached the top of the house, and here at last Tabby paused again. There was a little glimmer of light coming in upon them from a sky-light above their heads.

Now, if mother's in, won't you catch it!" Tabby suddenly said.

"Shall I?" asked Janet faintly, shrinking back.

"Won't you? That's all! I wouldn't be in your shoes for something." And then, having raised her guest's spirits with this kind hint of a stirring welcome, Tabby opened a door before her, and went in.

## CHAPTER VIII.

To Janet's great relief, for her companion's last words had made her shiver, the room they entered seemed empty.

"It's all right; she ain't here. I didn't think she would be," said Tabby. "I only said it to give you a turn. She don't almost ever come home till late. Sometimes she stops out working, and sometimes she stops out drinking, and sometimes she stops out 'cause she's too far gone to come in. Come along now; hold the candle till I get a light. Why, can't you hold it

steadier than that? One 'ud think you was starved with cold."

"No, I'm not cold," replied Janet. But her hand was shaking nevertheless, and she put the candle down upon a table as soon as Tabby had lighted it.

What a wretched, poverty-stricken room it was! So bare, so dirty, so comfortless! In one corner there was an unmade bed, with the tumbled bedclothes lying in a heap upon it; an old deal table stood on the uncovered floor, and two or three chairs with broken seats; there were the ashes of past fires lying in the grate; there were dirty cups upon the table, a dirty saucepan standing on the hob, dirty clothes hanging up against the walls. Janet turned sick as she looked round her. She had been in many a poor woman's room before now, but never in one like this.

"Now, if you ain't hungry, I am," said Tabby after a moment or two's silence, during which she had trimmed the wick of the candle with a hair-pin, and swept the crumbs off part of the table with the skirt of her frock. "If you ain't hungry I am; so I'm going to set to." And she unrolled her parcel; and, proceeding at once to business with a beautiful simplicity, took up a lump of pudding in her fingers and transferred it straight to her mouth.

She ate it off the paper in which she had brought it home, and she ate it without the help of fork, or spoon, or knife, or plate. After she had taken a few mouthfuls she paused a moment and looked in a speculative way into Janet's face.

"If you wants any you'd better look sharp," she said. "What ails you at it?"

"Oh, n—nothing," replied Janet, faintly, and stretched out her hand, and took up a lump of pudding too. But she was so sick and frightened that though she took it up she could not eat it, but put it to her lips and drew it back again, and then all at once flushed up and burst out crying.

"My eye, you are a soft one!" said Tabby when she saw this proceeding, and she stared at Janet with round, wide-opened eyes. Indeed, the sight seemed so surprising to her that for nearly a minute she sat with a piece of pudding arrested half way on its passage to her lips, quite absorbed by the curious spectacle before her.

"Well, you're the greatest gaby ever I kewed. What's the

good o' crying? You've got some good victuals; you ain't starved yet," she said at last.

"Oh yes, I know! Oh, it isn't that! But what—what—what am I to do?" sobbed poor little Janet, and dropped her pudding back upon the table, and looked at Tabby so eagerly and piteously that, hardened street gipsy as she was, Tabby did not quite like it.

"What are you to do? La! what does anybody do? You'll get on somehow, like the rest of us," said Tabby bluntly, not much accustomed to administering consolation. "You'll have to grow a little sharper though, or you won't be much hand at it. How do you think I'd get on if I wasn't sharp? My eye! fancy me sitting blubbering like a baby! Why, how old are you? I'll bet that you're as old as me; not that I'm sure how old I am," said Tabby frankly. "But I ain't mor'n than seven—or eight—or nine. You're much about that too, I should say; ain't you?"

"I'm just eight," said Janet.

"There now; I guessed you was. And to think of you blubbering still, as if you was two or three! Why, if you go on like this for nothing at all, what would you do if some one whopped you?" And having crushed Janet by this contemptuous question, Tabby addressed herself to her supper again, and went on comfortably with her meal.

Janet, too, took up her piece of pudding once more and tried to eat it; but there was a lump in her throat, and she could hardly swallow. She was trying with all the power of her little brain to think what was to become of her—where she was to go when her supper was ended—where she was to spend even this first night. Careless little Tabby was munching away with all her might, enjoying the pleasure of the moment, and apparently not thinking either of before or after. But Janet could hardly think of the present moment at all; she could only think of the misery that she had suffered already, and of the unknown trouble that she had still to face.

"Well, I can't do much more, I'm thinking," said Tabby at last, pausing in her labors and smacking her lips. "There, if you wants that last bit you may have it;" and she pointed with her greasy finger to a fragment still remaining of the feast.

"Thank you," said Janet meekly, and put forward her

hand to take it; and then suddenly stopped, and, "I can't eat it now, but I think—I think I'll put it in my pocket," she said timidly.

"Put it in your pocket!" exclaimed Tabby instantly at this proposal, seizing the piece of pudding in her own hand, with a look in her face like a young tigress. "You've no more right to put it in your pocket than I have. It's my pudding just as much as yours."

But you've had nearly the whole of it already," pleaded Janet.

"Well, and if I have, whose fault was that? I didn't stop you from having it, did I? Put it in your pocket, you mean thing!" and she glared at Janet with a pair of eyes like too small fires.

"I thought, I might have it to take away. I thought, when I had had so little of it—" began Janet, wistfully.

But Tabby had already burst into a torrent of abuse, and there was nothing for it but for Janet to break off her sentence and hold her tongue. The little vagabond poured out her bad words, and as she shot them out she ate the pudding up, till pudding and abuse both came to an end together; then licking her lips, she concluded the ceremonies of the table by wiping the fat off her hands upon her frock, and crushing the paper which had held their supper into a ball, which she courteously launched at Janet's head.

Janet ducked to avoid the blow, and then sadly got upon her feet.

"I think I had better go now," she said, almost in a whisper.

"Where d'you want to go to?" asked Tabby instantly.

"I don't want to go anywhere," said Janet.

"Then why can't you stop where you are?" said Tabby. "Come," she said suddenly, "I'll tell you what—you're such fun that if you like to stop here a bit—Mother'll make a row, of course, but I dare say she'll be drunk when she comes in to-night, and so she won't know nothing till morning; and then, when she sees you, if you'll just do like me, and give her as good as you get, and won't mind a slap or two, she'll leave you alone soon enough. For, bless you, if we gets our own living, what does it matter to her? And then we can go out together, you and me; and la! if you don't come round them with that prim face o' yours! I looks so wicked,