

## The Story Page.

### THE COMPANY SHE KEPT.

BY ELIZABETH ROBBINS.

A rather pretty girl was coming up the walk, and Mrs. Blake went to the door to let her in.

"Why, Nellie!" she said, "I'm glad to see you. I had begun to think our friendship was a thing of the past."

"I hope it isn't," said the girl, smiling, yet earnest, "for I never needed it so much as now. I have come to you for help, Mrs. Blake."

"You know I'll do anything I can," responded her friend, heartily. "Now take off your things and sit in this chair and tell me what it is that I can do."

"You know how I am situated," said Nellie, doing as she had been bidden and beginning at once to state the case. "I have to earn my own living, and not only that, but I have to support my mother and little sister. There is no getting away from that fact, is there?"

Her friend agreed there was not.

"Not but that I'm glad to, and very thankful that I can," said Nellie.

"It is equally certain," she went on, "that I have to earn what I get by factory work. There is nothing else I can do that would bring in enough money to support us all. I simply have to work in a factory."

Mrs. Blake assented.

"Well, in the room where I have to work there are a good many other girls, and some men. Now, the men say saucy things to the girls, and the girls answer back, and they are all too familiar. Nearly every girl in the room uses slang whenever she speaks, and hardly any of the talk is nice. And, oh, Mrs. Blake, I'm getting in the same way myself! I didn't realize it at first, but I do now, and I would rather die than grow coarse and slangy and rough. And I'm so easily influenced by the people I'm with. What can I do? You have noticed that I was growing that way, haven't you?" she asked, a little shrinkingly.

"I—well—I did think, the last time I saw you that you were not—not quite as you used to be," her friend answered, reluctantly.

Tears came to Nellie's eyes. "What can I do?" she said, despairingly. "I try not to let it influence me, but I can't help it."

Mrs. Blake leaned her cheek on her hand. "I must think about it," she said.

Nellie leaned back in her chair and waited. She looked tired and anxious.

After several minutes had passed, Mrs. Blake raised her head. "It seems to me," she said, slowly, "that what you need to do is to fill your mind with what is fine and good that the coarseness and slang will be crowded out. Try to get interested in something outside your work—in books, for instance—and then, while you are in the factory, you could think about what you were interested in, shutting your ears, as far as possible, to what was going on around you."

Nellie had looked thoughtful at first, then the anxious look had faded from her face. "I knew you would help me if anyone could," she exclaimed impulsively. "I will begin putting your plan in practice this very night."

"And I'm sure you will succeed," said Mrs. Blake, warmly. "Must you go?" she added, as Nellie rose. "Then I will go out with you and pick you a bunch of pansies. They are particularly beautiful this year."

"Oh, they are beautiful!" cried Nellie, her eyes shining as her friend gave her the flowers. "I'm going to carry them to the factory tomorrow, in a little vase, and have them on the bench in front of me, to look at while I'm working."

"I would ask you to come again soon," said Mrs. Blake, as they parted, "but Mr. Blake's vacation begins day after to-morrow, and we are to spend it in the mountains. You must come as soon as we get back."

Mrs. Blake was away for several weeks. Almost the first person who called, after her return, was Nellie Andrews. It was just before sunset, as it had been on the previous call.

"Did the plan succeed?" was the first question, after the usual greeting.

"Perfectly," was the quick answer.

"Tell me all about it, please," said Mrs. Blake.

"Well, you know the way I had been doing before I turned over a new leaf," said Nellie. "I used not to get up in the morning till the very last minute, and then had to hurry like everything to get to work at seven. I carried my lunch, and ate it at noontime in the factory. At night I did not feel inclined to go anywhere, it seemed such a bother to make myself nice for it, and so I would stay at home and kill time by altering some one of my dresses, that didn't really need it, and tell over to mother every little thing that had happened during the day. Then I would go to bed late, and dream of the factory and dressmaking all night."

"Well, after my talk with you I saw things clearer, somehow, and I came to the conclusion that I hadn't been living right at all, and I decided to make a complete change."

"In the first place, I had mother call me early enough in the morning so I needn't have to hurry and I found I really enjoyed my breakfast and the walk to the factory."

"The next thing was to come to dinner at noon. I have to work a quarter of an hour later at night, but I find it pays, for my appetite is better, and the exercise does me good. On very warm days, though, I still carry my lunch instead of going home, and eat it in a little park near the factory. I take pains to use my eyes when I am out of doors, and it is really surprising how much I see that is interesting, and that I can think about while working, and tell mother at night."

"Then I decided I would not do any more sewing. Mother is able to do all that is necessary, except fitting our dresses, and I can hire that done. I think if a girl works steadily for eight hours, she has done enough for one day—don't you?"

"I certainly think so," said Mrs. Blake.

"That gave me a delightful sense of freedom," continued Nellie, "and I began taking books—mostly magazines—from the library. When I come across anything in them that is particularly interesting, or amusing, I read it aloud, so that mother can enjoy it with me."

"Oh, and I have begun to go to church again, and the minister is very kind, and he asked me to come to the Bible class. So I do, and we all ask questions and he explains things."

"And how do you get along at the factory?" inquired Mrs. Blake.

"Ever so much better, though I did have one very unpleasant experience. You see, the foreman of the room, and one other man, had got in the habit of being rather free in their speech and manner, and I had stood it because I do so dislike to offend people. I thought it over, and decided that there are cases where people ought to be offended. The way they were acting certainly wasn't good for me, and it gave them a lower opinion of women when I let them do it."

"So one day I stood on my dignity, and told the foreman that I didn't like to be treated in that way, or spoken to as he spoke, and would he in future please to do differently?"

"He saw I meant what I said, and he was angry, and he and the other man made it very disagreeable for me for awhile about the work, but now I think he sees that I was right, for lately he has been—they both have been—kind, without being offensive, and I think they have a better opinion of me than before."

"And what do you think? I found there were several girls who felt as I did, and what I did gave them courage, and they asserted their dignity. They hate slang, too, and we are all trying to cure ourselves of it. I really think the tone of our room is much better than it was. I am quite sure there are not more than three girls in the whole room who do not want to be refined and womanly, and of course our trying helps these others. Everything is so much nicer than it was."

"There, I believe I have told you all there is—except that I have joined a literary club and enjoy it very much. We meet at the different members' houses one evening each week."

"You must find that interesting—only I hope you don't have to go alone in the evening, so," said Mrs. Blake. "I suppose I am a dreadful coward—my husband says so, but—"

"I don't have to go alone," returned Nellie, a pretty color rising to her cheeks. "The one who asked me to join said—lives near me, and we come along together."

"Do I know her?" asked Mrs. Blake, innocently.

The color deepened in Nellie's cheek. "It isn't a girl," she answered, hurriedly. "It is Mr. Westfield—and his sister generally goes."

Mrs. Blake's eyebrows went up the least bit in the world with surprise. Then she looked pleased. "Ah—Frank Westfield," she said, in a matter-of-fact tone. "He is a nice boy, I'm well acquainted with the Westfields."

"Why, it is nearly dark!" exclaimed Nellie, starting up. "I must hurry home. I'm ever and ever so grateful to you, dear Mrs. Blake."

"I am very glad if what I said was a help," said her friend, going with her to the door.

"I have found out something new," said Nellie, stopping at the foot of the steps.

"What is it?"

"That life is extremely interesting," answered Nellie, with a little laugh. Then, with a "Good night," she turned and walked briskly and lightly away.—The Editor.

### A TRUE STORY.

There is a city, not far from Boston, where tall chimneys stand almost as thickly as trees in a wood, and where flying shuttles weave miles of cloth each day. A great many Canadians have come away from Quebec to watch and tend the shuttles.

Polly Blanc's father was one of those who came. Polly, with her mother and father, lived in a little house close by a narrow canal, where water from the river flowed by on its way to turn a dripping water-wheel. There was another member of the family. It was Bob, a little bull terrier, with short, brown hair and a stumpy tail.

Polly's mother was too poor to keep a house nurse. So one day, when she had to go on an errand, she said:

"Now, Polly, I must run down the street, and you will have to be alone. Be a real good girl and don't go near the fire or touch the matches. Bob and you can have a good time together."

Polly wanted to go, too, but her mother hurried away alone. She cried a little; Bob trotted up, wagged his stumpy tail with sympathy and licked her hand; and she crossly slapped him.

Bob slunk away behind the stove, where he watched his cross little mistress with his bright eyes. Now Polly was only six years old, so she knew a great deal more than her mother.

She climbed upon a chair and found some matches. She forgot her crossness in her glee at watching the flames eat up the match; and Bob, hearing her laugh, came from behind the stove, ready for a frolic.

The match burned near to Polly's fingers, and she dropped it. It fell close to the pretty checked apron. The next minute Polly was running toward the door, screaming loudly. The bottom of her light dress was flaming up around her.

Then it was that Bob became a hero. He was only a dog, and did not know more than Polly's mother. But he did the best he could. He gave several sharp barks and snapped at the flames. He caught the apron in his mouth and tore off some of the burning part.

Bob's head was badly burned. His eyes smarted. His tongue was blistered by the flames he gulped in. But he still bit at the flames and tore away so much of the dress that the flames did not reach Polly's head.

Polly screamed with pain, and Bob kept up his quick, sharp barks.

Just then a man passed by the gate. He heard the noise and rushed in. Seizing Polly in his arms, he ran down to the canal. There was a splash and a souse, and the flames were out.

Polly was painfully burned. The doctor put cooling ointments on her burns and swathed her in rolls of cotton. But it was several weeks before her sufferings were all over.

Bob was burned worse than Polly; for his burns were about his head. It was a long while before he growled over a bone again. But he did, finally. He is not nearly so pretty a dog as he was. The Blanc family love him all the more, however. Polly never slaps him cruelly now, nor is she wiser than her mother any longer.—The Watchman.

### THE FOX AND THE HARE.

In a snug little grotto, beneath a high bank covered with foxglove and ferns, lived a sly old gray fox. He was so very old that he could not go to search for his food, so he was obliged to play all sorts of tricks to get it. One night as he sat at the mouth of his hiding place, feeling very hungry from having had nothing to eat for a long time, he observed a fine, fat young hare lazily feeding on the juicy turnip tops.

"O dear," sighed the fox, "if I were only a little younger, what a rare supper I could make of that young thing! But I can't catch her." Then an idea struck him. "Hem! hem! hem!" said he in a loud voice.

The hare was startled and looked round.

"Sweet miss," said the fox, coaxingly. "I'm old and feeble, and I can't fetch my supper; will you get it for me?"

"O, yes," said the hare, who was a giddy, thoughtless thing, but very good-natured. "What would you like? Some fresh, dewy clover?"

"Dear me, no," said the fox; "that would not suit me at all."

"O, it is delicious!" said the hare, "but what should you like?"

"Just walk into my house," answered the fox; "and I will show you the sort of things I like."

Now his den was strewn with the bones of rabbits and ducks and pheasants and chickens.

"Wait a minute," said the hare, "till I finish this turnip top." Then she skipped gayly up to the fox. "Now I'm ready," said she.

And so was the fox. He just gave her backbone one nip, and she was as dead as dead could be.

Do not listen to the fine words of strangers, whoever they may be. And do not choose your friends until you know something about them.—Children's Friend.