

JANET MASON'S TROUBLES.

(From the Sunday Magazine.)

CHAPTER VII.—(Continued)

Stories about dead people don't begin like that. Wait a bit. There was a man once who fell ill," said Tabby, after a moment's thought, "and died, and when he was dead they buried him. And the day they buried him somebody said to somebody else that he'd go and dig him up again. Or—let me see—no, he didn't say that; but he said he'd go and dig down till he reached his coffin and hammer another nail into it."

"But why should he do that?" asked Janet, opening her eyes very wide. "Did—did he think he was n't properly nailed?"

"He didn't care whether he was properly nailed or not," said Tabby contemptuously. "It wasn't that. He wanted to show that he wasn't afraid,—don't you see? They was a talking together, they two, and says one to the other, 'You think there's such things as ghosts; and there ain't no such things as ghosts. When a man is dead he's dead, and there's an end of him. I'm no more afraid of a dead man than a living one.' And then says the other, 'Well, if you ain't, go and dig down to Dick's—we'll call him Dick)—go and dig down to Dick's coffin and knock another nail into it, and then, says he, 'if you does that I'll believe you.' So they made a bet on it, and the man that said he wasn't afraid took a hammer and nails, and a big spade, and went late at night to the churchyard, and began to dig away at Dick's grave. And he dug away and dug away, till he got down to the coffin; and when he had got down to the coffin, he jumped into the hole, and got upon his knees on the coffin lid, and took a long nail and hammered it in; and then, just as he was a going to get up again—what do you think?" and Tabby suddenly paused here, and looked into Janet's horror-struck face with the next words arrested on her lips.

"Wh—what?" said Janet, breathless.

"All at once, as he was a going to get up again from his knees, he found that the dead man had caught him, tight!"

"Oh!" cried Janet, gasping.

"Yes, so tight that he couldn't move—just as if he'd got hold of his coat with a great strength.

And the man—the man—that was alive, you know—was in such a fright that he gave a great scream, as if he'd been shot, and then he fainted right away. And—and that was the end of him," said Tabby, bringing her story to a conclusion rather abruptly; "for when some other people come in the morning, they found him a lying on the coffin lid quite dead, and—just think!—it hadn't been a ghost that had laid hold of him at all, but he'd nailed himself to the coffin by driving in the nail through his coat tail. Wasn't it a joke! Now, ain't that a good story?" asked Tabby, cheerfully, with her face all on a broad grin.

I am afraid that Janet's enjoyment of the story had not been quite so keen as could have been wished. Tabby had, it is true, quite fulfilled her promise that she would make her companion's flesh creep; but some people don't care about getting their flesh set creeping, and to tell the truth Janet was one of these.

"Ye—es, I suppose it's a good story," she said hesitatingly, in reply to Tabby's question. "It's a—very good story, I suppose—only—it's rather horrid, isn't it?"

"Horrid? I should think it was! Why, that's the fun of it," cried Tabby scornfully. "I don't care tuppence for stories that don't give you a crawly feeling, you know. There ain't no good in 'em if they don't do that. I'd like to hear the sort of story you'd tell, though! My eye, wouldn't it be a milk and water one! Come, fire away at something, just for the fun of the thing," said Tabby, with her mischievous eyes gleaming.

It was strange, perhaps, that Janet should not find herself encouraged by this pleasant invitation to begin the narration of a tale forthwith, but I am obliged to confess that instead of "firing away" when Tabby bid her, she felt very much as if her tongue was beginning to cleave to the roof of her mouth, and for the life of her she could not think of any story that seemed likely to have charms for Tabby's ear.

"I'm not good at telling stories. I don't know many. I'm afraid I'm very stupid," she said, looking timidly in her companion's face.

"Well, I guess you are," answered Tabby frankly, "you must be if you can't make stories. Why, I can make 'em as fast as I can speak. But come now, you can't but know some. It

don't matter whether they're good or bad. Just tell anything. You can tell a true one if you can't do no better. Surely," said Tabby, who, I fear, had rather a contempt for truth, "surely you can tell a true story at any rate?"

"I don't know. I—I can tell you things I used to do," said Janet hesitatingly.

"There won't be much fun in hearing them, I should think," replied Tabby with undisguised scorn. "But come along—if you can't do nothing better—let's hear about 'em."

"I used to be so happy when I was little," said Janet, beginning in rather a faint voice, for she had not much hope of interesting her companion. "You know I didn't live here in London then; I used to live in the country far away."

"Why, that's just like me," said Tabby.

"What, did you ever live in the country?" asked Janet eagerly, with her face lighting up.

"Oh yes, I did once," replied Tabby carelessly. "I've most forgot everything about it now. I was born there; and then father died; and then mother come up to London. Mother belonged to London, and she found the country dull, you know."

"I can't think how anybody can find the country dull," said Janet, with a longing sigh.

"Oh, you would, if you was like mother. There ain't enough going on there to suit her. There ain't theatres, you know, nor them dancing places, nor nothing," said Tabby coolly, quite unconscious of the strange look on Janet's face. "Oh, the country never does for the likes of her. It's very well for little 'uns like you and me, 'cause we can get fun out of anything; but grown-up people seems different somehow. It needs such a deal to make them jolly. I wonder what the country would seem like now! I shouldn't mind seeing it again—once in a while."

"I wish I could see it again!" said Janet fervently.

"Why? was you so fond of it?" asked Tabby.

"Fond of it!" echoed Janet, with a little break in her voice; "how could anybody help being fond of it? Oh, think of awaking in the morning with the birds singing outside your windows! Think of getting up and running out into the green fields, and going and getting flowers and blackberries—and sitting in the woods! I used to have a

little pony that I rode upon; it wasn't mine, but somebody lent it to me. Just think of riding on a pony along the pretty country lanes, with the trees over your head, and the honey-suckle in the hedges, and all the wild roses, and the foxglove, and the buttercups, and the violets!"

"Set a beggar on horseback! Oh, my eye, if I had a pony wouldn't I whop it and make it go!" said Tabby.

"And we had such a pretty garden—a dear old garden, full of fruit-trees and flowers, and we had a cow, and cocks and hens, and once we had a goat."

"I knows about goats," said Tabby. "They has one down in the next street, at the blacksmith's; and oh, ain't he vicious!"

"Ours wasn't vicious," said Janet quickly. "He was quite young, and he used to play so prettily. But still I liked the cow best. She was such a dear old cow. She knew me quite well, and she used to turn round and low when she heard me coming; and often and often in the afternoons papa and I used to go at milking time and get new milk, oh, such rich, warm, beautiful milk! They thought it was good for poor papa,—but it never seemed to do him any good," said Janet, with a sudden sad drop in her voice.

"Why—was he ill?" asked Tabby bluntly.

"Yes, he was ill. He was dying—he was dying for a long, long time," said Janet half aloud. "He was a clergyman, and he used to work so hard. He was always with the poor people, teaching them, and reading to them, and doing them good. He used to work all day, and sometimes at night he would be so tired that he could hardly speak."

"Serve him right," said Tabby sharply. "What's the good o' anybody working that way when they're not obliged? I daresay all the people would ha' done just as well without him."

"But it was his business to work," explained Janet indignantly. "He wouldn't have been happy if he hadn't done it. He went on working till—till—till he just died at last."

"Like the old horses do," said Tabby. "I saw one to-day—a dreadful old beast—and he was a pulling a cart with stones in it, and he had a great sore on his back, and his master was a beating him, and all at once he went down—like a shot."

"Papa broke a blood-vessel,"