

Miss Carew, for she always had some cheering words to give her. The clean, respectable looking woman that entered was a great contrast to the Mrs. Collins of a few months earlier.

'I thought, ma'am, as you'd like to know how we were getting on. I know as you'd remember pension day.'

'Yes, indeed I did,' said Miss Carew. 'I can see by your bright face that you have been able to stand firm.'

'Yes, ma'am, you're right; not but that there were plenty who tried to do their best to make us go all wrong again. Ben said as God would help us if we could only ask Him, and I'm sure the boy's right.'

'Well, tell me all about it.'

'For the first thing, ma'am, there was some mistake about the post-office, and we couldn't get the money as usual at Rengate. We had to walk near two miles, but it was just as well, you see we got free from the old set nicely.'

'Yes; they would not follow you so far, I expect.'

'Then, when we'd got the money, we went on to a cheap shop as Collins knows of, and bought some boots for the other children. You see, ma'am, it was only Bob and little Nell had them last pension day. But this time we'd no back rent to pay, and we'd got it all to spend and a little over too, for Collins had been so careful, that he could get some clothes for himself as well. You see we shall be having the boy home before long, and I'd like his father to look smart like, so as Ben should't be ashamed of him. He wanted me to have a new dress, but I said as I'd wait; we couldn't expect to have new things all at once.'

It was a pleasant story to listen to, and it was pleasant to watch the happy face that told it, and know that a boy's love to his mother could be the means of doing so much.

'And when are you expecting Ben home?'

'He says he hopes to come at Whitsuntide.'

'It will be a very home coming to anything he has known before.'

'Yes, ma'am, indeed it will. He says he only wishes they'd take Bob into the Home. He's so grateful for what it's done for him.'

'Well, we must think what can be done. Ben is sure to come and see me when he gets his leave.'

But Whitsuntide passed, and no tidings came of Ben's coming. The spring mellowed into summer, and before long hay-making would be begun. Ben's mother had moved farther away from the village, farther away from her old friends, and close to the real country. This change had been a great pleasure to the children, and they loved to wander in the open fields. Two or three of them, including little Nell, who could scarcely be called the baby now, had been happily picking flowers one morning, in a field farther away from home than usual, when suddenly Bob gave a cry. He had caught sight of a policeman, and with a vague fear that they were trespassing, ran to the farther end of the field with all his

might, followed by Nell and the other little girl.

Poor little Nell ran as fast as her short legs would carry her, dropping her flowers, which she had gathered with such glee, as she went, and never daring to look behind her to see if she were followed. The field was an extensive one, and when the little one at last reached the far corner, where Bob was laughingly surveying the policeman on the other side of the field, she dropped from sheer exhaustion and fright.

The policeman turned on his heel and continued his beat, quite unconscious that he had frightened a little child so terribly.

Bob was an easy-going boy, and at first took little notice of Nell's tumble, but when he found that she did not move or cry, he was fairly frightened in his turn. The child had fainted, and after some minutes, much to Bob's relief, opened her eyes.

'What's up with you Nell?' he asked kindly.

'I's so tired; carry me home, Bob.'

And so Bob did, wondering greatly what could have come over his little sister.

But Nell was not to get well that night. The child had taken cold sitting among the damp grass, and her fright had been so real that she was quite unnerved, and started up continually in agonies of fright.

The next day brought a letter from Ben, to say that he was coming home on the following Friday, and hoped to find them all well.

'We won't write and tell him as little Nell is ill,' the mother said. 'Ben loves her so, I don't know what he'd say.'

And so when Ben, lighter hearted than ever, walked briskly towards home on the following Friday, he knew nothing of the shadow that had overspread his home, and perhaps he counted on his wee sister's welcome more than all the rest. But Nell had grown worse instead of better, and the doctor shook his head gravely, fearing to give any hope of the child's life.

She had lain unconscious all the day, taking no food, and they could only tell that the feeble life was there from the gentle breathing which could scarcely be observed. And so Ben found her as, in the glory of the summer evening, he passed through the cottage door.

'You never told me little Nell was ill,' he said reproachfully, looking from one to the other of the grave faces.

'We hoped she would be better,' said his mother tearfully. 'Speak to her, Ben, perhaps she might know your voice; she's taken no notice of any of us to-day, and she'd so counted on your coming.'

'Nell, baby Nell,' said Ben, going close up to the bedside; 'don't you know me? I'm your soldier brother,' he cried almost passionately, as if he would call her back from the very gates of death. For the first time that day the child opened her eyes, and gazed at him steadily.

Ben, it's Ben,' she said feebly. 'Take me in your arms, Ben.'

Ben gently took the wee sister in his arms, and comforted her as he had learnt to do long ago, and little Nell seemed as content as she had always been in those strong brotherly arms. Little by little the flow of life gradually began to return; but all through that holiday Ben devoted much of his time to the sick child. No one could tempt her to take food so well as he, and no arms seemed to rest her so well as his. As she gradually grew stronger she liked to listen to stories of his life, but best of all she liked to hear him speak of his hero Gordon.

'Tell me about that good man, Ben,' he would say.

And then Ben would tell of Gordon's Christ-like life, and how he loved poor uncared-for boys the best of all, and call them 'kings.'

'You are one of his 'kings,' Ben, are you not?' she would say.

'I don't know, Nell,' he would answer. 'I'd like to be a bit like him when I am a man.'

'And so you will, dear Ben,' answered Nell, putting her arms all round his neck.

The days of the young soldier's leave passed quickly on, too quickly, for home was now a sweet place to the lad. The day before he left he was sitting by his mother's side, with the newspaper in his hand.

'Oh, mother, listen!' he said in a pained voice, as his eye glanced down the column.

'Ned Willett, seventeen, was charged on remand with embezzling £5 10s., the property of his master, Mr. Preston, of Wild street. The prisoner stated that he had spent all the money with the exception of a few shillings, and that he had bought a watch and some clothes. Alderman D—— sentenced the prisoner to fourteen days' imprisonment with hard labor.'

'Oh, mother, to think of poor Ned! I was afraid he was taking up with that sort of life. Perhaps I should have been in prison too if I had not been sent to the Gordon Home. I am sure they do their best to help a lad on to a better life.'

'Yes, Ben, we may all be thankful that you ever went to that good place, for they have not only helped you to grow up to a life of usefulness, but, with God's blessing, they have helped us all.'

The next day Ben's leave was over. The young soldier went back to his work and duty, and there is every hope that when he grows into manhood, he will try and follow in the Christ-like steps of his hero Gordon.

(THE END)

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