

"Oh, I ain't thinking of the birds. I mean it don't seem dreadful to the people who do it. It's right enough for them to do it, if it's got to be done," said Jack, with an off-hand philosophy that was, I am afraid, too much for Janet's understanding.

And, in truth, I fear in this new life of hers there were many things too much for Janet's understanding. There was so much that seemed strange to her—so much that jarred with the teaching of her early years. She did not indeed argue about it. She came by degrees to accept it all patiently, as children so often do; but, unconsciously to herself, as she grew used to it, every spark of brightness, every touch of warmth, died out of her little life. She had not much spirit, you see, this poor, little, lonely Janet.

## CHAPTER VII.



It was a hot September day, and the closeness of the weather had perhaps tried Mrs. Mason's temper, for all the morning she had been more than usually hard to

please, and Janet had had a hard time with her, and had been cuffed, snubbed and rated till her poor little head had got all in a daze, and till she was in such fright that she broke two dinner plates, and upset a can of water, and let the potatoes boil over into the fire, all in the course of the last hour before dinner.

She had come to her seat at the dinner table after these exploits with her eyes red with crying, and Dick and Bill, who sat opposite to her at the banquet, had wiled away the moments before their plates were set before them by making faces at her across the table-cloth, and pointing the fingers of scorn at her—a playful attention which had so little the effect of raising her spirits that she began to eat her boiled mutton with the big tears rolling slowly down her cheeks.

There are some days, you know, on which everything seems to go wrong with us, and I am afraid this was a day of that sort

with Janet. Do what she would, she could not keep out of trouble, and as the hours passed on matters got only worse, for she had begun by breaking plates and upsetting water-jugs, but before the afternoon was over she had ended by doing about the most serious and dreadful thing that she had ever done in all her life. This was how it came about:—

Her aunt wanted to pay a bill, and sent her out to get some change. She had been sent for change on other days before this one. Sometimes Mrs. Mason had given her a sovereign, sometimes half-a-sovereign, to run out with to one of the shops at hand, and get silver for, and she had always brought back the silver correctly, without ever losing a sixpence of it; but on this particular afternoon it was not change only for a sovereign that Mrs. Mason wanted. She had no small money in the house at all, and she sent Janet out to get change for a five-pound note. She gave the note into the child's hand, and told her to hold it fast, for if she lost it it would be the worst day's work she ever did; and as she said this she took Janet by the shoulders and shook her, and then gave her a little shove out into the street; and Janet, clutching the note with all her might, ran without stopping to the shop where she had been told to go, and stretched her small hand out across the counter, with hardly breath enough left to speak her errand.

"If you please, sir—Mrs. Mason says—would you give her change—for a five-pound note?" she said.

"Why, you've run yourself out of breath, little woman," said the man behind the counter, good-naturedly. "Oh yes, I'll give you change. Here's your money—one, two, three, four, five. Now hold it all tight, and trot away home again."

So Janet said, "Thank you, sir," and picked up her five golden pieces, and turned to go home again, grasping them fast.

But, at the shop door, as the shopman handed the change to her, there had been an ill-looking man standing, whom Janet had not noticed, and as she went fast down the street again she never knew that he was following her. He followed her along the main busy thoroughfare, and watched her as she turned into the not-much-frequented street in which her aunt's house stood, and then, suddenly quickening his step, he

walked past her, and in an instant, before she could either struggle or cry out, she found the hand that had grasped the money so tight wrenched open, and the whole five sovereigns gone.

It was done so rapidly that it took her breath away; for two or three moments she stood gasping: the man had rushed past her and had almost turned a corner before, bewildered as she was, she moved or screamed, or tried to get any help. She screamed loudly enough then, poor little soul, and began to run too with all her might; but there was scarcely anybody near her, and long before the few passers-by (there was no policeman in sight) had succeeded in finding out from her what had happened, the man who had got her money had had time enough to escape securely—three times over, if he had pleased.

Poor little Janet! She stood with half a dozen people round her, wildly sobbing as if her heart would break. One eager young man had gone flying down the street shouting "Stop thief!" at the top of his voice, but as he had not waited long enough to hear the direction that the thief had taken, and his instinct had led him in a direction at right angles with it, the chances of his capturing him were not great.

The others stood about her, questioning her.

"Took your money, did he?" said one. "Why, that's a bad job!"

"A man with a light coat, did you say?" asked another. "Are you sure he had on a light coat? because I saw a man just as I turned the corner——"

"What, all the change of a five-pound note? Well, well that is too bad! Five sovereigns! Dear! dear!" cried a kindly-looking old gentleman, standing over Janet, and holding up his hands. "You'll never see them again; I'm afraid you may make up your mind to that, my dear. No, no, no,—there's nothing for it but to go home now, and tell your mother. She can speak to the police, of course, but you'll never set eyes on the fellow again. Where do you live? What, here in this street? Well, run away in, run away in and ask your mother not to scold you. There's a shilling for you to buy lollypops with, and I wish it was another five-pound note, my dear."

The little crowd opened, and sobbing with despair, Janet dashed out from it, and went

slowly down the street. What should she do? What should she do? Should she turn round and run away at once, and never face her aunt again? She stopped and looked back once after a minute or two, but three or four of the people who had gathered round her were still standing together in a knot, talking and watching her, and in face of them she had not courage to run away. If she tried to do it, would they not come after her, and bring her back? With their eyes upon her, it seemed to the child as if she had not power to do anything but go straight on; and yet how was she to go on and stand before her aunt?

I suppose the sound of her sobs went down the street ahead of her, for before she had reached her aunt's house Mrs. Mason came to the open door.

"Why, Janet!" she called out when she saw the child. "What are you going there for?" she exclaimed sharply, and seizing her as she came up by the shoulder. She looked over her from head to foot; seeing the convulsed face and the empty hand. "What have you done with the money?" she cried suddenly, in a voice that might have made one bolder than Janet quake.

The poor child shuddered at this and almost burst into a scream of terror. Before she could speak her aunt pulled her into the house. How she spoke or what she said even then she did not know; some few despairing words did come somehow from her lips, confused and half intelligible,—a desperate, heart-broken confession of the thing that had happened to her—and then they ended suddenly in another short, sharp cry as Mrs. Mason struck her.

I will not tell you how often the angry woman struck her; I don't care to describe to you all she said and did. She was in a passion, and hardly knew what she was about. She struck Janet as she was accustomed to strike her own boys, and she turned her out of doors in her fury when she had beaten her, just as she was accustomed to turn them out. You need not try to imagine the scene, for it was a bad and an ugly one. Let us pass over it, and get to the end of it,—to the moment when poor little Janet found herself pushed out into the street again, and the door slammed in her face.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)