

"Bairnie, bairnie! what ails my bairnie?" exclaimed her alarmed parent.

It was not at once that Bonnie Nellie recovered her voice; and not until the imploring and terrified tones of the grandmother her heart was devoted to had repeatedly urged her to speak, could she conquer her emotion sufficiently.

"Oh, Granny McEachern, Granny McEachern!" she exclaimed at last, amid much sobbing, "it's too dreadful, too dreadful, I canna speak it."

"My bonnie bairnie, this suspense is mair than I can bear; tell it at ance," again implored her grandmother.

Nellie's eyes flashed; she stood up and cried:

"Granny McEachern, Robert McKeltie's a dooble-faced villain, and I'll nae speak wi' him mair," and she began to sob and cry again. These words reassured Mrs. McEachern, and she remarked:

"Robie's nae a lad likely to be at muckle ill-doing. What has he been at, lassie?"

"Oh, Granny," exclaimed Nellie, "I dinna ken; the police hae a grip o' him, an he is lockit up, an has gotten nought but breed an' water for sustenance."

"Lassie, whar did ye hear sic redeecolous havers," inquired her grandmother.

"Fra Geordie Harris," was the reply.

Mrs. McEachern laughed out. "Is that a' Nellie; gang awa, and wash yer bonnie face, and mak ready a cup o' tea, and fash yersel nae mair wi' Geordie Harris's clishmaclavers," she cried.

Nellie, unconvinced, shook her head and remarked:

"Granny, Mistress Halloran says it's aye true."

"Tut! bairnie," cried her grandmother; "a' folks ken weel the string o' Mrs. Halloran's tongue was cutted lang syne; gang awa an' red up the place; supper-time is nearing: 'twill nae mend matters to be crying o'er what canna be helpit."

Nellie obeyed, and pale and distracted did she move about; yet, still with her usual promptitude and exactness, she performed her various tasks. But her heart was

crushed with unutterable grief. In the impetuosity and inexperience of youth, she never doubted what she had heard: the proofs to her were incontrovertible, and she believed the sunshine of her days was forever darkened. Not a ray of hope penetrated the deepness of her despair; the dreadful words, "Robie is locked up by the police," rang in her ears incessantly, as she went about her work. "Robie is locked up by the police," woke her up at night, and roused her early in the morning, and chased her out to milk the cows, ere the drowsy animals had risen from their grassy beds, and to feed her fowls, when Chanticleer considered it yet too soon to call his family forth, sweet as the morning was.

After a long day's toil, Nellie, as was her custom, dressed herself; and, clean and neat, she took her sewing, and sat down on her low chair, opposite her grandmother. Mrs. McEachern gazed with pity and anxiety on the pale cheek of her darling, and, greatly pained, watched her absent manner and frequent sighs.

"Bairnie," she said, after a long pause, during which neither had spoken, "it's ridiculous fashin' yersel in sic a way about daft Geordie's blatherins. It's nae the truth he telled you, Nellie. Tut, it's nae tear I'd waste on a' he'd say, an he blathered for a year, an' nae stoppit a minit."

"Granny," replied Nellie, sadly and seriously, "Robie wad hae been here lang syne, gin it had na been ower true;" and a tear rolled down her pale cheeks, while she looked pitifully into her grandmother's face.

"Hie awa, Nellie, to Mistress McKeltie's directly, an' find out the truth fra' hersel," cried Mrs. McEachern. "Whar's the sense o' breaking your heart thar in the chimly-lug about a pack o' lies? Gang awa wi' ye, an' nae word. I'm nae liking to pit through anither nicht, like the last ane, and hae you skirling and starting, as if ye were ganging daft. Hie awa noo, lassie, hie awa."

Reluctantly, Nellie rose to obey; and, putting on her garden hat, she went out,