

FRIDAY.

BY FRANCES.

CHAPTER VI.—(Continued.)

"In John Fox the boatswain showed himself valiant above the rest, till a shot broke his whistle and smote him on the breast, and then he fell down, bidding them farewell, and to be of good comfort. And when the other prisoners stole the Turks' treasure, John Fox the gunner would not touch one piece, for the honor of God. So he was nice. And in Miles Philips, when they would not change their faith in Mexico, Roger, the armorer of the Jesus, had three hundred stripes on his back, and John Moore and John Rider and the others, two hundred, and John Keies one hundred. And George Rivelle, and Peter Monfrie, and Cornelius the Irishman, were burnt to death in the market-place on the day before Good Friday. So they were all shut-up travellers, and they were very brave. And there were the twenty-two kings with their people shut up fast, locked in the mountains, and there they are to this day; but men say they shall come out one day," quoted Friday softly.

"And there was that other place all covered with thick darkness, where you may hear people talking, but they cannot come out, and they evermore abide in darkness till doomsday."

But this was rather an awful old legend, and gave Friday the creeps. The Arctic explorers afforded most lasting satisfaction, for one could never tire of the captains. And what was their behavior when they were shut up in the ice? Friday thought of all his books; of Sir Hugh Willoughby, that very noble knight, and stout Master Richard Chancellor, and Sir Martin Frobisher, and gallant Master Captain Best, and good Captain James, and all the host of them. And Friday remembered that they were very brave, very cheerful, and very patient; and therefore, it became all shut-up people, especially persons who intended to be explorers themselves, to be very brave, cheerful, and patient too. Besides, this was not ice, nor hardship, nor hunger, nor cold. It was only a wood near home. But the thought of hunger suggested the idea that it was time to go in to tea; and cold, that it was not quite so warm as it had been in the garden. The sun was getting lower, too, and Friday knew that the world ought to go into the house at tea-time, because night might be expected to come on after it. But George had not appeared yet, and there was no sign of him. And the stable-clock striking, Friday knew that tea was laid in the schoolroom, and George must be there.

"Perhaps he didn't know the door was shut," he said; "he thought it was open when I went back. And perhaps he went out another way."

And, just as this passed through his mind, there was the sound of a key in the lock. Friday thought he was released, and started up gladly; but behold, the bolt of the lock was shot! And then some one began to stomp away on the other side of the wall, and from the pad—dot, pad—dot, Friday knew it was Zachary, locking all the doors for the night, and going home. He fell on the door in a sudden panic, knocking and calling wildly—

"O Zachary, it's me, it's me! Friday's here! O Zachary!"

But the wall was thick and high, and Zachary was a little deaf, and by that time no doubt at the end of the walk.

Friday sat down again in a bewilderment of terror and despair. It was not so disappointing a thing as being turned back by George, but it was a more dreadful, and oh, what a naughty one! To be in a wood at that hour, late for tea, in a linen suit, and no hat! How cross Mrs. Hammond would be. If he did not spend the next morning in the corner for his crimes it would be because he would be in bed for a sore throat. Friday thought it very probable that he would have a sore throat tomorrow, for his back began to feel cold, and the dew was falling. There was a huge lump in his throat already, but that was mental agony.

"I couldn't help it," he said, "I didn't mean it. I would have gone out if I could, and I haven't been any farther."

It did come into his mind that it would be very awful to stay here until the wood

got quite dark, and if George had gone out at the other side, he could do the same. But onmyhonner stood in the way. Even if you were very much frightened, Friday did not see how that could be got over.

"I will wait," said he, gulping; "perhaps they will come for me soon. And they will be very cross, but I said I wouldn't go another step into the wood, onmyhonner. I said so to George. I will try to be good till they come, only I wish I had my Crusoe."

And thereupon—Crusoe came. He came rather queerly, not down the path, but through the fern, and startled Friday. He came very slowly, and kept stopping, and presently he lay down and crawled. Friday thought he was sorry.

"O my Crusoe!" he said. "I am so very glad you have come! Good doggie! Crusoe, I am not angry."

But it seemed that Crusoe was afraid. Friday went to him, and took him in his arms, and talked to him, and kissed the top of his head, but it did not seem to cheer him much.

"Crusoe is so tired," said Friday. "We should both like to go home so much." And he sat down before the door, cross-legged, with Crusoe on his knee. Crusoe did seem very tired, and it had been a labor to come to his master, for his coat was covered with dirt and damp. Friday was so glad to have him, and so sorry that he was cold and tired, that he thought he must allow him a few licks. He bent his face down and said, "Good doggie!" But Crusoe did not lick Friday, he licked himself, and that was surely a very strange thing.

"Crusoe dear!" said Friday anxiously. But Crusoe did not seem to hear him. He licked himself a little longer, and spread himself out on Friday's knee.

"Crusoe dear!" and Crusoe touched Friday's cheek with his nose, and spread himself out again and shivered. And then he laid his nose on Friday's hand, and began to be very cold, and Friday held him close to make him warm. And so he sat, and waited and waited, a bare-headed, patient-faced, little figure, and the dew fell, and the wood grew darker behind him.

CHAPTER VII.

No one noticed Friday's absence. The long afternoon faded into evening. Kitty and Nelly came in from their walk with Martha, and then George appeared, followed by the schoolroom tea. George sat at the end of the table, provided with a book, which he propped open against the milk-jug. The twins privately thought it rude to read over tea, but George was such a big boy; to be sure, he did not interfere much with them. Friday's empty chair excited no remark, because his recognized home was properly neither the schoolroom nor the old nursery, but a little of both, and he fluctuated about the house to suit the convenience of the elders.

Kitty said, "Where's Friday?" Nelly supposed in Mrs. Hammond's room.

"Perhaps he's in the corner," said Kitty.

"Then he will have tea there," decided Nelly.

George had never given another thought to seeing Friday in the wood, and between the lines of his book, he gathered that Friday was in the corner in Mrs. Hammond's room.

The evening passed as usual, quiet to dulness, until Friday's bedtime, when it was the custom to take him to say good-night to grandmother. Martha knocked at the schoolroom door.

"Mr. George, Mrs. Hammond is waiting for Master Friday."

"Not here," said George; "he's in her room."

Martha went back to say so. In two minutes she was at the schoolroom door again.

"Mr. George, he isn't there."

"Well he was at tea-time. He hasn't been here since."

"Mrs. Hammond hasn't seen him all the afternoon."

"Rubbish!" said George, with boyish brevity; "he had tea there. He isn't here." And he bent over his book again. In two minutes more Martha knocked for the third time.

"Mr. George, haven't you seen him?"

"Look here, what's the use of bother-

ing?" exclaimed George testily, looking up from his confusion of books and papers.

"He had tea in Mrs. Hammond's room, that's all I know."

Martha departed, shaking her head dubiously. Then came Mrs. Hammond in person.

"Mr. George, could you say who told you that Master Friday was in my room?"

"Well, no, I don't know," said George, rubbing his hair up.

"We did," admitted the twins, from the corner where they unceasingly played at "house." "We said 'perhaps'—we didn't really know."

"I do assure you he hasn't been near my room, Mr. George, not even for tea. I'll take a look at the nursery—the old nursery being the half-play, half-bedroom where Friday slept."

There was quiet in the schoolroom for a quarter of an hour, and then flying feet came down the passage, and Martha burst open the door. "Mr. George, Mr. George, Master Friday's lost!"

"Oh, rubbish!" retorted George; "you haven't looked for him."

"We have, indeed! All over the house!" cried Martha, whose white face testified to the reality of her fear.

"Well, Mr. George, it's beginning to be a very strange thing," added Mrs. Hammond, in the background; "we have looked everywhere you can imagine in the house, and I can't think he would be out of doors at this hour."

"He has put himself to bed," suggested George.

"Oh, no, not a sign of him in the nursery."

"Well, he's in grandmother's room."

"Nor there either, Mr. George, for I've been to look, and daren't say a word about him, for fear of exciting the mistress. And we've been all over the house. Oh, dear, I do not doubt the unlucky child has come to grief!"

"He's fallen down-stairs somewhere, and he's so bumped that he can't get up again!" said Nelly dimly, and instantly began to cry.

George pushed his books away, and set out to scour the house from the top to the bottom. But Friday was at the foot of no stairs, nor in attic, hall, or cellar. In vain did they open doors, and softly call his name. No Friday answered. Kitty and Nelly were now weeping profusely in each other's arms; Martha and her fellow-maids were scared and trembling; Mrs. Hammond was visibly anxious; George himself began to feel secretly uneasy.

"Who saw him last?" he demanded, making the best of it, and assuming the head of affairs. No one precisely knew. One of the maids had seen him in the garden during the afternoon, but whether he had been in the house since, she could not say. The only thing that everybody was agreed in was that he had had no tea, either in one room or another.

"Mrs. Hammond, keep grandmother and the girls quiet," said George. "I'll go into the garden." He seized his cap and dashed away into the moist dusky garden, but returned presently with a blank face.

"I can't find him anywhere," he reported; "but I'll go to Zachary's. He may know something about him."

"Oh, perhaps he is at Zachary's!" said Kitty hopefully, wiping her eyes.

Mrs. Hammond privately shook her head.

"It isn't like him," she murmured, "the unlucky child's lying somewhere." It was singular that no one thought he was in mischief. Friday and mischief were two ideas that had no relation to each other.

Meantime George was speeding across the paddock to Zachary's cottage. Disappointment awaited him there. Zachary had not seen Friday since morning; but he "would be main glad to help find the little young gentleman."

So armed with the largest and oldest stable lantern, they sallied forth. They searched the gardens (the locked door in the wall not being taken into consideration for a moment), the glasshouses, the stable-yard, the out-buildings, but there was no Friday. They went up and down the paddock, and looked in the ditches, and called along the hedgerows. George went up the lane, and Zachary down it calling and beating the banks, but still

no Friday. They met at the gates again, and did not need to tell each other of their failure. Then Zachary had a bright idea.

"Let's try the young Doctor's, Mr. George. Master Friday does set a deal by him, and he might chance to be there."

"Of course!" cried George, only too eager to seize on the barest hope; "why didn't we think of it before? He is sure to be there. I'll go, Zachary—I shall not be long."

It was not very far down the lane to the village where the Doctor's rooms were, but George felt as if weights were tied to his feet. He was telling himself all the way that Friday was certain to be there, but underneath a fear lay at his heart. He was not himself conscious how glad he should be to see little Friday again!

He stood at the door at last, scarcely with breath left to speak. The Doctor came running down the stairs.

"You, George? Any one ill at home?" he exclaimed, noting the boy's flushed cheeks and quick breathing. The Doctor's uncomprehending face felled George's last hope to the ground.

"Oh, don't say he isn't here!" he gasped.

"Who? No one is here but myself."

"Friday," panted George, leaning against the side of the doorway, his color fading; "Friday is lost! We have been looking for him everywhere. Old Zachary said he might be here, because he is so fond of you. We dare not tell my grandmother; and what shall we do?"

It was more a cry of dismay than a question, but the doctor answered it.

"I'll come," he said, snatching his hat and struggling into his coat. "When did you miss him?"

"I suppose he has been missing all the evening," replied George, as they hurried up the lane; "but it was not found out till his bed time. He is certainly not in the house, and Zachary and I have hunted all over the place."

"Who saw him last?"

"I don't know. He was seen in the garden after noon. He has not been with Zachary at all. Oh, I saw him, but only for a few seconds," added George; "he was in the wood, and I told him to go back in the garden, because Sir John was shooting near the place."

"And he went back?"

"I told him to go. I didn't wait to watch him; but I am sure he went."

"It is possible that he did not."

"Oh, but I am sure he went. He promised to go back. I sent him because I thought it wasn't safe to leave him, and I know he went. The little chap doesn't know what disobedience means."

"It would have been safer to have watched him go."

"Nobody ever watches him, because he is such a good little fellow. But it does seem as if we might have looked after him amongst us," said George remorsefully.

"Have you looked in the wood?"

"No, we never thought of it; the door is always locked."

"Then, in my opinion, he is there."

"I don't think so!" exclaimed George sharply, for a horrible dread fell upon him; "our door was locked at night, but he could go through the wood to the stile to the high road—and if he has, who knows where he has wandered, for he never went beyond the old toll-bar before!"

The Doctor did not answer and George's fear grew.

"You don't think he is in the wood, do you?" he urged.

"I do," said the Doctor, in a low voice; "if he had been able he would have left it. Nothing would have kept him there so late, but—"

He did not end his speech, and a dead silence fell, and lasted until they joined Zachary.

"He isn't here, Zachary," said George; "we are going to try the wood."

"The wood! Mr. George! I keep the door locked myself!"

"You opened it this afternoon for me, you know. Let us go. Where is your key?"

(To be Continued.)