

loved it so, and I think that alone would make it dear to you. You know since his death what a struggle it has been for me to keep it at all. I could not rent it without a good deal of money spent upon it, and I could get only a small sum if I sold it in its present condition, certainly not enough for another house in a more desirable neighborhood. So try and be brave and make the best of it, or at least do not complain. Think how many things are worse in this life than an old-fashioned home.'

Lillie looked a little ashamed, but not convinced, so kissing her mother, hastily she called impetuously to Robbie, her little brother, who was coming down stairs, to 'hurry,' and then they rushed off for school. When the children were gone, Mrs. Blake looked towards the sofa where her sunbeam lay, as she called her little lame daughter, who unlike Lillie always made the best of things, even of her sad life and poor shrivelled leg, which kept her from having any sport or fun. She was just recovering from the grip, and looked wan and tired, but she smiled pleasantly and said:

'Mamma, Lillie is only talking, she must love this dear old home. I know I do, and would hate to live up town. Such nice big rooms, and our darling quaint furniture; it is much nicer to live where the family always did. It seems like we were kings and queens, now don't it?'

Her mother smiled, as she re-arranged her pillows, and answered, 'You sweet Nancy, I feel the same way, though I suppose it is natural for Lillie to dislike being so far from the girls she knows, but you and I love it.'

'And Robbie, too, mamma.'

'Ah, yes, Robbie,' and Mrs. Blake smiled again as she thought of her fat little boy with his happy disposition and his appalling appetite.

Sunday-school was over about half after ten. Sometimes Lillie stayed for church, especially when she knew her mother was coming, but to-day Mrs. Blake could not leave Nancy, so Lillie decided to take Robbie home, as the service was rather long for him. She stopped to talk to some of her friends, and as they were parting, May Walton called out, 'Oh, look, Lillie, at the big flames; there must be a fire somewhere.'

'I suppose so, way down Baltimore street, or near by,' answered Lillie vaguely.

'What noise is that?' asked a girl, joining them as a loud explosion was heard. 'I wonder!' echoed the others. But fires of wholesale buildings and stores in the business section had been so frequent of late that the beginning of what was to be the most fatal their city had ever known, made no impression upon them, and the girls separated for their respective homes, Lillie and Robbie going by themselves, as no one they knew lived in their old time street. Lillie felt brighter and had sense enough to know that it was foolish repining always for what after all could not be helped, so the remainder of that Sunday morning was passed pleasantly in their comfortable library, Mrs. Blake reading the church service, and the children responding and singing hymns. Then a little story appropriate to the day followed, and an early dinner. It was not until four o'clock that afternoon when the crowds of people passing and repassing their door, began to excite their curiosity, Lillie went out to investigate, and soon came back.

'Mamma,' she cried, 'I wish you could see the excitement. Everybody is going towards Baltimore street. They say the fire is the biggest we have ever had, Hurst's store was the first. Now all Hopkins Place, Hanover street and many stores on Baltimore street are in flames. Engines have been sent for everywhere. It is simply awful!'

'Simply awful!' echoed little Robbie.

'Ah, mamma, how I wish I could see it, but you go, don't mind me,' added Nancy bravely.

'No, dearest,' her mother told her, 'I fear I am getting cold myself, and it is so damp. Lillie, it must be dreadful; perhaps you had better not go out again, and Robbie is entirely too little for the crowds you say are on the streets.'

'Oh! no, he cannot go,' answered Lillie, 'but I must; please don't say no, I will be careful.'

'Come home soon then, and tell me all that you hear and see,' replied Mrs. Blake, as Lillie hurried off. Then she settled herself on the sofa by Nancy, and with Robbie half asleep on her lap she told the children stories of her life long ago. Things indeed they had heard repeatedly, but always loved to listen to once again. So the afternoon passed, they little realizing the havoc going on and creeping up towards them, until Lillie returned at about six o'clock wildly excited. 'Mamma,' she simply screamed, 'it is worse than anything you ever imagined. All Baltimore seems in flames. Do you think it will come to us?'

'My darling, I trust not, I pray not,' exclaimed Mrs. Blake, now thoroughly aroused to the danger, for Courtland street, where they lived, was a small and undesirable street between St. Paul and Calvert streets, and they were only a few blocks from Fayette street and Charles, where already the fire had demolished a large fancy store and all around it.

'It is coming on at a fearful rate. If it passes Charles street, on Baltimore street, they say nothing will save that part of the city. The engines have come from everywhere, Washington, Wilmington, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, and New York engines will be here soon.'

'From New York,' gasped Nancy, shocked at the magnitude of the fire.

'From Yuope?' asked little Robbie.

'No, no, dear,' said his mother, 'that is too far away, but how truly terrifying. Suppose we go up in your room, Lillie; from the third story we can see everything.'

'Where is Becky?' asked Lillie, referring to their maid.

'Her Sunday out, you know, dear. I wonder where the poor thing is, and if her family is in danger. She lives in East Baltimore.'

'Mamma, suppose it comes here?'

'Darlings, we must be ready for the worst if it does.'

Then it flashed across Lillie's mind how often of late she had abused and derided their dear old home; now if it were to be taken from them by cruel flames, how bitterly grieved she would be!

'You must not go out again, dear girl,' Mrs. Blake told Lillie. 'Whatever happens we must keep together,' and she thought of their loneliness, for their relatives and friends lived in other parts of the town and she knew they would probably be too excited and anxious for themselves to think of them. Besides, it was hard to say at that time just what part of Baltimore's resident section might be the victim to the fire. The wind changed and shifted about, and horror and uncertainty were felt all over the city.

To divert the children's minds for a while, Mrs. Blake got up a little supper, making for them their favorite beverage of cocoa, with whipped cream and a preserve omelet. Then she and the little ones took their places at the windows in Lillie's large, comfortable room on the third floor. Here they could watch the rapidly approaching flames, and listen to the roar of many voices, the falling walls and the horrible explosions of dynamite. The terrible sight and sound would never, Mrs. Blake felt, be eliminated from her memory.

Building after building caught, and all hope seemed abandoned. They could but pray and

wait. It was impossible to get a waggon to remove even a few of their household treasures. Mrs. Blake could not leave her two helpless children, Nancy and Robbie, in a house which any stray spark might ignite, even if in its course the fire fiend did not come that way; nor could she allow Lillie to go alone to seek aid. She and Lillie packed in small parcels some of their most valued possessions, and then with what they felt might be a good-by glance at the different rooms, as they went through them, picking up here and there some little article that they might save, with aching hearts and anxious eyes they took their place at the windows in Lillie's room. Lillie was sad beyond words. This indeed was the home which she so often abused, here were the treasures of her parents and grandparents, here were her earliest recollections, all doubtless ere long to go up in flames. Ah! how she valued them now when, alas! she feared it was too late. Inwardly she prayed that if they were only spared this horror, she would never again do anything but love and adore her dear old home.

The night wore on, little Robbie asleep on his mother's lap as they sat by the windows watching and actually feeling the heat of the flames, as the fire approached them; Nancy, in her chair leaning back on her pillows, dozed off sometimes, but no such respite came to Lillie or her mother, who never for even an instant lost their tense feeling of terrible apprehension. There they sat alone and prayed and waited.

'We need not go,' said Mrs. Blake, 'until the first house in our block catches, unless the roof take fire from some of the flying cinders, then it will be useless to struggle, we can do nothing to save our home, but we are in our Merciful Father's keeping, and we will stay until the last and then go.'

'Where, mamma, where?'

'Dear, I cannot tell, all our relations and friends may be burnt out, too, before the night is over; but I will carry Nancy and you will take Robbie, and any little parcel you can. Our bags with the miniatures, old jewellery and papers are already fastened on us, and the little money I have, is pinned in my dress body, we can't save nothing else.'

'Not even our silver, nor the old family portraits?'

'Not unless at the last moment we could get a waggon, but pray, dear Lillie, that even yet we may escape this misery. What is that just caught?'

'The Law Buildings, mamma, only two blocks away. Now unless the wind blows in another direction, we are doomed.'

Mrs. Blake put up a silent prayer that still this fearful thing might pass by them, for if they lost their house, it would be all indeed that they possessed. It was not insured for much, and who could tell in such a disaster, that any company would pay? The Law Buildings, the offices near by, were all consumed, the roofs of their rows of houses were in constant danger, and men stood upon them putting out sparks as they fell. The night went on. 'The American,' 'The Sun,' 'The News,' 'The Herald' (the daily paper buildings), perished in the flames. Large trust companies, the banks, stores, the Church of the Messiah, warehouses, innumerable gorgeous modern structures, said to be fire-proof, all shared the same fate, and from solid edifices of stone and marble, crumbled into nothingness under the flames demon progress. As they sat and watched, the wind seemed to be shifting away from them. Fewer sparks fell in their direction, and a grateful hope sprung up in their hearts that at least they would be spared their old home. They were awed into silence at the horrible yet fearfully beautiful sight of