

thing was. You never could tell. Supposin' it was a diamond!

It was a bit of glass. A vagrant ray of the low Western sun had selected it to shine on and to set a-glistening in its narrow prism. Nellie's cheeks blazed with fierce resentment. Think of being starved to pieces and—frozen for a little bit of glass!

It did not occur to her at first to break a window—breaking windows was not one of Nellie's sins. If she was locked in she would have to stay locked in and starve the best she could. The idea to think of breaking windows was not yet, but it was on the way.

It grew a little dusker in the room, then a little dusker still. By and by it would be as dark—as a stove! Oh dear! stove reminded Nellie of mother at home getting supper over her. About now she was filling the kettle—or toasting the bread—or slicing the potatoes to fry. Was anything in the world much nicer for tea than fried potatoes, mother's kind!

Nellie felt of her arm. It felt a little thinner, seemed as if. Probably very hungry persons starved quicker. Perhaps it only took a day!

There was a crust or two in Nellie's dinner-bag—Nellie had always despised crusts till now. Now she caught at them eagerly. Mother made such good crusts. Perhaps Joey Hoyt had forgotten his dinner-bag again and there were crusts. He had! There were! And somebody had thrown away an apple because it was small. It looked big to Nellie. She ate that and all the crusts, and then went back to her desk to starve. On the way she stopped at the teacher's desk. A queer little notion seized her to sit down at it and be Miss Eddy! She put out a finger and tapped the little bell sharply.

"Order," she cried. Then pointing sternly at one of the seats before her, she called, "Nellie Page, stop that whispering! Stop pinching anybody, Nellie Page! Nellie Page you bring that apple to me!"

What a dreadful girl Nellie Page was! If she hadn't been starving she would have laughed at the idea of sitting up here pointing her finger at herself and "Nellie Pageing" herself! She was actually ashamed of Nellie Page—things looked different when you sat in the teacher's desk and put yourself in the teacher's place!

Suddenly Nellie's eyes fell on one of the papers Miss Eddy had been correcting. It had evidently been the last one and she had left it spread out on the desk. There were X's—X's—X's—all over it, but Nellie was not looking at those. She was looking at the crumpled spots on it—all over it, a rain of crumpled spots.

"Looks like Nellie Trotter's paper when she cries over it because she can't spell the words," thought Nellie. Probably it was Nellie's paper; she bent over it scornfully. Cry baby, to cry just because she couldn't spell!

It wasn't Nellie's paper. It was Nellie Page's—but Nellie Page never cried over hers because she couldn't spell the words—Oh, no! Nellie Page never!

The dingy room was getting gradually dimmer and dimmer. It was hard to read the writing lesson on the black-board across the room now. But Nellie gazed at it, in order to get her eyes away from the crumpled paper which lay on the teacher's desk. For, on account of the new idea that had occurred to her, she didn't want to look at that paper any more. It made her feel—queer. Who'd ever have thought Teacher cared like that.

"Enough so—to cry over it!" Nellie thought, in scorn, but there was no scorn in her deep-down soul. Down there she wanted to cry—herself. It had never occurred to her that Teacher cared that way—oh, not that way. You just think—enough to cry crumpled tears on your spelling-paper because it's all spelled wrong! When a teacher cares like that, she must—seems as if she must—care for you.

"Oh, my goodness!" murmured Nellie. The murmur sounded loud in the silent room and startled her. It didn't sound right.

"Oh, my badness—my badness, I mean!" she groaned.

"To think own self be true," her eyes read peeringly, across the room. Nellie had written that writing lesson ten times down the blotted page of her writing-book. It had grown crooked and crooked and blotter at every line. Until this minute, Nellie had never really read it—she read it now ten times. The tenth time she understood

it. Things were coming home to Nellie, here in this silent room, alone. Perhaps people could think clearer when they were starving.

"It means learn your spellin's and 'rithmetics, an' don't whisper, nor pinch, nor eat," she thought, solemnly. "Don't make your teacher cry over you. Be good instead of bein' bad—that's what it means. I never thought before. Of course you can't be true to thine own self if you whisper an' eat things in school, an' spell your words so bad that it makes the teacher cry."

"To thine own self be true." Nellie went across the room, stumbling between the desks, to get nearer to it. She reached up and traced the words slowly with her little blunt forefinger.

"I never was true to mine own self," she murmured sadly, "an' now there won't be any chance. They won't be able to tell from my bones that I was goin' to begin. They'll just say, 'Here lies that bad Nellie Page, and the Lord have mercy on her soul!'"

But Teacher—Nellie started and a sob gripped her throat—perhaps Teacher would know. Perhaps she would cry over the little heap of starved bones and say, "She was goin' to begin to be true to her own self—I know she was goin' to begin! But she didn't have time."

Still there was a good deal of doubt about it. And Nellie did not like to think that the teacher would not know.

"I'll tell her!" she exclaimed, suddenly, the echoes waking again in the empty room. She got a pencil and paper and hurried to a window. By squeezing up close she could see to write.

"Dear teacher,"—she rubbed it out and spelled it the other way, but not until she had tugged the great dictionary over to the window and heated it up laboriously. Nellie had "begun" already.

"Dear teacher," she wrote with patient care, "I was going to begin to be true to mine own self, but I didn't have time enough"—again a patient hunt in the great book—"before I starved. When you find my bones I want you to know I was going to. I'm sorry you cried"—some words Nellie could not stop to hunt up, it was growing dark so fast—"so. I mean I'm glad. I'm glad to know you cared, it makes it easier to starve. If I had had wood have loved you, Nellie Page."

The last word written, Nellie dropped her head on the nearest desk and cried softly to herself. She would have liked so much to have lived so she could have loved the teacher and begun to be true! It was harder to starve than she had expected it was going to be. She had thought that being hungry would be the worst part.

"It's bad enough," sobbed Nellie in muffled woe, "to be so hungry you could eat the g-g-graphy globe, but it's worse not to be able to begin to be true."

In sudden fear lest Teacher would never find out, she stumbled to her feet and hurried to the desk on the little platform, across the room. Between her tears and the darkness she lost her way once or twice. Even after the little letter was safely deposited on top of the tear-crumpled paper, Nellie was not quite satisfied.

"I'd rather be satisfied," she thought, wistfully. "She might never find it—perhaps she'd think it was one of the spellin' papers an' never look. I wish I could tell somebody sure!" But she could think of no one—no way.

It was altogether dark presently and Nellie shuddered gently with the dread of it. She had always been a little afraid of the dark; when she was little she had been very. Mother said all the little Page children, clear back to little great-grandmother, had been afraid. Mother had never been, but then mother hadn't been a Page till she grew up. Speaking of mother—

"Oh, I wish she was here!" sobbed little forlorn Nellie Page. A new thrill of horror shot through her as she remembered for the first time that she had been going after school to Grand-ma Page's house, to "stay over Sunday." So mother would not worry. No one would worry or come to find her.

Nellie sobbed on softly. She did everything softly on account of the echoes. Echoes are almost as bad as shadows. A queer little crackly noise began in a corner somewhere, but it reminded Nellie so much of the crackle of mother's fire when she got supper that she was not afraid of that. But it made her hungrier. A sort of desperation took possession of her then. She would not starve—no, no, no, not. She would get out somehow. She would break something

—why, yes, a window! Nellie had got to that point now. But only one pane— it couldn't be very wicked to break just one pane when you'd starve if you didn't.

"The panes are very small," thought poor Nellie, "I shall have to wait until I get pretty thin." And she felt of her arm in the darkness. It felt pretty thin already, by morning it would be thinner still. She would be thin enough all over then.

Nellie did not think of the Lord until the last thing. She had never remembered Him very often. You can say your prayers when you go to bed without remembering Him at all.

"I guess I better say my prayers," thought Nellie, worn out with her poor little vigil in the dark. And she slid to her knees and began at once. When she got to, "If I should die before I wake," a violent shudder shook her little frame. She had said those words a great—oh, a great—many times before, but she had never been so near to dying before she woke, before.

No, saying her prayers had not helped much. She felt just as afraid exactly. "I'll pray," Nellie said, in sudden remembrance of the Lord, for it was then she remembered. She had never prayed before. A solemn awe clutched at her soul and sent her heavy head down on her arms on the desk. This time she did not think to kneel.

"Oh, Lord,—Lord,—Lord, I'm all sole alone. Won't Thou come and stay with me? It's very dark. I'm not certain, but I think I'm beginning to die—I feel 'aif. Won't Thou come quick?"

Only that, but He came. In the moments of peace that followed, Nellie fell asleep. She had a beautiful dream that the Lord told Teacher about her having been just going to begin to be true when she died. And that dying wasn't bad at all—and that there was plenty to eat in heaven. It was beautiful.

The night tucked the child in as softly as a mother tucks her little one into bed. It was a peaceful, pleasant dark, after the Lord came. And short, too, for very soon the east grew rosy—grew rosier—and it was light. But still the child slept on.

"Nellie Page! Nellie Page!" It was the same voice, but it had never Nellie Page-d like this before. Never so tenderly, no, never. Nellie opened her eyes in wonder.

"You little Nellie Page!" sobbed Teacher, with the inert little body in her arms, "you little—little—little Nellie Page!"

"Why, it's you," smiled Nellie, still in heaven. "Why I didn't know that you died too! Then you didn't find my letter and know I was just a goin' to begin—"

"I found it, Nellie—I know!" The arms around her tightened. "I came for something else, but I found that, and then I found you! You've been shut in here all night, Nellie—I shut you in."

"Yes'm, thank you," murmured Nellie, drifting bewilderedly back to earth. Then as she got quite near. "Why, yes, I remember now. Then—why, then I've got time to begin!"

—From "The New Idea."

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