

ago! She looked thinner, more worn, more grey and faded, if it were possible, by the light of her own little candle; and beside her, curled up like a little kitten, lay a beautiful, fair little child, the image of what my Lilian must have been in her babyhood. But how came they here? and — but my brain fairly reeled. Only yesterday (how long ago it seemed now!) I had left Lilian singing over her work in the Ward, as gay as a lark. Was I going mad? How could this be? Just then the baby-child—it might have been a year old, or a little more—moved, and sitting bolt upright, as is the way of babies, began to roar in a most lusty fashion. The mother laid aside her work—she was sewing, poor soul, at that hour of the night—and taking the baby in her poor thin arms, began to hush it with tender loving words: “My little Lily, my pretty one, mother will buy it some bread to-morrow, if she gets some money,” pitifully.

I could bear no more, and fairly sobbed aloud. The door seemed to close on me, and there I was in the dark, a long way from home, in the dead of night. As I stood pondering what to do, I heard a gruff voice say, “Well, he’s a nice one anyway to leave in charge. What a fine clutter! Why, bless my soul, there’s someone there.”

At this I opened my eyes wider, and saw, in the sunshine streaming into the building, an elderly man; and, yes, it was the old verger I knew quite well standing beside me, struck dumb as it were with surprise to see me apparently sleeping in the midst of a chaos of hassocks and cushions, which he expected to find piled up in tidy fashion ready for distribution. And all my adventure was a dream!

I got up, stiff, cold and hungry; and making the best of my way to the “Home,” was soon telling my story to eager listeners.

Our Lady Superintendent—such a mother to us all—was so distressed at my weary looks, that she gave me leave to rest until the next day. Then, it being her afternoon off, I turned to Lilian, but was struck with the awful look on her face.

“Come!” she said, hurriedly, “tell me your dream again.”

I did; and then to my surprise she sobbed out—

“I had a twin sister once; she married very young, as her husband, who had an appointment abroad, was to leave England for many years. The ship they sailed in went down, and, as we thought, all were lost on board. But could it be possible? If you love me you will take me where you went last night in your dream!”

At first I refused, it seemed so foolish; but gave in at last, to Lil’s great delight. At first I feared

we should never find the way; but it seemed so plain, to my astonishment; I seemed to have my guide speeding before me again. At last we stopped at the door. I looked at Lilian; her face was very pale, but quiet for her, intensely quiet. She answered my unspoken question, “Let us go up!” We toiled up the filthy stairs, and arrived at the door, still open, where I had stood unseen last night. For one moment the poor child faltered, then with a firm hand pushed open the door, and with a cry of “Lilian!” “Daisy!” these two, severed as they thought by a grave, were clasped in one another’s arms.

It seemed after Daisy was cast ashore she was ill in a cottage for weeks; on the lonely coast where the ship had been wrecked, there was no one to befriend her. At last, worn-out as she was, she started for the home she had left, knowing a warm welcome awaited her from her father and mother. To her despair, she found they had left both the house and the place—they could not bear the sight of it, Lilian put in, after she was gone for ever, as they thought. She had then toiled on to London, where her baby was born, and ever since had been barely keeping body and soul together by her needle.

That was the sum and substance of the story she told us. You may be sure before the day was out we had taken her and the baby—such a sweet, wee mite it was—and at last the poor, tired little mother was settled with her best friends, where the storms of life blew but lightly.

And I? Well, I never had such a Christmas before or since, and I trust I never shall again, though, when I see the happiness of that reunited family, the horrors of that day and night sink into oblivion.

No. 2.—This Time Last Year.

BY MISS HELEN FOGGO-THOMSON.

(Second Prize Winner).

“NURSE, are you crying?”

“No, dear.”

“But, Nurse, I am sure I saw tears glisten in the firelight as they fell into your lap. Nurse, *do* tell me what is the matter. Are you unhappy? Don’t you like being here nursing me?”

“Yes, dear, I like nursing you very much. I am not at all unhappy. I was thinking, that was all, and my thoughts ran away with me.”

“About what were you thinking, Nurse?”

“My last Christmas, childie.”

“Where were you last Christmas, Nurse?”

“Where was I? In my dear old Hospital, and so busy. Let me see—half-past five, Monday. I

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