

Shades of Elizabeth Fry.

Some fifty years ago an English child lived in a buoyant environment as fresh and free as air, then she was suddenly whisked away to study music in Paris. One fair summer's day she returned to England, and came pale and silent into a terraced garden. Without word or warning she cast away her Parisian *chapeau*, flung herself on the verdant ground, and was seen rolling from terrace to terrace, her fluffy petticoats well above her knees, and her high-heeled bronze boots kicking in the air. Over and over she turned with cries of delight until she bumped on to the lower gravel path. In a twinkling she was up again, with *frisé* hair flying, only to repeat with unrestrained mirth her abandoned evolutions, until, with flaming cheeks and grass-stained garments she was ultimately seized by an outraged mother.

Slaps—threats—at once to bed—no dinner!

A not too maternal treatment.

Then the Man of Mercy with the glistening whiskers snatched up the "dishevelled dervish," and made away with her.

A ruffy-tuffy headed girl stood sentinel, cold as stone. In such mood she was denied the relief of tears—*her heart was weeping*, flip-flop, flip-flop, drip-drip-drip. You will perceive her notions of anatomy to have been sensational in those far-off days. She listened to grown-ups.

The mother of the culprit, whom old and young, including her children, called by her flowery Christian name (and indeed she exhaled the perfume of pink roses), spat out little venomous words of anger, the childless woman well beloved of babes rippled excuses, but upon his return the Man of Mercy with whiskers bristling spoke rough mysterious truths. "That child has been in prison, and, mark my words, her mother will frizzle for it. I have burned those monstrous boots!"

The ruffy-tuffy headed girl weighed the words with wonder.

"Prison! Frizzle! What crime—?"

But she was a practical little person, and, later in the day, having abstracted from the larder various toothsome dainties, she crept with them up the back stairs to the room in which the Singing Bird was doing time, hidden behind the curtains of an eighteenth century four poster, and when but a jammy stickiness remained to attest to tarts and trifles, she pressed to know of that prison in Paris. And a tragic tale she heard which cannot be written here.

Oh! that tale of woe! Of days, and weeks, and months of misery, high up in a house of darkness—of life with an old mad maker of music, of scales and scores, and strumming, of sharp raps on tired fingers, and thumps on music stools, of terrific crashes on poor pianos, of sighs and sobs and tears. And the terrible longing for green—*real English green*—and to dance in puddles and make mud pies, and kick up dead leaves, to hear the sound of sea, and smell salt winds, and taste sirloins of beef, *real English beef*. Oh! to have none of these things *is* prison.

And here Nurse entered and exclaimed, "Oh! you naughty story—a pack of fiddle-dee. Prisons is summat different to that, I'se assure you. You just go and see them murderers' graves i'

Castle Keep to Lincoln. There's prison for you. Up you go them mossy old brick steps, and you find a door in the wall. 'Ear the rusty old key a'screech in the lock. Step through, look hup, 'igh walls to the very sky, and at yer feet *blue* grass as 'igh as yer knees, and down, down among the dead men, graves and graves, where lie the bones of them as has been 'anged as 'igh as 'Aman—as well they deserved it—a gruesome sight I'se assure you—but now't to do wi' sirlines so juicy as never was. Its agin nature that them grass fed beasts should thrive to Paris what wi' frogs and snails and sich like. And now you two little gels is forgiven, for all your misbehaviour, and you're to take dessert in the room along of your kind uncle, so here goes."



ELIZABETH FRY.

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