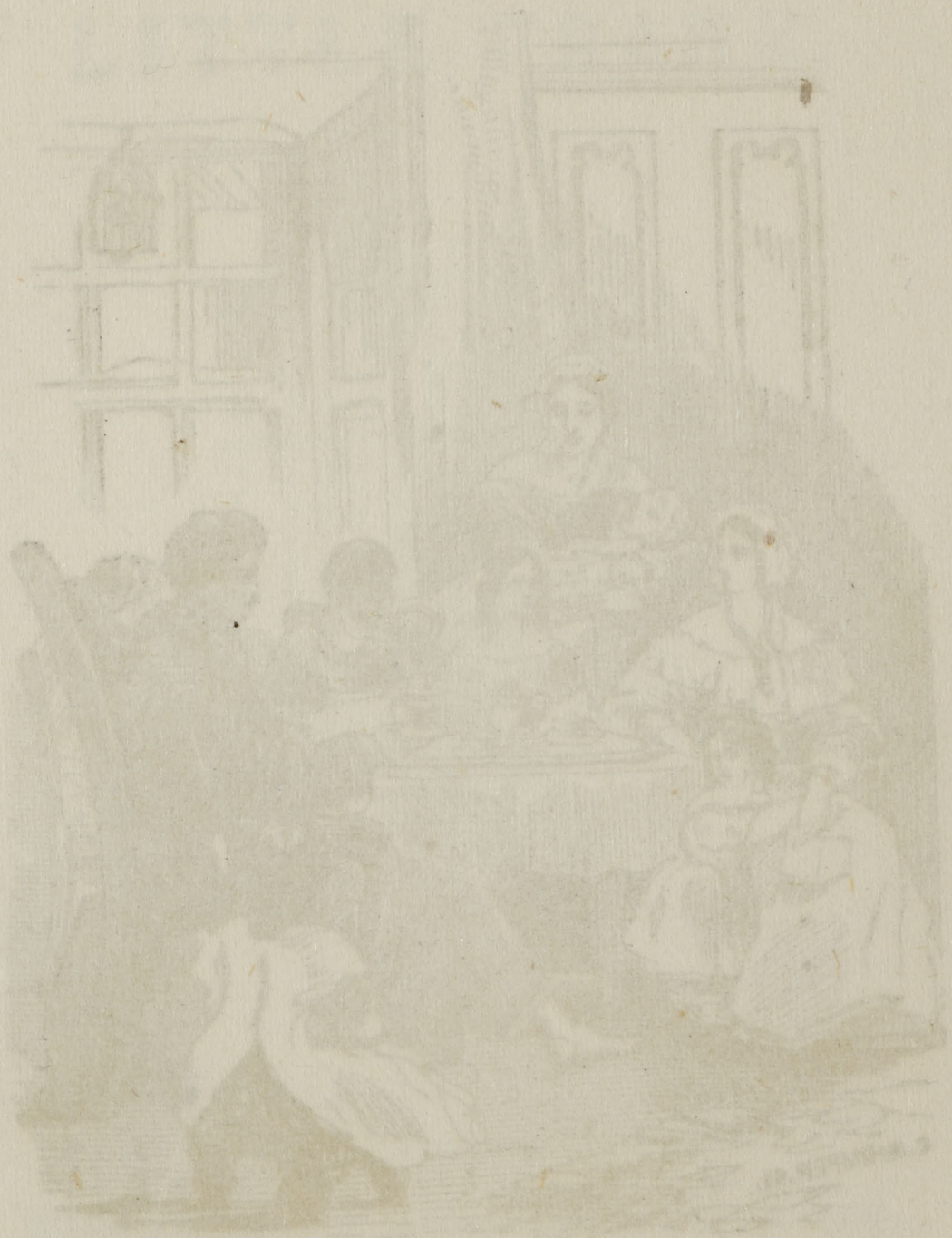


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# LITTLE FRANK.



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THE LITTLE TRAMP

## Little Frank.

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IF you were to go into Mr. Farre's house, 11. Bertha Terrace, Highbury, any morning before eight o'clock, you would see a pleasant sight. From nursery to kitchen, every one is awake and busy. Little children, fresh and rosy from their morning bath, are playing about merrily. Cook is making toast and preparing bacon, and Jane, the housemaid, setting out the pretty white breakfast cups and saucers, and the gay flower mugs on the snow-white cloth of the parlour table. Quick and business-like is Jane as she sets on the large jug of milk for the children, and the teapot for the papa and mama. All is ready just as Mrs. Farre walks down stairs. Then the bell rings for prayers, and all the little ones come down, from Frank the eldest boy of eight years old, to Blanche the

tiny baby girl, who can just run with the help of nurse's finger. It was a cold chilly morning in April, and the fire was very welcome although the sun did shine. Yes, the sun shone so brightly, that Mrs. Farre's flowers in the stand looked quite happy, and the canary, in its bright wire prison home, sang such loud songs of joy, that every one wished it would be quiet. Mama was obliged once or twice to cry 'Hush! hush!' for there were little voices which made as much noise as the canary, and just like the canary, they were still for a minute or two, and then began again. That did not matter very much, for Mr. and Mrs. Farre liked to hear their good happy little ones talk.

Such a group of merry faces! No, do not look at the eldest first. There is Ernest, the second boy. No sunbeam nor summer flower ever smiled so much. His was the smile of heart sunshine, of peace and love. Then there was Clara, his twin sister. She smiled when Ernest smiled, but it was a sort of reflection of his joy rather than joy of her own: as when the sun shines on the parlour wall, making that bright and cheerful, which has no light of its own. She was a meek,



thoughtful child, was Clara ; too thoughtful for a little one of seven, but as she grew stronger, and saw only that which was lovely and joyous, so her mama hoped she would lose her careful look and her quiet way ; but every one loved Clara. There were two more at the table, little sprightly chatterers, Agnes and Lucy, and the baby. Of course the baby did not sit up to breakfast. I am afraid he would have made more confusion than canary bird and talkative brothers put together.

The postman's knock ! and three letters came in. What could be the matter every one asked, as mama looked up from her letter ? ' I am afraid the postman has brought a disappointment to you my dears,' said Mrs. Farre, at length. ' Your aunt Mary writes me a very mournful letter. Fanny, and John, and little Charley are all ill of the measles. It will not be safe to go to Dorking for the Easter holidays, even if it would be kind to give trouble in your aunt's sick and sorrowful house.'

There had been a cloud hanging over one child's heart from the moment of his first awaking. He was not always,—indeed he was very seldom a naughty boy ; but this morn-

ing he awoke in that uncomfortable frame, which nurses sometimes call 'out of sorts.' Nothing was right. His lessons for the day were difficult. He remembered that two of yesterday's tasks still remained unsaid, and worse still, unlearned. Yet he lay in bed till the very last moment; I believe until the bell rang for prayers, and just came down as Jane brought up the coffee. He was discontented with everything. There was no brown bread on the breakfast table. That was one grievance. Another was, that Ernest spilled a cup of milk into his plate, and did not seem half sorry enough. And now to finish it all, to complete his misery, the Dorking visit was put off. All country joys were at an end; poor, unfortunate Frank!

Oh! what a pity it is, that such a pleasant household should be spoiled by a discontented face amidst the bright smiling ones! But yet it is most likely you have seen that which I describe; and as there is a lesson to be learned from pictures, you may learn one from mine just as well as if I painted it all sunshine. It is not very often that a landscape is *all* bright. Sometimes it is so, but

more often, if you look far on, there is a distant hill, lying in a mist, or a pretty village in a nook, on which a cloud is resting; just so in this happy family there was a shadow to-day. Mr. and Mrs. Farre did not say, as some papa and mama may have said to their little ones, that they must not be so cross and discontented, because it would be wrong, and selfish, and so forth. By and by, when the first edge of the vexation was gone, they would tell them all this. They did not expect them to bear the disappointment like men and women, silently and quietly, but were so full of love, and sympathy with their darlings, that one might have supposed they were themselves as disappointed as they. But soon papa began to show how much worse it was for poor John and Fanny, to be in bed this fine weather with aching heads and feverish bodies, and bad coughs, and unpleasant medicine; so by degrees, in beginning to pity others, they forgot to pity themselves at all. This is always the best way to forget self, if one can. Frank, however, did not forget himself. He went on with his inward murmurings and grumblings, and was getting in a bad way altogether

Whilst this was going on in the Farre's pleasant breakfast parlour, a little girl had been calling her morning cry of "Water-creases, four bunches a penny," past the house, along the terrace where they lived. They had often heard her plaintive cry, but had seldom thought of the poor street seller who uttered it. They seldom bought water-creases, and the child had only one regular customer in the row of houses, an old gentleman, and now he was ill in bed, and water-creases were not good for him, so she cried in vain, and it seemed that she had a cold this morning, for as she sat down on the step of the Farre's door, to arrange her green bunches in her little tin, she coughed sadly. Clara heard the cough, and she listened attentively. Cook was now sweeping out the hall, the front door being open.

Clara heard the order for the child to get off the steps. 'That's the water-cress girl, mama; may I give her one of my pennies? She could buy licorice with it and that would do her cough good.'

Her mama was quite willing that she should give the penny; but she doubted whether the child would dare to buy licorice

with it. She was, no doubt, sent into the street to earn her loaf for breakfast. 'Children, very young children, had to do this,' Mrs. Farre said, in answer to Clara's wondering look; 'but take the penny, dear, or the child will be gone.'



So Clara took the penny. The child, a pale thin girl, had no childish way nor look with her. Oh! no, there were lines of care instead of dimples, and an old, thoughtful face, instead of a childish one. She was

counting the bunches on her tray, and wrapping her thin shawl about her, and was just preparing to move away as Clara appeared. When she offered the penny, the girl began to count four bunches of cresses in return, but 'No!' Clara said, 'I don't want any cresses, thank you; I only brought you this penny to get you some licorice or sugar-candy for your bad cough.'

The water-cress girl looked astonished. 'I don't know what that is,' said she; 'is it sweet stuff?'

'Yes, and good for colds.'

The child shook her head gravely. 'I take all I get to mother. Mother is very good to me. I never eat sweet stuff, Miss.'

'Have you had any breakfast?'

'Breakfast! No. I've had bad luck to-day. I don't go home to breakfast till I have sold all my *creases* out.'

'Stop a minute,' said Clara, as she ran in to ask for just a piece of bread and butter and some tea for the pale little girl, that had had no breakfast.

'You may have mine,' said Frank, pettishly, 'the bread is old, and I like brown bread best.'

Clara took the bread, and Ernest following with the milk, they told the child to sit down on the step and eat. She thanked them, but she must not wait she said; her only chance of selling was 'afore nine o'clock' and she must go on, so she drank the milk, and hastily taking the bread would have walked away, but that Mrs. Farre, who had followed the children, and pitied the water-cress girl as much as Clara did, asked where she lived? Her answer was not very plain. However, Mrs. Farre made out that it was somewhere in Sun Court, Gray's Inn Lane, and that her name was Martha. This was all the child seemed to know. Happy little Clara! she had been thinking so much of others, that she had forgotten herself and her disappointment, and when Frank renewed his complaint about the long expected Dorking visit being put off, 'for these tiresome measles,' Clara looked up surprised. The room looked so snug, the fire so bright, her little brothers and sisters so healthy and clean, compared with that pale, thin, half clad water-cress girl.

The lessons went on very ill this day; Miss White, the morning governess, looked more

grave than ever, and the long list of backward lessons swelled terribly. This was not the worst. If we do not do our duty in one thing, we are almost sure to forget it in another. Frank was put out with himself and every one else.

‘Will you come and walk with me?’ said Mrs. Farre gravely to her little boy. ‘Clara, Ernest, and I are going to see where the little pale water-cress girl lives. Will you not come?’

Frank had no greater pleasure, at most times, than that of walking with his mother; but he did not feel it to be a pleasure to-day. There was that in her calm, steady eye, as it rested on him, which Frank could read very well. It seemed to say, ‘Oh my child, how discontented you are, and how sorry you make me!’ Frank put his hand in his mother’s and walked silently by her side. It was not a pretty walk; no one could say that it was. Gray’s Inn Lane and the road to it from Highbury is not pleasant. There are few smart shops; none indeed, after you leave Islington, and all the murmuring thoughts were stirred up within Frank’s young heart, for he could not forget Dorking,



and the country walks. He well remembered these, and he kept calling all the pleasures of the country to his mind, until the town seemed to him scarcely to be borne. Little Clara, meanwhile found pleasure in the dim and airless streets. Hers was a spirit no less than that of her glad twin brother Ernest, which shed peace and joy about her path. This was indeed an errand suited to her taste, and she chatted in her quiet pleasant way to her mother, as they walked along.

Suddenly a thought seemed to strike Mrs. Farre, and stopping short she said, 'Clara, darling, will you go back with Ernest, and do not think me unkind that I do not take you to day?'

Clara's eyes filled with tears. This was *her* disappointment, but she took Ernest's hand at once; 'Mama knows best,' was the language of her simple, trusting heart. Mrs. Farre, was quite right. Scenes of poverty and distress were bad for little Clara. She was not likely to feel too little in this life. The fear was that she might feel too much, and whilst she was so young and delicate, her mother wisely kept her from all that was likely to be too distressing or painful.

Frank went on, and after a little search, they found Sun Court, but Sun Court had so many inhabitants, that for a long time it seemed unlikely that they would discover Martha, the cress girl. Rude, dirty children playing on the dust heaps, unwashed, untaught, and ill fed, answered either boldly or shyly to the inquiry for the water-cress seller. At last they spied Martha herself. She was bending under the weight of a pail of water, which she was trying to convey by slow stages up the crooked, narrow staircase. The gentle voice of the kind motherly Mrs. Farre seemed strange music to the ear of the little wanderer; and she set down her pail, and looked curiously in the lady's face.

'Is your cough better?' asked Frank's mother.

'No,' answered the girl roughly, but it was only a manner that she had. Her heart was really softened by the lady's tone.

'You are very young to carry that heavy load. Let my little boy help you. He is stronger than you.'

Frank looked surprised, but he could not refuse, and he lifted the pail a stair or two. Then the child tried, and by degrees they



were on the top stair. Martha went first and the visitors followed. What a room it was! Frank had time to look round it, whilst his mother talked with a poor sickly woman who sate by the only light part of the room, near a broken window, employed in sewing the fur skins together for a furrier. Mrs. Parre complained how sorry Martha's cough had made her little daughter, and how her pale thin cheeks and poor clothing had excited her own pity, and she asked if anything could be done for the child.

The woman did not answer at first. At last she began to cry. 'She could not have her loaf ma'am except she earned it,' she said. 'She is a good girl, and her day's work is hard for her day's bread, poor lamb! I have three younger ma'am,' and she pointed to a baby asleep in an old basket, and to two little rough headed, sickly looking girls, playing on the floor with oyster shells, and a bunch of cresses, at 'selling, like Martha.' 'Yes,' said the old woman in answer to Mrs. Farre, 'she is young for such work. Five o'clock, at latest, she has to be up in the morning, and dress by the lamp light in the court, in winter, and out she goes with her little tray to Farringdon market, and sixpence in her hand to buy the cresses. They buy a lap full for threepence, and for sixpence as much as the basket there will hold. It's cold, work, ma'am, I know for the little ones on cool spring mornings, and on winter mornings 'tis worse to take the dirty *creases* to the pump and wash them. Then they have to sit all in the cold, poor dears, and tie them up, before they begin their rounds. My girl is not often home till ten, and to-day she has had bad luck; she could not sell her *creases*.

She says her cough teased her, and she could'nt cry them well, and that's true enough, as I know.'

'Have you had your dinner, Martha?' asked Mrs. Farre of the child.

'No, ma'am, I don't get dinner. Mother gives me bread and butter, and a cup of tea, when I come home from my rounds, and then I go till tea-time.'

'Ah,' and a hard pinch we have to get that,' said the poor woman.

Frank looked amazed. Two meals a day, of bread and butter and tea, and a hard pinch to get that! A room with a broken roof, and almost paneless window, a sloping floor, two deal chairs and a stool, a mattress on the floor in one corner, and some straw, and an old rug in another; and he had grumbled at his breakfast that day, had thought his a hard lot, because he could not go into the country. Oh what shame! what sorrow he felt for his bad spirit! Little Martha stood before him almost in reproof, and his heart swelled with gratitude now, as it had done with discontent and ill-humour but a little time before. His mother saw that the lesson was understood, and she rejoiced that it was.

‘Are you happy?’ she asked of Martha: ‘don’t you wish sometimes to go out into the beautiful country, to see the streams where the cresses grow, and to hear the pretty birds sing?’

‘No, I never wished that.’

‘Don’t you sometimes wish for a better dinner or supper? Does it not seem hard to pass breakfast tables covered with good food, whilst you are cold, and weak, and hungry?’

‘Sometimes it feels hard; but many a girl in our court has not even that much, and that is harder.’

How Frank blushed at this, and well he might.

‘Then you don’t rest all the morning, when you come home?’

‘No, I must work for mother.’

‘And how old are you?’

‘I shall be nine, come my birthday.’

‘Just my age,’ thought Frank; ‘but how old and wise she seems!’ The child had begun to ‘tidy,’ as she called it, their little room. She picked up all the pieces that lay about, and taking a brush, began to scrub

the farther part of the floor, coughing at times sadly.

Her mother looked at her anxiously once or twice, and then said, 'She's a good girl,—never thinks of herself nor of her own troubles; it's always her mother or the little ones that's uppermost, and she never complains, bless her! let the weather be ever so bad. Ah! ma'am, I'd take her out of the streets, if I could; 'tis a hard life, but we must work for bread, or we must go without it. I have lost my husband, and there's only her hands and mine, to bring in our loaf and pay our rent.'

After a little help, and a promise to come again soon, and to buy a pennyworth of water-cresses of little Martha now and then, Mrs. Farre and her child left the narrow court. How fresh the air felt in Gray's Inn Lane, after the stifling atmosphere of Sun Court; and when they came to Islington, it seemed like the country to Frank, as he thought in his own childish way on the past lesson.

'I know why you brought me to-day, mama. I might forget your lessons; I often do, I know, but I shall never forget little

Martha. Her voice of a morning will remind me, if I am disposed to grumble, I think.'

'Of what will it remind you, Frank?'

'Of my discontent, mama.'

'And is that all? Will you not ask if you deserve more than the ill-fed girl, who passes your door day by day?'

'Yes, mama.'

'And will you not try to be thankful for these things, which you take as matters of course? Will you not ask yourself how it is that your table is spread every day, and thrice a day, with plenty of good food, whilst little Martha has to content herself with two scanty meals? Will you not ask if it is by *chance* that your home is in the purer air and clearer light of Highbury, whilst hers is in the dark, unwholesome court in Gray's Inn Lane? Will you again complain that you cannot enjoy a week in the country, when you see little Martha going on her hard-working life cheerfully and honestly?'

'I will try, mama, and ask God to keep these thoughts in my heart. Mine is indeed a beautiful home,' said he as he saw the gar-





den plot in the distance, 'compared with poor Martha's. I will not say that I will never grumble again, but I will think more of others and if I forget myself I shall not be so likely to complain.' The mother silently asked a blessing on her boy's resolve, and they went hand in hand to enjoy, with cheerful hearts, the blessings of a happy home.

THE  
FRANK



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