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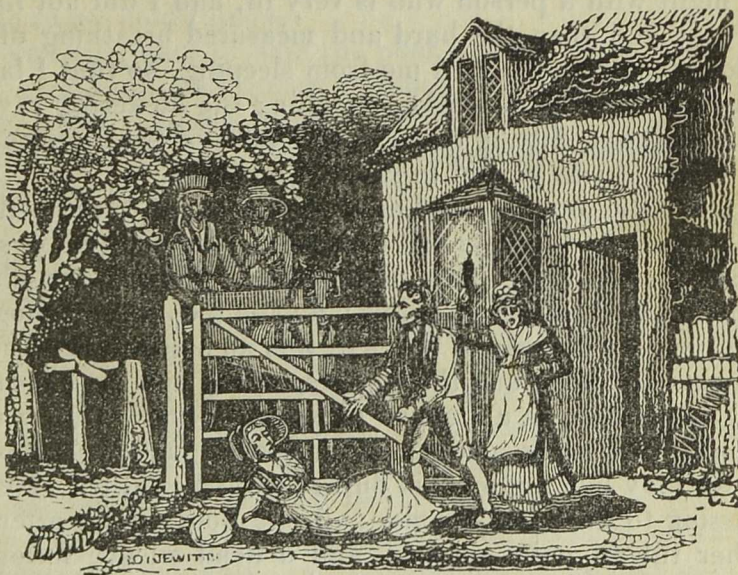
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THE  
**TURNPIKE-HOUSE.**

PART II.

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# THE TURNPIKE-HOUSE.



## PART II.

IN the first part of my story I broke off in the middle of my account of poor Nelly Brian's sickness; and was mentioning, that, having been appointed to attend her during the night, I laid myself down on the bed by her side.

Nelly appeared very stupid when I had given her the medicine, though not so stupid as that she did not know every thing that passed; and I perceived that she breathed very hard for some time after I got to bed; though, after a while, it might be about an hour, she began to breathe more easily, and was apparently fallen into a deep sleep.

It is a dull thing, it must be confessed, to be left alone at night with a person who is very ill, and I did not like it at all; and then the hard and measured breathing of the poor creature prevented me from sleeping, so that I lay as much as two hours awake, watching the flickering rays of the rushlight, flitting through the holes of the deep tin pan in which it was placed to prevent mischief.

Our attic was low, and hung with very old-fashioned paper, which had lost its colour by time, and contracted some stains from damp. Two old-fashioned damask arm-chairs stood on each side the window; and on a chest of mahogany drawers, on my side of the bed, was an assortment of cups, phials, and jugs, and the leeches, which had been brought the day before, in a cracked glass water-bottle with a wide mouth, which was covered with a piece of gauze tied upon it.

As I lay looking on this dull scene, I heard the servants passing to their bed-rooms, and one door closed after the other till all noise ceased; and a dead silence followed, which was only broken now and then by a kind of whistling, or moaning, of the wind in the chimney.

I heard the stable-clock strike twelve, and then fell asleep, and awoke again about two hours afterwards. Poor Nelly was sleeping soundly, she never slept so comfortably again in this world.

To this day I cannot recollect my behaviour at that time without agony. I was not so hard-hearted but that I rejoiced to find my poor bedfellow so easy: but before I settled myself to sleep again, I got out of bed to set up the

rushlight which had fallen against the side of the tin; and as I stepped on the ground, I touched something cold with my bare feet. It was a leech, which had got out of the bottle, and was crawling on the boards. I shrieked, and looking to the bottle, I saw that the gauze was unfastened, and all the leeches abroad, crawling in different directions.

I shrieked again, and jumped back into bed; on which poor Nelly roused herself, and asked what was the matter.

"The leeches!" I exclaimed; "the leeches!"

"What of the leeches?"

"Oh! they are all abroad; and, for aught I know, some of them may be in the bed!"

"Well," said Nelly, "and what need was there of such a noise? Get up and put them back in the bottle, and you will soon see if any are missing."

"Oh! the ugly beasts," I said. "I would as soon touch a serpent as a leech."

"Well, then, take your handkerchief," said Nelly, "and gather them up with it."

I shrieked again; and declared I would not touch one of the nasty cold things.

"You simpleton!" said the poor woman; who, being of Irish extraction, was rather irritable, though there was not in the world a kinder-hearted creature. "Sure you would not have me get up, all in a perspiration as I am, to gather up the creatures?"

"I don't know," I replied; "but, as for me, I neither can nor will touch them."

"So I am to take my death to save your delicacy, am I?" said the poor woman, springing up in her anger, and getting out of bed: and I was cruel enough to allow her to stand in the cold as much as five minutes, while she picked up the leeches and put them in the bottle. After which she came to bed, and I had indifference enough to say, "Well, I hope you will not be the worse for it."

After this I fell asleep, and slept till day-break; at which time waking suddenly, and recollecting what had passed in the night, I looked with some sort of fear at my bedfellow, and found her lying on her back, neither asleep nor otherwise, and labouring most fearfully for breath, while her face was more purple than red.

"Nelly!" I exclaimed, "Nelly, how are you?" She opened her eyes, but spoke not, nor answered my repeated calls.

I hurried on my clothes, and running to Mrs. West's door, I knocked aloud, for it was bolted within, and begged her to get up, for Nelly was dying.

The next minute the poor old lady came trembling to the door, and hastened with me to our chamber. She expressed no small surprise to find her so ill, and asked me when the change had taken place; bidding me, at the same time, to pour the water from the leeches and prepare them for application to poor Nelly's chest. I could pour away the water without touching the leeches; but when Mrs. West ordered me to give her one, I again refused to touch them.

Mrs. West was excessively angry; but this was no time for parleying with obstinate people; and she bade me call the cook, and go about my business, adding, that she wished me no greater punishment than the company of my own thoughts.

I readily obeyed her, called the cook, and as, by this time, it was broad daylight, went about my usual employments.

When the servants met at breakfast, which was about eight o'clock, the cook began to attack me in such a manner as quite confounded me, and brought the blood up to my very forehead. "And so," she said, "you made poor Nelly get up in the middle of the night to save your delicacy; because, forsooth, you are too nice to touch leeches? Well, Heaven defend you from ever being sick! for you have no right to expect to be treated better than you have served others. You have as much murdered poor Nelly as if you had put a knife to her throat: for if ever she gets over this, I am more mistaken than ever I was in my life."

I was certainly shocked when thus accused, and led to apprehend what might be the effect of my cruelty; but I strove against conviction, and tried to brave it out among the servants. Yet, from that time, I was treated with so much neglect that I was never again comfortable in that house. Indeed, troubles came fast upon us. The doctor came before we had done breakfast, and was shewn, by Mrs. West, into Nelly's room. I saw the laundry-maid bring down a pint bason of blood; and, as she passed me, she gave me a very angry look. I was not permitted to sleep that night with the poor woman, nor did I see her again till the next day, for, indeed, I feared to see her. I was then sent into her room on some errand, but as the room was darkened I had but a faint glimpse of her as I peeped at her through the curtains; but the nurse, who, sat by her, shook her head when I asked how her patient was.

That evening we heard of two persons being dead in the village of the fever, and this frightened and disturbed us all very much.

The next day poor Nelly was still worse, and her life despaired of. My feelings were not very pleasant ones; but I tried to harden myself against them, though I had some difficulty to bear the looks and glances which were thrown on me whenever Nelly's name was mentioned in my hearing.

I now thought that the servants were making out that Nelly was worse than she really was, just to vex me: so I resolved to go and make sure myself of her real state; and, with that intent, went up about dusk to her room, and, going in without knocking, I witnessed such a scene as I never can forget. There was a lighted candle in the room, which shone upon the bed so clearly, that every feature of the poor woman's face was quite plain to me. She was supported in bed by pillows, and was labouring so dreadfully for breath, that she looked more like a corpse than a living being. The cold sweat stood in large drops on her brow, and every limb was convulsed. I had never seen death, or the approach of death before, and it now appeared in one of its saddest forms. And then my conscience! O, what dreadful pangs did that give me! Hard as I was, I had all the feelings, at that moment, of one who had committed deliberate murder.

"Poor creature! the Lord have mercy on you, and give you a happy release!" were the first words I heard on entering the chamber, and these words were from the nurse, who, together with Mrs. West and a maid-servant, were standing near the bed.

I looked for a moment, and then turned away; and, going to a dark corner of the passage, wept in real bitterness of heart; and I not only wept, but prayed that God would have pity on the poor sufferer. And the Almighty, in his infinite mercy, had compassion on her.

Poor Nelly's pains relaxed towards midnight, and strength was given her to give her last assurance that she died in hopes of the divine mercy, through her blessed Saviour, a few minutes before she actually expired.

We were all very low while the corpse lay in the house; for it is a depressing thing to know that there is a corpse under the same roof with oneself.

Mrs. Clifford would not allow the body to be committed to the dust in less than five days, for she would have all respect paid to the worthy old servant; and, because poor Nelly had never been married, she caused all the young female servants to attend her funeral in white hoods and gloves.

I was one of those who were ordered to attend the funeral. It was a gloomy October evening when we set out from

the Hall to the church. We had to pass a dark grove of Scotch firs, and I thought I had never felt so sadly, or so downcast, in my life. At length, when we came into the churchyard, we found that the grave had been dug close alongside of one of those persons who had died of the fever a few days before. There was a kind of damp earthy smell about the open grave, and the young woman who had walked with me after the coffin, and who had been my bedfellow for some nights past, said, as soon as the ceremony was over, "Did you not smell something very offensive, Eliza, as we stood by the grave?"

"I smelled nothing," I replied, "but the fog and the damp leaves."

"But I did," she answered. "I smelled the fever, and I breathed it; and I know I shall have it, and perhaps die."

I ought to have done what I could to have put this foolish idea out of my fellow-servant's head; for there is nothing which sooner occasions an illness than a panic of this kind. Indeed, as I have heard a medical man observe, the body is prepared for disease when the person indulges such alarms. However this may be, Susan Fell (for that was the name of my young companion) went home, and had a very bad night; and, within twenty-four hours, was so ill that she was forced to take to her bed. At the same time our groom began to complain; and, to crown all, our master's eldest daughter was taken with the same symptoms.

And now I must tell you what thoughts crossed my wicked heart at that time.—Distressed as the family were, and much as every one's help was required, I no sooner was assured that it was actually the typhus fever which had seized upon us, than I began to think how I could get away. Nearly a year's wages were due to me; and I felt assured that if I were to run away at this time, I should never get them. Neither could I think of any excuse which I could make for getting away, which had a chance of passing with Mrs. West. In the mean time I was set to attend poor Susan Fell, and a sorry nurse no doubt I made; for I was always shewing my false delicacy, and would not touch this, or that, without such airs and grimaces as must have been very painful to the poor sick girl to see, though she made no remark; for she knew the situation of the family, and was thankful for any attentions.

At length, on the fifth evening after her attack, the doctor ordered her a blister on the back to relieve her head; and Mrs. West, coming up with it in her hand, ordered me to raise her in the bed and uncover her neck.

While doing this, I said, "You will please, Ma'am, to cut and dress the blister when it has risen? for I can do no such thing."

Mrs. West made no answer; and the blister being put on, the poor girl was laid down again on her pillow. After which, Mrs. West bid me follow her into the gallery. There, shutting the chamber-door, she said, "Eliza Spence, you spoke very improperly just now. Had you said you did not know how to dress a blister, I should have thought less of it: but to say you would do no such thing, and the family in such distress, I wonder greatly at you. Surely you must have suffered in your conscience about poor Nelly Brian, who owed her death, I fear, to you!"

"I can't dress a blister," I repeated.

"But you can learn to do it," she replied.

"No," I answered, "I can't."

"Say you will not, at once," said Mrs. West.

"I was not hired for any such jobs," I replied.

"Well then," said she, "you may as well take yourself off. You are not a person to be trusted in illness, I see. You have a heart as hard as a stone. You may go when you please. My master and mistress are not so little beloved that they will not be able to procure all the help they need in their afflictions."

"Then you wish me to go?" I asked, in a very impertinent manner. "But be pleased to remember," I added, "that it was to be either a month's wages or a month's warning."

"You shall neither have one nor the other," said the housekeeper, in great anger. "If you can leave a house, where you have had a happy home for four years, in the hour of its greatest need, you deserve no indulgences. But you may stay your month, if you please."

"I would rather choose to go immediately," I answered.

"Go to the steward, then," she said, "and get your wages: and put up your clothes to-night, and then you may go as soon as it is light. And God give you a better heart: for if ever there was a heart of rock and stone, it is the one in your breast, Eliza Spence."

I received my wages; took leave of the servants; and, having eaten my supper, went up to my old room, the one where poor Nelly had died, and where my clothes still were. There I spent more than an hour in making up my packages; I then crept for the remainder of the night to the bed of one of the maids who was sitting up with the sick. There I tried to sleep, but was in trouble; beginning now, for the first time, to think what my parents would say about my be-

haviour to Mrs. West, and my giving up my place in so hasty a manner. At length I fell asleep, and awoke again in a fright, fancying that I was standing by the grave of Nelly Brian, and that I was falling into it. I found myself very hot and thirsty. There was no water in the room; and I tried to sleep again, but became much hotter, and was violently sick. After my sickness I was a little better, and slept again, but awoke at six o'clock: when, remembering the journey that was before me, I got up and went down, carrying a small bundle in my hand; and, being prepared for my walk, (for my plan was to walk about half way that day, and then stop at a little country inn, the mistress of which was my second cousin, and so to go on the next morning,) I agreed with Mrs. West that I should leave my box till I had an opportunity of sending for it.

I saw none of the servants as I went out but the kitchen-maid, who asked me where I was going, but she expressed no sorrow when I told her that I was going home.

I walked as much as four miles, becoming more faint and weary every step. At length I was overtaken by a return-chaise. On enquiry, I found that it belonged to a town at about twelve miles from my father's house, and the post-boy told me that I should ride to that town for three shillings, provided I would get out before he drove up the street. The bargain was soon struck, I got into the chaise, and went off with much greater speed than I could have used on foot.

I had scarcely stepped into the carriage when my head became giddy. I was violently sick again, after which, I lay in a sort of fainting-fit: and when the post-boy stopped at the entrance of the town, he found me lying in the bottom of the chaise like one dead.

The first words I heard, as the boy opened the door, were, "Come, mistress, out with you. You have had your penny-worth, and it has been a good one. But (and he swore as those people too often do) I reckon you have had a drop too much, early as it is. But up with you, for I must be going on home." With that he gave me a pull, and set me on the ground, giving me my bundle, shutting the carriage door, and driving off; for I had paid him the three shillings in advance. And now I found myself alone in the highway, at the entrance of a town where I did not know a single person, and at least twelve miles from home.

I looked after the chaise till it was out of sight, and then sunk down on the bank; forgetting, for a moment, where I was, or what I was intending to do. My eyes were dizzy, my limbs trembled, and my throat was parched and inflamed.

I had run away from the fever when it was too late. The dreadful infection had already seized upon me; and what would I then have given to have been back again in that house where, unfeeling as I had been, I was sure of the kindest treatment.

But it would not do for me to stay where I was. I got up and walked on, for I knew my road, and, crossing the corner of the town, I asked for a little cider at a public-house by the way, and dragged myself forward till I got into the direct road to my native place. I heard the church-clock of the town strike twelve just as I entered on this road, and I had then twelve miles to walk, for I had passed the halfway-house where my cousin lived while I lay insensible at the bottom of the carriage. I dragged my weary limbs forward a quarter of a mile further, when, being overtaken by an empty waggon which was going in the direction I wished to go, I offered another shilling for assistance; and almost thought myself in heaven for the first few minutes after I had been laid on a heap of straw in the bottom of the waggon, having my bundle for my pillow. But, alas! my heaven was soon changed; for, what with the jolting of the waggon, the increasing violence of my illness, and the effect of the cider on my head, I was in the greatest possible misery for the next ten miles; and when the waggoner stopped the waggon, and came to tell me that he was now going to turn out of the direct road, to a farm called Brockington, I was obliged to get out, and was again left, more dead than alive, on the road-side, in a gloomy evening of October, about one mile and a half from the turnpike-house where I had been born.

I was too ill to feel any pleasure in the thought that I was so near home. A mile was as much to me, at that moment, as forty would have been at another time; and I was now assured that I was carrying with me the dreadful infection from which I had so wickedly tried to run away, —and I was carrying it to my parents too, as I thought! Thus my sin began to stare me in my face, and to add inexpressible horrors to my situation.

After the waggon had passed away, I sat for a while by the way-side weeping most bitterly, while the loud wind whistled round me, and I trembled with cold, and burned with fever, in various parts of my body at the same time. At length I arose and crept forward, for I feared the approach of night. I was more than an hour getting one mile; and Oh! what horrors did I experience in that hour! Although I met not a single human being on the road, yet

I sometimes fancied it was full of people, passing and repassing me; dark, silent figures, some of which, as they approached, I fancied took the likeness of poor Nelly Brian, disappearing entirely as they passed by me. These were nothing, indeed, but the shadows of the trees, waving in the wind, which were changed into all these horrible visions by my feverish brain.

At length I saw before me a light, which gleamed from the well-known window of the turnpike-house. Hope gave me strength. I hastened on—I heard voices within the house—I called on my father and my mother—I pushed forward—and remember no more till I fell on the door-sill, repeating the name of “Mother! mother! father! father!” and then I suppose that I fainted, for I lost my recollection for a considerable time.

At length I opened my eyes and looked up, and heard a rough voice, which said, and that not without an oath, “Get up, you drunken body, and get away with you! We harbour no such persons here.”

“Dear father! dear mother!” I cried, “have pity.”

“Father! mother!” repeated the voice. “Get away with you. Arn’t you ashamed, young as you are, to be so disguised in liquor?” and many harsh and coarse words followed which I forbear to write down.

By this time I could distinguish the face of the person who spoke. It was a man, but not my father, and the woman who stood by him was not my mother. I shrieked aloud at seeing these strange faces: on which the man pushed me back with some violence, and was just shutting the door upon me while the woman joined in the grossest abuse of me, using many words such as no human being should apply lightly to another. Among which words I only remember one, and that was the word *nasty*, when suddenly “*Turnpike! turnpike!*” was uttered by some persons on the other side of the gate; and the man, pushing the door open again, in his hurry knocked me down, so that I lay in the way to be trod upon by the horse of the travellers as soon as the gate should be opened. These travellers were in a one-horse chair, or sort of market-cart.

“Get out of the way,” said the turnpike-man, “you drunken body!” at the same time telling the persons in the chaise that there was a drunken woman in the way which prevented his opening the gate.

“I am not drunk,” I said; “but very ill. Dying, I fear, dying with the fever.”

“The fever!” shrieked the woman. “And are you such

a wretch as to go about the country carrying the plague with you?" and she ran back to the house.

"The fever!" repeated the gentleman in the carriage. "You ought not to go about the country in such a condition, carrying the infection to others. Why do you not go home? Or have you no home?"

"This is my home," I replied. "I was born here. This is my home."

"It is Eliza Spence," said a gentle voice from the cart. "What can have brought her here? Does not she know that her parents are gone?"

"Spence's daughter that lived at Squire Clifford's?" said the turnpike-man: and he uttered a thousand maledictions upon me for coming there, and bringing the fever with me.

"And where are my parents—where are they?" I said, in an agony I cannot describe. "Are they dead? all dead?—all gone?"

"Gone, but not dead," said the man. "They are put to the gate on t'other side Hereford. But get away with you, that the travellers may pass through the gate."

By this time I had risen from the ground, and was supporting myself against the gate.

"But you will not refuse to take the poor creature in and nurse her?" said the gentleman in the carriage. "You will not suffer her to die on the road?"

The man replied, with another oath, that I might die in the ditch if I would; for, that he would have no fevers in his house: and turning to me, though keeping at a distance, as if afraid, "Young woman," he added, "stand off from the gate, that I may let the passengers through."

"But is she to be left to die?" asked the same soft voice.

"That's no business of mine," replied the man. "I reckon that the same legs as brought her here may carry her on a little further."

I lost my recollection again; and have but a faint remembrance of hearing loud voices as if in dispute. At length I felt myself lifted up, and presently afterwards found myself in the cart between two persons, the arm of one of them being round my waist, and my head reposing upon the bosom of the same person who held me. It was Pamela who was thus tenderly supporting me, braving, thus piously and charitably, all the dangers of an infection of the most terrible kind; and it was her husband who was driving the cart.

The voice of Pamela was the first thing that made me sensible of my situation; and a sense of her wonderful kind-

ness made me burst into tears. If I were required to point out the moment in which my stony heart began to dissolve, I should say, it was at this moment, and under the influence of such compassion.

But my narrative is already long; and, therefore, I must add but little more. The lovely Pamela and her kind husband brought me, that night, to their happy home: and I was laid on a bed, and nursed through the dreadful fever in the tenderest manner by this most excellent woman. There was no office, however mean, however unpleasant, which she did not perform for me cheerfully; and, by so doing, she gave me such a view of the lovely effects of piety, that, by the divine blessing, I arose from my bed, not only with restored health of body, but with a renewed heart, and with an ardent desire of being a disciple of that blessed Saviour, whose image I had seen thus reflected in an earthly mirror. Through divine mercy, the fever was not communicated to any of the family. And, from that period, I continued twenty years with Mrs. Willis as a servant. She had eight children born while I was with her: I nursed her in all her illnesses, and all the children during this time. I learned, with the divine help, to do every thing necessary in a sick-room. And I now live near the same dear mistress, in the house of my parents; and am, I trust, an affectionate partaker, with her, her husband, and her children, in all their joys and sorrows. Eliza Spence is the first person sent for on every occasion of pain and pleasure at Greenwood Farm.

Mr. Clifford's family still prosper. The fever went through the house, and only one person died: that person was poor Susan Fell. But Mrs. West, whom I saw some years since, said, that she died in a very happy state.

And now, my readers, let me entreat you to assist your fellow-creatures in their sicknesses and infirmities; and if you have a family, to teach the duty to your children: and let it be impressed on young females especially, that the particular obligations of women are, to bring up children, to console the afflicted, and cherish the aged; and that these duties can never be suitably and conscientiously performed, but in the strength of the Lord, and by the assistance of his Holy Spirit.