

## *The Stolen Child*

Caroline Orne

"I'M COLD, Archie," said a little child; and going up to a boy crouching by a small, rusty stove, she cuddled down close by his side.

"Well, I can't help it, sis," said the boy. "There isn't a chip or coal left;" but he opened the stove door, blew off the white ashes which had gathered over the dying embers, and placed the child so that she could feel the faint warmth they emitted. It was very sad to see how eagerly she thrust forward her small hands, purple with cold, so as to catch what little heat there was. In a minute or two, a noise was heard outside the door, as if someone was fumbling with the latch.

"There, sis, *he* is comin' now, and you'll be in his way;" and, snatching up the unresisting child, into whose large, brown eyes came a sudden fear, he placed her on a pile of straw, in one corner of the damp cellar-room, hastily threw over her a tattered quilt, and then ran and opened the door.

"Why didn't you let me in, and not keep me out in the cold all night?" said the man, who, with marks of moral degradation stamped on his face, and those of physical destitution exhibited in his soiled, threadbare garments, seemed eager for some cause of complaint.

"I thought the door was unfastened, so you could open it yourself."

"You didn't think any such thing. What did you let the fire go out for?" he then angrily demanded.

"'Cause fire al'ays goes out when there's nothin' to burn."

"What's become of the coal and chips you picked yesterday? But I needn't ask. You wasted it all to keep that little imp in yonder corner warm. See that you don't do it again, for when I come home, I must, and will have a fire. We must get rid of the young 'un somehow, and if you don't do it, I will."

"You stole her, sir, and now I think you ought to take care of her."

"How dare you say that I stole her?"

"'Cause you did."

"How do you know?"

"I heard mother say you did."

"When?"

“Only a few days afore she died.”

“Is that all she told you about it?”

“Yes.”

“I don’t believe you. When a woman begins to tell anything, she never breaks off so short as that. When her tongue begins to go, it keeps runnin’, till she gets to the end of the worsted. Come, now—own up, and tell me what more she said about the little imp.”

“She didn’t say anything more. I guess she meant to, but she heard you comin’, so she didn’t dare to.”

“It’s lucky for you, and the child too, that she didn’t. If she had—Well, no matter. She didn’t dare to, as you say. Mag had a will of her own, but it had to come under. I broke it down.”

“You broke her heart, sir—that’s very certain.”

“You’re your mother’s own child—a little too peart to suit me. I was a fool for marryin’ a widder with a great awk’ard boy to feed and clothe. But I’ll get rid of that three-year-old, and then you’ll have time to do somethin’ else besides takin’ keer of her.”

“If she goes away, I shan’t stay,” was the thought that passed through Archie’s mind; but he was too shrewd to give it expression.

“If she could only be made to answer the purpose I meant she should,” resumed the man, “she might stay. She’s real handsome—there’s no denyin’ that—and Mag used to have a sight gi’n her for the sake of her purty child; and you, if you were sharp and cunnin’, as some boys are, could take her round with you, pass her off for your sister, and get heaps of cakes and dainties to feed her with, and us, too.”

“Maybe I’ll try to-morrow, and see ‘f I can. I wish you’d tell me where she come from.”

“That’s what I’ll never do. But I’ll tell you this much: The child’s father is so rich that he can set and loll in a cheer kivered with welwet, while I’ve nothin’ better’n a three-legged stool to set on. He can walk on floors kivered with carpets that look as if flowers were bloomin’ all over ‘em, while I have to put up with a rough, dirty floor, full of damp and mildew. More than that, he can every day sit down to a table spread with all kinds of meats, pies, and sparklin’ wines, while I have to gnaw a mouldy crust, and wash it down with water—or at best, what the Injuns call fire-water—jest as if he was made of better flesh and blood than I am. I can remember the time when he hadn’t as much money as I had.”

“Not as much as you?” asked Archie, with a look of astonishment.

“No, not a quarter part as much.”

“How came he to get so ahead of you, then?”

“Cause fate would have it so.”

“Mother used to tell me that people sometimes make their own fate. She said she made hers when she married you, and a bad one it was.”

“As well call it fate as anything. I s’pose people in gineral said ‘twas all owin’ to his havn’ a better eddication than I had. I don’t know but ‘twas. You see that, at first, his larnin’ wasn’t better’n mine, but instead of spendin’ his airnin’s in fine clothes, oyster suppers, and sech like, as I did—for I couldn’t bear to be outdone in that way—he spent ‘em goin’ to an evenin’ school, where, besides writin’ and cipherin’, which I was a tol’rable hand at myself, he larnt grammar, and ‘strology, I believe they called it—it had an ology to it, at any rate—and sech kind of trash, with the black art into the bargain, as I raly b’leve, for the very gal I had in my eye, who was the only darter of a man rich as a Jew, took him, and wouldn’t have anything to say to me, for all that I beat him all holler in good looks and fine clothes, as everybody said. Some thought my refusin’ to sign the temperance pledge had somethin’ to do with her refusin’ me; but if she *was* rich and handsome, I wasn’t goin’ to be snubbed in that way, as long as I lived in a free country. But I don’t care. For a year past, I’ve bin takin’ my revenge, and calc’late to go on takin’ it. I reckon he and his wife don’t take much more comfort in their fine house and furniter, rich dinners, and splendid kerridge and horses, since they lost their child, than I do, poor as I am. What is there for my supper?”

“Some bread, the same as Margy and I had—that’s all.”

“If there’s nothin’ better’n that, I’ll go without.”

Archie slept but little that night. His step-father’s threat, relative to little Margy, continually haunted him, even in his dreams. Knowing that he was cruel, revengeful, unforgiving and unscrupulous, he even had fears for her life, unless she could be made to answer the purpose she did while his mother was alive. After devising many expedients, he finally rejected them all, as impracticable, saying to himself that he would trust to chance.

After the first faint gleam of morning light struggled through the begrimed window, the time that intervened before his step-father woke seemed to him half a day. Little Margy still slept, and Archie remained quiet, hoping that his step-father, when he rose, would go away without saying anything to him, or taking any notice of the child. But the moment he woke, he said:

“Get up, Arch, and stir around. If you expect me to find coal and wood for a fire, to keep you in your laziness, you’re mistaken.”

“I don’t expect you’ll find it—I’ll get it myself.”

“It’s well you don’t. If you did, you’d be disappointed.”

He then went to the corner of the room where little Margy was lying, turned down the quilt, and looked at her. Archie trembled, and involuntarily held on to the back of an old chair, as if to prevent springing forward to her rescue, for he expected his step-father was going to take her away with him, for the purpose, as he had threatened, of getting rid of her. He without doubt thought of it, for he murmured to himself:

“Better wait till night, now—I ought to have been earlier. Arch,” he then said, turning to the boy, “give me some money. I haven’t a red cent left, to buy my breakfast with.”

“There’s all I have, sir,” said Archie, handing him a little a gentleman gave him for doing an errand.

Pocketing the money, he went to the door, put his hand on the latch, then turned and looked towards the corner where lay the sleeping child. Archie again trembled, but he turned away without speaking, and left the house. While he is making his way to a cellar, where he can obtain beer and a mutton-chop for breakfast, with the money he demanded of Archie, we will enter one of the brown-stone palaces of New York City, owned by a gentleman by the name of Wilton. In an apartment, where the keen, frosty air of that January morning was tempered to a grateful, summer warmth, Mrs. Wilton sat at the head of the breakfast-table, before the massive, richly-chased silver urn, whence escaped the delicious aroma of the choice Mocha coffee, as she filled a cup of costly china for her husband, who sat opposite her. Only they two were at the table, and though Mr. Wilton took the offered cup and tasted it, he did not heed the fine mellowness of flavor, to which, like wine, by subtle and sure processes, the coffee berry is said to ripen by age. Had the beverage been made of peas or beans, it would have been all the same to him. Mrs. Wilton did not even taste her coffee, and her husband saw that it was by a great effort that she held back the tears from her eyes. She attempted to speak, but her poor, trembling, broken voice could not give utterance to her thoughts.

“Yes, I know what you are thinking about,” said her husband; and then, thought

—“His voice swayed like an Alpine plank,

That feels a passionate torrent underneath,”

He succeeded in saying, “It is the anniversary of the day we lost our dear Lilia.”

“If she had only died,” said Mrs. Wilton, after she had swept away with her bitter tears somewhat of the deep anguish and agitation which shook, and threatened to prostrate her.

“It would have been better,” said Mr. Wilton.

“Yes—heaven would seem so near us, if we knew that she was there. I often think, when sitting alone in the dim twilight, that if her home *was* there, I should sometimes get so near her in spirit as to catch glimpses of the glory by which she is surrounded. But, even in my dreams, I never see

her thus. She is always a little vagrant, with no home, no shelter, except some dark, noisome den, like those from which you and I, for years, have been trying to rescue children of the degraded poor. Even should I meet her in the street, I sometimes feel afraid I shouldn't know her. Look at this;" and Mrs. Wilton handed the miniature of a child to her husband, and moved her chair to the side of his.

With emotions of unspeakable tenderness, they gazed on the little face, full of sunny sweetness, and of a glad, joyous look, which might have been likened to the fresh, rosy light of a summer morning.

Meantime, a keen, northwest wind was blowing without, directly in the eye of which, walking rapidly, was a boy of ten years old, with a little girl in his arms. As he went, he kept continually casting around quick, stealthy glances, as if afraid that some one was either pursuing, or lying in wait for them. His clothes were clean, yet not whole, though many a patch set awry, showed his own undextrous attempts at needle-craft, that he might appear decent.

"Sissy cold, Archie," said a little plaintive voice.

"Yes, I know poor little sis is cold. There, lean down on Archie's shoulder, so the sharp, bitter wind won't bite her face;" and he attempted to place his arms around her in such a manner as to better shield her from the cold.

Just at that moment, a sharp gust of wind swept by, piercing him to the marrow with its icy breath, and, sweeping the loose dirt from the pavement, it whirled it aloft, and drove it in a dense, blinding cloud into his face. He bent down till its fury was spent, then cast a wishful look at the row of stately houses, which, as it seemed, to him, were regarding him with a proud, forbidding look. There was no poor, humble-looking place in sight, that he could creep into long enough to warm "Sissy," and his own bare feet and hands were growing numb with cold. Arming himself with a sudden courage, he went boldly up the steps of one of the brown-stone palaces, and rang the door-bell.

"What do you want *here*?" demanded the porter.

"To warm sis—I'm afraid she'll freeze to death."

"Well, go somewhere else and warm her. The family are at breakfast, and don't wish to be disturbed."

"I won't go anywhere else. She'll die afore I get there, if I try to go;" and resolutely crowding by the indignant porter, and following the sound of voices, and the pleasant savor of choice viands wafted from the breakfast-table, he soon stood in the presence of the master and mistress of the mansion, and their three children, a son and two daughters. Speaking to no one, Archie went directly to the open grate, where the fire burnt with a clear, ruddy glow.

“Do you know whose house you’re in?” said the gentleman, laying down his knife and fork, and looking at Archie, with astonishment depicted in every line of his countenance.

“No,” he replied.

“Well, sirrah, you are in Mr. Burder’s house; and you’re a bold, brazen boy to rush by the porter, as I know you did—for he’s had his orders about such things—and to come in and disturb me and my family when at breakfast. It’s unpleasant to us—very unpleasant.”

“Well, I didn’t come in for the sake of myself, ‘cause it isn’t any matter about me; but I couldn’t bear to have little sis freeze.”

Archie had already seated little Margy on a velvet-covered footstool, near the fire. He now knelt by her side, and by chafing her little purple hands, tried at the same time to get warmth into them, and by producing a free circulation of the blood, prevent them from aching. He even felt proud when the glow and pleasant heat of the fire brought color to her cheeks, light to her brown eyes, and made her hair, which, with infinite care and pains he had brushed that morning, shine like burnished gold, as it clustered in soft curls round her white, blue-veined forehead.

Her dress, which was of good material, she had nearly outgrown, and in many places I was so worn that numerous tags and fringes hung to it, which were neither useful nor ornamental. On her feet were a tiny pair of kid shoes, with the gloss rubbed off, and one of them torn at the heel. But over the rest of her clothing was a blanket beautifully embroidered, which Archie had so arranged as to cover the greater part of the rags and rents. The blanket was nearly new, and unsoiled, his mother having always kept it hidden away in a box, carefully locked. His step-father had in all probability forgotten it, and as he left his miserable home with a firm determination of never returning, he wrapped it round her, not only as a protection against the cold, but with the hope that an article of clothing so fine and handsome, by heightening her beauty, might prove a kind of passport to the favor of ladies fond of children, whose charity he might ask in her behalf.

This was one of the many tentacles, which, from time to time, he sought to throw out, and which were gradually revealed to his perception—perhaps instinct is the better word—sharpened to an almost preternatural keenness, the constant, relentless pressure of want. A furtive glance cast now and then towards Mrs. Burder, told Archie that she had discovered that Margy was a pretty child, if Mr. Burder had not. Some question, he felt certain she was about to ask, and soon it came.

“What is your name?”

“Archie Linn.”

“What is the child’s name?”

“Margy.”

“She has another name besides Margy, hasn’t she?”

“I s’pose she has.”

“Well, what is it? I should like to know.”

“I don’t know myself, so I can’t tell you.”

“Whose child is she—whom does she belong to?”

“She belongs to me, now; ‘cause since her mother died, there’s nobody else to take care of her.”

“She isn’t your sister?”

“No; but I al’ays call her sis.”

Mr. Burder’s patience was by this time exhausted.

“I am surprised, Mrs. Burder,” said he, “that you should be at the trouble of questioning one of the cunning little vagabonds that now-a-days overflow the dirty lanes and loathsome alleys, where they belong, and like swarms of vile, pestilent insects infest the more decent, even opulent, parts of the city, where families of wealth and rank might hope to be exempt.”

“The child is really pretty, let her come from ever so mean a place,” replied the lady.

“And what a beautiful blanket she has round her,” said Laura, the eldest daughter.

“A black mark against the boy,” said Mr. Burder. “It was stolen, no doubt. Come,” said he, turning to Archie, “you’ve been here long enough to warm yourself, and the child, too—so up with you, and be on the tramp.”

“Sis wants some breakfas’, Archie,” said Margy, looking wishfully towards a plate of warm biscuit.

“I haven’t the least doubt but that she’s had half-a-dozen breakfasts already, this morning,” said Mr. Burder.

“Well, never mind,” said his wife, “it won’t take long for her to eat a biscuit;” and she handed one to the delighted child, who commenced eating it, with an appetite made keen by the cold, sharp air.

Mrs. Burder offered one to Archie.

“No,” said he. “I made my breakfast on a mouldy crust, such as beggars ought to eat, and be thankful for, and I’m sorry sis couldn’t have done the same; but she don’t know about sech things. She don’t know why that little gal at the table ought to have better bread than she has.”

Could he have put what he thought and felt into words, there would have been as much keen irony in what he said, as is expressed in the following:

“We are of one flesh, after all,  
And need one flannel—with a *proper sense*  
Of difference in their quality.”

Margy soon finished her biscuit, when Laura held a cup of milk to her lips, which she eagerly drank.

“That’s good,” said she, when she had drained the milk to the last drop. And she looked up to Laura, as she spoke, with eyes beaming with a warm, sunny light.

Laura touched the child’s soft, bright curls with her lips, with an impulse she could not control, for which she received a frown from her watchful father.

“Now, sis, we must go,” said Archie.

“Sis don’t want to go—it’s pretty here.”

“She must—sissy must. Don’t cry;” and, wiping away the tears that started to her eyes, he carefully wrapped her in the blanket, took her in his arms, and left the room.

Mr. Burder hastened to open the door, which Archie closed when he went out, to see, as he said, that the beggars didn’t loiter by the way, and steal something which might be lying round. When they were fairly out of the house, he put on his warm overcoat, and other articles of clothing impervious to the wintry air, and proceeded to his place of business. Archie stood a few moments on the door-steps, and looked wistfully up and down the broad street. There was nothing to be seen, but cold, stately magnificence.

“You’ll freeze, if we stay round here, sis,” said he. “We must go back to some poor place, where they’ll let you stay. Let me think where it’s best to go.”

He walked along slowly and thoughtfully, for a little while; then, with a resolute air, as if he had made up his mind, he started off in a direction which would soonest lead to the “poor place” he had in view. The wind was not in his face now, so, with little Margy’s face nestling on his shoulder, and his arms clasped firmly around her to keep her warm, he could walk rapidly. He did not slack his speed, till he arrived at the door of a large, mean-looking tenement building in a



dark, dreary alley. Many families lived in the house, but it was a poor widow, the occupant of a garret-room, that Archie wished to see.

“Her little girl is dead,” he said to himself, “so she’ll think of her, I reckon, when she sees sis, and be glad to see her.”

He found her hard at work, making shirts with stitched bosoms, at the munificent price of seventy-five cents per dozen.

“Good-morning, Archie,” said she. “And who have you there?”

“O, this is sis, that I told you about t’other day.”

“The little dear. Her curly head makes me think of my Susy that’s dead and gone;” and rising, she placed a child’s chair close to the small stove.

“O,” said Archie, as he put her in the chair, “one of her shoes is gone. I’m sorry, for I don’t know when I shall get money enough to buy her another pair.”

“I’m sorry, too, and I wish I could help you to buy some more. I don’t know but the child will be cold, for I’ve only a handful of coals I went out and picked early this mornin’, ‘fore I could see to sew, but there’s enough to warm the room some.”

“Let me have the basket, and I’ll go and pick some for you. I know where the good places are. You’ll let sis stay with you while I’m gone, won’t you?”

“Yes, indeed, and be glad to have her. Here, give her this doll to play with,” taking a little cheap one from a piece of tissue paper, in which it was carefully folded. “I set up late one night, just before Christmas, on purpose to earn an extra sixpence to buy it with, for Susy had heard about Santa Claus and thought if she was good, he’d certainly give her somethin’ for a Christmas present, and I couldn’t bear to have her disapp’nted, when she tried so hard to be good.”

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Mrs. Wilton, after her husband was gone, sat alone in an apartment, surrounded by everything which could gratify a cultivated mind and refined tastes. But nothing had power to divert her thoughts from her child, on this anniversary of the day when she had so unaccountably disappeared. All at once, her pet dog, a King Charles spaniel, so small as to appear little even among that diminutive genus of the canine family, began to whine, and scratch at the door. She rose, and opened it mechanically. As he joyfully bounded into the room, though she saw that he had something in his mouth, she did not notice what it was. After running round the room, still retaining the plaything in his mouth, in a hurry-skurry way, demonstrative of ecstatic delight, now and then letting it fall long enough to give a quick, joyous bark, then snatching it up, as if afraid of losing it, he seemed suddenly aware of the indifference manifested by his mistress. He

stopped short in his gambols, looked her in the face a few moments, then, still holding his treasure in his mouth, he ran and jumped up into her lap.

“Why, what ails you, Donty?” said she, and as in an absent manner she began to pat his head, she perceived that it was a child’s shoe that he held in his mouth.

“Donty, Donty, where *did* you get this?” she said, taking hold of it with an eager, trembling hand.

Donty’s joy, at having attracted her attention, was unbounded. He gave another joyous bark, and, wagging his tail, alternately caressed her hand and the little shoe.

“This is Lilia’s shoe—shaped by her little foot. O, where can she be?” and in her excitement, she rang the bell with a peal so loud and sharp, that the girl, whose duty it was to answer it, entered the room with looks of alarm.”

“Is the errand-boy at home?” said she.

“Yes’am.”

“Tell him to come to me.”

He was not long in making his appearance.

“John,” said she, “I wish to see Mr. Wilton. Go and tell him he must come immediately. Let him have ever so much business on hand, h mustn’t wait a moment.”

“I’ll go, ma’am, and won’t be long about it, neither.”

She could not content herself to remain in the house, but went to the door, and looked up and down the street. Few persons, comparatively, were to be seen, as the tide of business flowed in a different direction. The distance was not great, and Mr. Wilton was not long in reaching home. She met him at the door, and putting the shoe into his hand, said:

“Look—it is Lilia’s.”

“Yes—there’s no mistake. Where did you get it?”

“Donty brought it in. I don’t know where he found it. On the doorsteps, perhaps. She, our own child—our only one, may have been there this very morning, in the arms of some vagrant—only think, such cold, bitter weather!”

At this moment, Mr. Burder came in sight. Certain business transactions had brought him and Mr. Wilton together, so that they were on speaking terms, and when he had come near enough to enable him to see, Mr. Wilton thought he appeared excited. Mrs. Wilton went into the house, and

her husband was about to follow her, when Mr. Burder made a sign for him to remain where he was.

“Good-morning, Mr. Wilton,” said he, when he had arrived within speaking distance. “I’ve lost my pocket-book. There was more than a thousand dollars in it, and a number of valuable papers. That little vagabond that was tramping around here this morning, carrying a child in his arms to make fools of people, and excite their pity, stole it, I’ve no doubt.”

“A boy with a child in his arms? How old a child?”

“Two or three years old, I should think. My wife and Laura pitied them mightily, and would have been glad to feed them with the best there was in the house, but I understand the tricks of such vagrants. When not more than seven years old, they are keen and crafty enough to be twice that age. The one I’m speaking of, looked cunning as a fox, and in the face of the little one with him, I could see the same kind of look, as plain as day, though wife and Laura thought she was pretty, and innocent looking. At any rate, I gave them to understand that they must leave my premises, quick time.”

“They were in your house, this morning, you say?”

“Yes; they came in while we were eating breakfast. The bold, impudent knave pushed right by the porter, came into the room, and placed the little one before the fire, without leave or license. But there’s a detective on their track by this time, and they’ll find safe quarters, I dare say, in the lockup.”

“If you please,” said Mr. Wilton, “I should like to make some inquiries of your wife and daughter, about them.”

“Certainly—certainly. Come right along with me, sir, if you please.”

“Mr. Burder tells me,” said Mr. Wilton, addressing Mrs. Burder, “that a beggar-boy, with a little girl, was here this morning. Will you be so good as to describe the child to me?”

“I will, with much pleasure. She was not far—so I should think—from three years old, and though her clothes were so much worn as to be ragged, still she was one of the loveliest children I have ever seen. I never saw such beautiful brown eyes in my life—they have haunted me ever since she was here; and then her hair, soft as milk, lay in such shining, golden rings round her forehead.”

“Yes,” said Laura, “her beauty, and pretty, childish ways almost bewitched mother and me.”

“You have probably heard that we lost our only child a year ago?”

“No,” replied Mrs. Burder, “We have lived in this part of the city only a few months.”

“I don’t mean that our child died.”

“How then?”

“She was stolen.”

“And you think the little girl who was here this morning may be the child you lost?”

“I do; and when so near her father’s house, it seems hard that she should miss it. I think, sir,” turning to Mr. Burder, “you told me that you had put a detective on the children’s track?”

“I did tell you so; but the little one, of course, had nothing to do with stealing my pocket-book, so she won’t be hurt.”

“Stealing your pocket-book, did you say?” said Mrs. Burder.

“Yes; that boy stole it. I suppose I must have laid it down a moment, for something, which gave him a chance. Slight-of-hand is one of the accomplishments of such gentry as he belongs to.”

“Here is your pocket-book. You left it lying on the table, and I didn’t notice it till you were gone,” said his wife, handing it to him.

A ring at the door-bell.

“I want to see the lady that lives here,” said a sharp treble voice.

“You can’t see her, if you do,” said the porter. “But are you the boy,” eyeing him sharply, “that was here this morning?”

“Yes, I am.”

“Well, wait a minute.” And going to the apartment where Mr. Burder and the others were assembled, he said, “Here’s the thief I heard you say stole your pocket-book—he’s come back of his own accord.”

Archie followed him.

“I’ve come,” said he, “to see if sis didn’t lose one of her shoes when she was here.”

“What did you say about a shoe?” inquired Mr. Wilton.

“I said that little sis had lost one of her shoes. I brought her in here to warm, ‘cause you see she was like to freeze, and I didn’t know but that she lost it off in here.”

“I wish to ask you a few questions,” said Mr. Wilton.

Archie made no answer, but braced himself, and put on a bold, defensive look, evidently expecting that he was to be catechized somewhat in the same spirit he had been an hour or two previously by Mr. Burder.

“I should like to have you tell me who the child is you brought here this morning?” he said.

“I don’t know nothin’ about it,” was Archie’s answer. “People like to ask questions about her, but they don’t like to give her anything to eat, or to wear—they’d see her die first. That man that tends the door called me a thief—I heard him. I never stole in my life; and if I ever do, ‘twill be to keep sis from starvin’, and not for myself. I’ll work for her, if I can get work, and if I can’t, I’ll steal for her, sooner than see her die. I told mother, just before she died, I’d take care of her, and that’s what I mean to do, sir. But after all, it’s poor care that the likes of me can take care of such a delicate little creature as sis is.”

“That’s true, my boy,” said Mr. Wilton, who could see that all the bitter antagonism of his nature was brought into action by the presence of Mr. Burder. “Yes, that is true,” he repeated; “and now if you will to with me to my house, you’ll find the little shoe you’re in search of.”

“Is it there?” said Archie, with a bright, eager look.

“Yes, I believe it to be the one you lost.”

The manner of Mr. Wilton inspired confidence, and Archie’s bold, defiant look, as if by magic, gave place to behavior gentle and respectful. He gladly complied with his request.

“Yes—this is the very one sis lost,” said Archie, when the shoe was shown him. “I’m so glad to find it, for poor sis can’t go barefoot like me, this cold weather.”

“Show him the miniature, Mary,” said Mr. Wilton to his wife.

“Why, this looks jest as sis did, the first time I ever saw her. But she looks paler now than she did then, and her cheeks are kind o’ holler.”

“Mary,” said Mr. Wilton, “our child that was lost is found. There can be no doubt of it. This boy had her with him in the next house, this morning.”

“Where is she now? Where did you leave her? Tell us where she is,” said Mrs. Wilton.

“Is little sis your child, ma’am?” said Archie.

“Yes, she’s my own—I’m her mother.”

“Then I’ll tell you, ma’am, and shall be glad to. You see it’s so cold she couldn’t go round with me, so I left her with a poor woman, ‘cause you see poor women are kinder to little ragged ones like sis, than ladies are. A lady spoke cross to her this mornin’, and made her cry, ‘cause the wind flapped the corner of her blanket ag’in’ her nice fur cloak—”

“Mr. Wilton, let us go at once for her.”

“Yes, Mary; I’ll order the carriage. Now, my boy,” said Mr. Wilton, after he had given the necessary order, “while you sit down and warm, and eat this piece of cake, I wish you to tell us all you know about the child.”

“It’s but little I know,” said Archie. “My mother, about two years after my father died, was married again. One evenin’, the man she married come home pretty late, and when I heard him comin’, I run and jumped into bed, and made b’leve I was asleep, ‘cause he didn’t like to see me round. When he come in, he had somethin’ in his arms, and he said to mother, ‘Here, Mag, I’ve brought you somethin’ to help you airn a livin’ with,’ and, takin’ off an old piece of cloth that was wrapped round her, I could see ‘twas a little child he had in his arms, all dressed up in beautiful clothes. Mother asked him what he meant, and he told her that she must go round, and carry the child with her, and make b’leve she was a poor, destitute widder, and folks would give her a sight for the sake of the pretty child. Mother begged him to let her be carried back, and left on the steps of the house he took her from; but he scolded, and spoke bad words, and said he’d kill her, and the child, too, if she said a word about. Anyhow, he said, whether the child lived or died, he should be revenged on somebody—he wouldn’t tell who—that he hated worse than p’ison.”

“What is your step-father’s name?” said Mr. Wilton.

“Dormand—but he’s commonly called Boney, ‘cause he says he was named for the Emperor of France.”

“That name, Mary, gives us the key to the whole affair; but though I knew that he turned out to be an intemperate, miserable wretch, I didn’t think he was so wicked and malicious as to revenge himself in the way he has, because you chose me instead of him. I had lost sight of him for the last two years, and supposed him to be dead. What did you say your name is, my boy?”

“My name is Archie Linn, sir.”

“Well, Archie, I see the carriage is ready, and you must go with us; so wrap yourself up in this thick, warm shawl.”

They were not long in reaching the old dilapidated tenement-house, where Archie had left the child.

“Mind where you step, ma’am,” said he, leading the way, “for the stairs are kind of broke away in some places.”

When they arrived at the room of Mrs. Carnes, the poor sewing-woman, Archie rapped at the door, and being bid to “come in,” threw it open. The mother’s eyes swept the room; then she exclaimed, wildly:

“She isn’t here—where is she?”

Mrs. Carnes, surprised at the unexpected presence of Mr. and Mrs. Wilton, was confused, and did not understand that the inquiry was for the child.

“It’s little sis that the lady means,” said Archie, looking round with anxiety; for he was afraid his step-father had somehow found where she was, and had been and taken her away.

“O, I didn’t think of little sis,” said Mrs. Carnes. “She dropt to sleep, and so I put her on the bed behind this curtain. Here she is, if you would like to see her;” and she drew the curtain aside. “She still holds the little doll she had to play with in her hand.”

In a moment, both of them, father and mother, were at the bedside. How lovely and innocent she looked. Her soft golden curls were tumbled somewhat, and the color of her cheeks deepened by slumber to a rosier glow, while her scarlet lips were a little apart, so as to show the milk-white teeth.

“They leaned above her, drinking her as wine,

In that extremity of live; ‘twill pass

For agony or rapture.”

“Lilian—my Lilian,” said the mother, softly.

And the red lips smiled. Perhaps she dreamed that an angel was speaking to her. And as they, the happy father and mother, stood, side by side, that mean garret-room, with nothing but tokens of penury and pinching want on every hand, was an Eden to them. At last the mother bent down, and kissed the soft, rosy cheek of her slumbering child. Lilia opened her eyes, saw the gentle face bending over her, and uttering the word “Mama,” raised her arms, and twined them round her mother’s neck. It is not likely that she recognized her, but the bright, loving face beaming upon her, satisfied the cravings of her little heart, filling it with peace and love.

Dormand, Archie’s step-father, died soon after he and sis made their escape, the victim of intemperance and crime. Mrs. Carnes, the poor sewing-woman, remained only a short time in her comfortless garret. Mrs. Wilton, who needed a seamstress, pleased with the kindly spirit she had manifested, and pitying her tollsome and cheerless lot, gave her employment, and a home. Mr. Wilton, having found other employment for his errand-boy, took Archie on trial to fill his place; and finding him willing, ready and faithful, gave him the privilege of acquiring a good mercantile education. Subsequently he employed him as a salesman; and ten years from the day he entered the house of Mr. Burder, with “sis” in his arms, he was Mr. Wilton’s confidential clerk, and Lilia, with the free and full approbation of her parents, was his promised wife.

*The Flag of our Union*, March 25, 1865