Ririro
READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Telltale Tile

Olive Thorne Miller

It begins with a bit of gossip of a neighbour who had come in to see Miss Bennett, and was telling her about a family who had lately moved into the place and were in serious trouble. "And they do say she'll have to go to the poorhouse," she ended.

"To the poorhouse! how dreadful! And the children, too?" and Miss Bennett shuddered.

"Yes; unless somebody'll adopt them, and that's not very likely. Well, I must go," the visitor went on, rising. "I wish I could do something for her, but, with my houseful of children, I've got use for every penny I can rake and scrape."

"I'm sure I have, with only myself," said Miss Bennett, as she closed the door. "I'm sure I have," she repeated to herself as she resumed her knitting; "it's as much as I can do to make ends meet, scrimping as I do, not to speak of laying up a cent for sickness and old age."

"But the poorhouse!" she said again. "I wish I could help her!" and the needles flew in and out, in and out, faster than ever, as she turned this over in her mind. "I might give up something," she said at last, "though I don't know what, unless—unless," she said slowly, thinking of her one luxury, "unless I give up my tea, and it don't seem as if I COULD do that."

Some time the thought worked in her mind, and finally she resolved to make the sacrifice of her only indulgence for six months, and send the money to her suffering neighbour, Mrs. Stanley, though she had never seen her, and she had only heard she was in want.

How much of a sacrifice that was you can hardly guess, you, Kristy, who have so many luxuries.

That evening Mrs. Stanley was surprised by a small gift of money "from a friend," as was said on the envelope containing it.

"Who sent it?" she asked, from the bed where she was lying.

"Miss Bennett told me not to tell," said the boy, unconscious that he had already told.

The next day Miss Bennett sat at the window knitting, as usual—for her constant

contribution to the poor fund of the church was a certain number of stockings and mittens—when she saw a young girl coming up to the door of the cottage.

"Who can that be?" she said to herself. "I never saw her before. Come in!" she called; in answer to a knock. The girl entered, and walked up to Miss Bennett.

"Are you Miss Bennett?" she asked.

"Yes," said Miss Bennett with an amused smile.

"Well, I'm Hetty Stanley."

Miss Bennett started, and her colour grew a little brighter.

"I'm glad to see you, Hetty." she said, "won't you sit down?"

"Yes, if you please," said Hetty, taking a chair near her.

"I came to tell you how much we love you for—"

"Oh, don't! don't say any more!" interrupted Miss Bennett; "never mind that! Tell me about your mother and your baby brother."

This was an interesting subject, and they talked earnestly about it. The time passed so quickly that, before she knew it, she had been in the house an hour. When she went away Miss Bennett asked her to come again, a thing she had never been known to do before, for she was not fond of young people in general.

"But, then, Hetty's different," she said to herself, when wondering at her own interest.

"Did you thank kind Miss Bennett?" was her mother's question as Hetty opened the door.

Hetty stopped as if struck, "Why, no! I don't think I did."

"And stayed so long, too? Whatever did you do? I've heard she isn't fond of people generally."

"We talked; and—I think she's ever so nice. She asked me to come again; may I?"

"Of course you may, if she cares to have you. I should be glad to do something to please her."

That visit of Hetty's was the first of a long series. Almost every day she found her way to the lonely cottage, where a visitor rarely came, and a strange intimacy grew up between the old and the young. Hetty learned of her friend to knit, and many an hour they spent knitting while Miss Bennett ransacked her memory for stories to tell. And then, one day, she brought down from a big chest in the garret two of the books she used to have when she was young, and let Hetty

look at them.

One was "Thaddeus of Warsaw," and the other "Scottish Chiefs." Poor Hetty had not the dozens of books you have, and these were treasures indeed. She read them to herself, and she read them aloud to Miss Bennett, who, much to her own surprise, found her interest almost as eager as Hetty's.

All this time Christmas was drawing near, and strange, unusual feelings began to stir in Miss Bennett's heart, though generally she did not think much about that happy time. She wanted to make Hetty a happy day. Money she had none, so she went into the garret, where her youthful treasures had long been hidden. From the chest from which she had taken the books she now took a small box of light-coloured wood, with a transferred engraving on the cover. With a sigh—for the sight of it brought up old memories—Miss Bennett lifted the cover by its loop of ribbon, took out a package of old letters, and went downstairs with the box, taking also a few bits of bright silk from a bundle in the chest.

"I can fit it up for a workbox," she said, "and I'm sure Hetty will like it."

For many days after this Miss Bennett had her secret work, which she carefully hid when she saw Hetty coming. Slowly, in this way, she made a pretty needle-book, a tiny pincushion, and an emery bag like a big strawberry. Then from her own scanty stock she added needles, pins, thread, and her only pair of small scissors, scoured to the last extreme of brightness.

One thing only she had to buy—a thimble, and that she bought for a penny, of brass so bright it was quite as handsome as gold.

Very pretty the little box looked when full; in the bottom lay a quilted lining, which had always been there, and upon this the fittings she had made. Besides this, Miss Bennett knit a pair of mittens for each of Hetty's brothers and sisters.

The happiest girl in town on Christmas morning was Hetty Stanley. To begin with, she had the delight of giving the mittens to the children, and when she ran over to tell Miss Bennett how pleased they were, she was surprised by the present of the odd little workbox and its pretty contents.

Christmas was over all too soon, and New Year's, and it was about the middle of January that the time came which, all her life, Miss Bennett had dreaded—the time when she should be helpless. She had not money enough to hire a girl, and so the only thing she could imagine when that day should come was her special horror—the poorhouse.

But that good deed of hers had already borne fruit, and was still bearing. When Hetty came over one day, and found her dear friend lying on the floor as if dead, she was dreadfully frightened, of course, but she ran after the neighbours and the doctor, and bustled about the house as if she belonged to it.

Miss Bennett was not dead—she had a slight stroke of paralysis; and though she was soon better, and would be able to talk, and probably to knit, and possibly to get about the house, she would never be able to live alone and do everything for herself, as she had done.

So the doctor told the neighbours who came in to help, and so Hetty heard, as she listened eagerly for news.

"Of course she can't live here any longer; she'll have to go to a hospital," said one woman.

"Or to the poorhouse, more likely," said another.

"She'll hate that," said the first speaker. "I've heard her shudder over the poorhouse."

"She shall never go there!" declared Hetty, with blazing eyes.

"Hoity-toity! who's to prevent?" asked the second speaker, turning a look of disdain on Hetty.

"I am," was the fearless answer. "I know all Miss Bennett's ways, and I can take care of her, and I will," went on Hetty indignantly; and turning suddenly, she was surprised to find Miss Bennett's eyes fixed on her with an eager, questioning look.

"There! she understands! she's better!" cried Hetty. "Mayn't I stay and take care of you, dear Miss Bennett?" she asked, running up to the bed.

"Yes, you may," interrupted the doctor, seeing the look in his patient's face; "but you mustn't agitate her now. And now, my good women"—turning to the others—"I think she can get along with her young friend here, whom I happen to know is a womanly young girl, and will be attentive and careful."

They took the hint and went away, and the doctor gave directions to Hetty what to do, telling her she must not leave Miss Bennett. So she was now regularly installed as nurse and housekeeper.

Days and weeks rolled by. Miss Bennett was able to be up in her chair, to talk and knit, and to walk about the house, but was not able to be left alone. Indeed, she had a horror of being left alone; she could not bear Hetty out of her sight, and Hetty's mother was very willing to spare her, for she had many mouths to fill.

To provide food for two out of what had been scrimping for one was a problem; but Miss Bennett ate very little, and she did not resume her tea so they managed to get along and not really suffer.

One day Hetty sat by the fire with her precious box on her knee, which she was

putting to rights for the twentieth time. The box was empty, and her sharp young eyes noticed a little dust on the silk lining.

"I think I'll take this out and dust it," she said to Miss Bennett, "if you don't mind."

"Do as you like with it," answered Miss Bennett; "it is yours."

So she carefully lifted the silk, which stuck a little.

"Why, here's something under it," she said—"an old paper, and it has writing on."

"Bring it to me," said Miss Bennett; "perhaps it's a letter I have forgotten."

Hetty brought it.

"Why, it's father's writing!" said Miss Bennett, looking closely at the faded paper; "and what can it mean? I never saw it before. It says, 'Look, and ye shall find'—that's a Bible text. And what is this under it? 'A word to the wise is sufficient.' I don't understand—he must have put it there himself, for I never took that lining out—I thought it was fastened. What can it mean?" and she pondered over it long, and all day seemed absent-minded.

After tea, when they sat before the kitchen fire, as they always did, with only the firelight flickering and dancing on the walls while they knitted, or told stories, or talked, she told Hetty about her father: that they had lived comfortably in this house, which he built, and that everybody supposed that he had plenty of money, and would leave enough to take care of his only child, but that when he died suddenly nothing had been found, and nothing ever had been, from that day to this.

"Part of the place I let to John Thompson, Hetty, and that rent is all I have to live on. I don't know what makes me think of old times so to-night."

"I know," said Hetty; "it's that paper, and I know what it reminds me of," she suddenly shouted, in a way very unusual with her. "It's that tile over there," and she jumped up and ran to the side of the fireplace, and put her hand on the tile she meant.

On each side of the fireplace was a row of tiles. They were Bible subjects, and Miss Bennett had often told Hetty the story of each one, and also the stories she used to make up about them when she was young. The one Hetty had her hand on now bore the picture of a woman standing before a closed door, and below her the words of the yellow bit of paper: "Look, and ye shall find."

"I always felt there was something different about that," said Hetty eagerly, "and you know you told me your father talked to you about it—about what to seek in

the world when he was gone away, and other things."

"Yes, so he did," said Miss Bennett thoughtfully; "come to think of it, he said a great deal about it, and in a meaning way. I don't understand it," she said slowly, turning it over in her mind.

"I do!" cried Hetty, enthusiastically. "I believe you are to seek here! I believe it's loose!" and she tried to shake it. "It IS loose!" she cried excitedly. "Oh, Miss Bennett, may I take it out?"

Miss Bennett had turned deadly pale. "Yes," she gasped, hardly knowing what she expected, or dared to hope.



A sudden push from Hetty's strong fingers, and the tile slipped out at one side and fell to the floor. Behind it was an opening into the brickwork. Hetty thrust in her hand.

"There's something in there!" she said in an awed tone.

"A light!" said Miss Bennett hoarsely.

There was not a candle in the house, but Hetty seized a brand from the fire, and held it up and looked in.

"It looks like bags—tied up," she cried. "Oh, come here yourself!"

The old woman hobbled over and thrust her hand into the hole, bringing out what was once a bag, but which crumpled to pieces in her hands, and with it—oh, wonder!—a handful of gold pieces, which fell with a jingle on the hearth, and rolled every way.

"My father's money! Oh, Hetty!" was all she could say, and she seized a chair to keep from falling, while Hetty was nearly wild, and talked like a crazy person.

"Oh, goody! goody! now you can have things to eat! and we can have a candle! and you won't have to go to the poorhouse!"

"No, indeed, you dear child!" cried Miss Bennett who had found her voice. "Thanks to you—you blessing!—I shall be comfortable now the rest of my days. And you! oh! I shall never forget you! Through you has everything good come to me."

"Oh, but you have been so good to me, dear Miss Bennett!"

"I should never have guessed it, you precious child! If it had not been for your quickness I should have died and never found it."

"And if you hadn't given me the box, it might have rusted away in that chest."

"Thank God for everything, child! Take money out of my purse and go buy a candle. We need not save it for bread now. Oh, child!" she interrupted herself, "do you know, we shall have everything we want to-morrow. Go! Go! I want to see how much there is."

The candle bought, the gold was taken out and counted, and proved to be more than enough to give Miss Bennett a comfortable income without touching the principal. It was put back, and the tile replaced, as the safest place to keep it till morning, when Miss Bennett intended to put it into a bank.

But though they went to bed, there was not a wink of sleep for Miss Bennett, for planning what she would do. There were a thousand things she wanted to do first. To get clothes for Hetty, to brighten up the old house, to hire a girl to relieve Hetty, so that the dear child should go to school, to train her into a noble woman—all her old ambitions and wishes for herself sprang into life for Hetty. For not a thought of her future life was separate from Hetty.

In a very short time everything was changed in Miss Bennett's cottage. She had publicly adopted Hetty, and announced her as her heir. A girl had been installed in the kitchen, and Hetty, in pretty new clothes, had begun school. Fresh paint inside and out, with many new comforts, made the old house charming and bright. But nothing could change the pleasant and happy relations between the two friends, and a more contented and cheerful household could not be found anywhere.

Happiness is a wonderful doctor and Miss Bennett grew so much better, that she could travel, and when Hetty had finished school days, they saw a little of the world before they settled down to a quiet, useful life.

"Every comfort on earth I owe to you," said Hetty, one day, when Miss Bennett had proposed some new thing to add to her enjoyment.

"Ah, dear Hetty! how much do I owe to you! But for you, I should, no doubt, be at this moment a shivering pauper in that terrible poorhouse, while some one else would be living in this dear old house. And it all comes," she added softly, "of that one unselfish thought, of that one self-denial for others."

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