

# **NELLY'S DARK DAYS**

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Nelly's Dark Days by Anonymous

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**ANONYMOUS**

**NELLY'S  
DARK DAYS**





WAITING FOR FATHER.

# *Nelly's Dark Days.*

BY THE AUTHOR OF  
"JESSICA'S FIRST PRAYER," "LITTLE MEG'S CHILDREN,"  
"ALONE IN LONDON," &c.

*Tales.*



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## NELLY'S DARK DAYS.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### A STREET CORNER.

**I**T was nearly twelve o'clock at night on the first Sunday of the New Year. The churches and chapels had all been closed for some hours; and none of the better class of shops had been opened during the day. Business had been set on one side, even by those workmen and labourers who lived from hand to mouth, and scarcely knew beforehand where the day's meals were to come from. There had been, as usual, a prevailing feeling that the day was not a day for work or traffic of any kind; and what had been done had been, more or less, away from the public scrutiny. But though midnight was close at hand, the streets in the lower parts of Liverpool were neither quiet nor dark. Up higher, farther away from the long



line of docks and the troubled stream of the mighty river, there was silence in the deserted streets where the wealthier classes had their comfortable homes; but where the poor dwelt, and wherever there was a corner of a street which afforded a good situation for traffic, or wherever it was supposed there was an "immense drinking neighbourhood capable of improvement,"\* there stood a gin-palace still open, with its bright gas-lights sparkling down each dark row of dingy houses with a show of cheery welcome not easy to resist.

At one spot where four roads met, each corner house was thus brilliantly lit up; and the doors, which swung to and fro readily and noiselessly, were constantly moving, and giving a passing glimpse, but no more, of what was going on within. The streets were so light here that a pin lying on the flagged pavement was plainly seen. So were the rags of a child who stood in the full glare of the most popular of the gin-palaces, leaning against a lamp-post, with her face turned towards the often-opening door. It was a small, meagre face, yet pretty, with a mingled and wistful expression of anxiety and happi-

\* "Capital Spirit Vaults to Let, in an Immense Drinking Neighbourhood, capable of great improvement by an industrious man and his wife." (*Newspaper Advt.*)

ness. The anxiety was visible whenever the door stood ajar; when it was closed, the happiness came uppermost. The secret of her brief, new-born happiness was very simple, but very deep to the child. She clasped tenderly, but carefully, in her thin bare arms a gaily dressed doll, whose finery contrasted strongly with her own rags. When the door remained closed for a few minutes she passed the time in timid, half-fearful caresses of her shining doll; as soon as it opened she peered, with heedful and searching eyes, to the farthest corner of the interior.

"Nelly!" said a clear, shrill voice, which startled the child from an anxious gaze, "you here at this time! How's poor mother to-night?"

"Very bad," said the child sadly.

"And father's in there, I reckon?"

"Yes," said Nelly, "and oh! I want him to come home so, because mother says she'd go to sleep maybe if father was home."

The girl who had spoken to her—a bright, brisk-looking girl—pushed open the door a little way, and glancing in turned back with a decisive shake of her head.

"No use, Nelly," she said; "he won't come as long as he can stay. Well, I'll nurse you a bit to keep you warm; it's very bitter to-night. I don't

much wonder at father drinking to-night, I don't."

All day long the wind had been blowing keenly from the north-east, bringing a fine, piercing sleet with it, and at nightfall the bitter cold had increased. The girl sat down on a door-step, and drew the shivering child into her lap, covering her as well as she could with her own scanty clothing.

"Father didn't use to get drunk once, did he, Bessie?" asked the child, plaintively.

"Oh dear, no!" answered Bessie, in a cheery voice.

"Tell me all about that time," said Nelly, nestling closer to Bessie. It was an old story, often told, but neither the girl nor the child ever grew weary of it.

"It's ever so many years ago, before you was born," said Bessie; "and he lived in a beautiful house, with a parlour in front, and a kitchen behind, and two rooms upstairs, all full of beautiful furniture. Everybody that I knew called him Mister Rodney then; but I was nothing but a poor ragged little girl, raggeder than you, Nelly, selling matches in the streets. And this was how I come to know him. I was hanging about the basket-women, down by the stages, running *errands* for 'em, and one day, almost as cold as