



THE STORY
OF
FLORENCE
NIGHTINGALE.

THE STORY OF FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

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Sample

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I	
Dawn.....	5
CHAPTER II	
Preparation.....	12
CHAPTER III	
The Burden and the Heat of the Day.....	19
CHAPTER IV	
Faithful to the End.....	30
CHAPTER V	
Work at Home.....	39
CHAPTER VI	
Eventide.....	48

PLATES IN COLOUR

Eventide.....	4
The dog lay quite still under her hand.....	11
Eyes full of adorning gratitude watched her pass.....	26
“Miss Nightingale’s Carriage”.....	36



Eventide (see page 48)

THE STORY OF FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

CHAPTER I

DAWN

IT was in the year 1820 when spring was once more sowing the earth with flowers that, on the 12th of May, a little English baby was born in the beautiful old city of Florence. The Villa Colombaia, where the baby first saw the light was close to the Porta Romana, and outside the grim old city gate, the fields under the grey olive trees were bright with rainbow coloured anemones and golden tulips, and the city itself was gay with flowers.

No wonder then that when the baby girl came to such a flowery corner of the earth, they should call her after her fair birthplace, the City of Flowers. The baptismal water was poured over her little fair head by Dr Trevor, Prebendary of Chester, who gave her the name of Florence and signed her with the sign of the cross “in token that hereafter she shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under His banner against sin, the world and the devil; and to continue Christ’s faithful soldier and servant unto her life’s end.”

The promise has been made for many a new little soldier enrolled under the King’s banner, but seldom has it been fulfilled so royally as it was by that little maiden who was born under the blue Italian skies

and who was to make the name of her birthplace shine in golden letters upon the roll of fame.

So was that this baby started life with a beautiful Christian name added to the specially fitting surname of Nightingale. Her father had taken this name when he succeeded to the property of a great-uncle, so here was the small maiden surrounded at once with the magic of flowers and music, entwined in the call of her, and even a golden halo hovering around, for the word Nightingale in Italian is Filomena, and every one knows that Santa Filomena is one of the best loved and most honoured of saints.

Florence was not the only baby in the Villa Colombaia. She was, in fact, only the new baby. The little sister, who was now the old baby, could certainly not boast of any great age, for she had only been born the year before, when Mr and Mrs Nightingale were in Naples. She, too, had been called after her birthplace, the old Greek settlement of Parthenope, so had quite as dignified a name as Florence, but, indeed, neither of the children, as they grew up, were the least impressed by the dignity of their calling. Florence in a very short time became simply "Flo" and Parthenope became "Parthe" or even "Pop.

Mr and Mrs Nightingale and their two babies did not stay very long in Italy. The next year found them back again in England, preparing to make a home for themselves. The house of Lea Hall on Mr Nightingale's estate was not quite suitable, so, while a new house was being built, they lived at Kynsham Court. By the time Florence was five years old, however, the new house, called Lea Hurst, was ready, and Mr Nightingale had also bought an estate at Embley Park on the edge of the New Forest, so it was in these two beautiful homes that Florence and her sister spent the sunny days of their childhood.

Mr Nightingale loved to have everything about him as beautiful as possible, and Lea Hurst was a specially charming home. The windows facing south looked over lawns and gardens and wooded slopes across the valley where the Derwentwater wound its way, like a silver thread to the hills beyond, and on every side the view was lovely. But, surely, most charming of all must have been the sight of the two little maidens in their dainty muslin frocks, Leghorn hats and sandal shoes, as they played about the garden slopes, among the beds of purple pansies, blue forget-me-nots and crimson wallflowers.

The children had each their special garden in which they worked diligently, planting, weeding and watering, but it was Florence who was particularly fond of flowers. It seemed as if the City of Flowers had laid its charm upon her besides having given her its name.

The two little sisters were very fond of their dolls, too, although they showed their fondness in very different ways and brought up their families on quite different plans. Florence's dolls were all delicate and needed constant care. They spent most of their lives in bed, going through dangerous illnesses, while they were most carefully nursed by their little mother who doctored them and tempted their appetites with dainty dishes until they were well again. Parthe's dolls, on the contrary, were scarcely ever in bed at all. They led stirring lives of adventure, and when an accident happened, and an arm was broken, or a leg came off at the joint, it was Florence who tenderly "set" the arm and put the injured leg in splints.

And if it was interesting to nurse dolls, how much more worth while was it to take care of live animals! Florence looked upon all animals as her friends, more especially those who were unfortunate and rather ugly. Anything that needed her care appealed at once to her tender heart. It was she who welcomed and admired the very

commonplace kittens which the stable cat hid from less friendly eyes; the old pony that was past work knew his little mistress loved him as well as ever, and that she always had an apple or a carrot hidden in her pocket for him. The birds, even the shyest of them, seemed to know and trust her. A pet pig and a donkey also came in for a share of her affection and all dogs were her special friends.

Even in those early days Florence was a very methodical little maiden, and kept a careful list of her collection of flowers with their names and the places where she had found them. But the earliest piece of her handwriting which has been preserved, is a medical prescription written in a tiny book about the size of a postage stamp, neatly stitched together. A very childish hand must have traced the inscription, "16 grains for an old woman, 11 for a young woman, and 7 for a child."

It was the summer months which were spent at Lea Hurst, for in winter and early spring the family went to live in their other house Embley Park, in Hampshire. There Florence and her sister were kept very strictly at lessons with their governess, for their father believed that girls should be taught quite as thoroughly as boys, and he planned his little daughters' lessons most carefully. With him Florence learned Greek, Latin and mathematics, and was extremely quick at learning all foreign languages.

The little girls were taught, too, by their mother to work their samplers and do fine sewing, so there was not much spare time in their days, but some hours were set aside for them to run about outside with their dogs and to ride their ponies over the Downs.

From her mother, too, Florence learned the pleasure of visiting the village people and getting to know them in their homes. She was always eager to be the messenger when there was a pudding or jelly to