

MARTINEAU, Harriet. 1852. "The Deaf Playmate's Story". *Household Words* 6 (Extra de Navidad), 25 de diciembre: 599-602.

I thought so too, at the time, and now I know it. We sat up all night to be ready for the news when it came from Dewcester. Early next morning a messenger arrived. Thomas let him in; and *before* he told us what had brought him to Brownham, Thomas said to him, "Alderman Playford is dead." The messenger was astonished, as well he might be, and said "Lor, how could *you* know that?"—"He died last night," said Thomas, "as the clock was striking twelve, and I heard his footstep cross the hall, and go up the staircase. The Alderman's step is like nobody else's, and I knew by that he must be dead."

And wishing we may all live happy ever afterwards!

### THE DEAF PLAYMATE'S STORY.

I DON'T know how you have all managed, or what you have been telling. I have been thinking all this time, what I could tell that was interesting; and I don't know anything very particular that has happened to me, except all about Charley Felkin, and why he has asked me to go and stay there. I will tell you that story, if you like.

You know Charley is a year younger than I am, and I had been at Dr. Owen's a year when he came. He was to be in my room; and he did not know anything about school; and he was younger, and uncomfortable at first; and altogether, he fell to my share; and so we saw a great deal of each other. He soon cheered up, and could stand his ground; and we were great friends. He soon got to like play, and left off moping; and we used to talk a great deal in wet weather, and out on long walks. Our best talks, though, were after we were gone to bed. I was not deaf then; and we used to have such talks about home, and ghosts, and all sorts of things; and nobody ever overheard us that we know of, but once; and then we got nothing worse than a tremendous rap at the door, and the Doctor bidding us go to sleep directly.

Well; we went on, just so, for a good while, till I began to have the ear-ache. At first, Charley was very kind to me. I remember his asking me, once, to lean my head on his shoulder, and his keeping my head warm till the pain got better; and he sat quite still the whole time. But perhaps he got tired; or—I don't know—perhaps I grew cross. I used to try not; but sometimes the pain was so bad, and lasted so long, that I used to wish I was dead; and I dare say I might be cross enough then, or dismal, which boys like worse. Charley used to seem not to believe there was anything the matter with me. I used to climb up the apple-tree, and get on the wall, and pretend to be asleep, to get out of their way; and then the boys used to come running that way, and say, "Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall;" and one day when

I heard Charley say it, I said "Oh, Charley!" and he said, "Well, why do you go dumping there?" and he pretended that I made a great fuss about nothing. I know he did not really think so, but wanted to get rid of it all. I know it, because he was so kind always, and so merry when I got well again, and went to play with the rest. And then, I was pleased, and thought I must have been cross, to have thought the things I had; and so we never explained. If we had, it might have saved a great deal that happened afterwards. I am sure I wish we had.

When Charley came, he was a good deal behind me—being a year younger, and never having been to school. I used to think I could keep a head of all but three boys in my class; and I used to try, hard, to keep a-head of them. But, after a time, I began to go down. I used to learn my lessons as hard as ever; still, somehow the boys were quicker in answering, and half-a-dozen of them used to get my place, before I knew what it was all about. Dr. Owen saw me, one day, near the bottom of the class; and he said he never saw me there before; and the usher said I was stupid; and the Doctor said, then I must be idle. And the boys said so too, and gave me nicknames about it; I ever thought so myself, too, and I was very miserable. Charley got into our class before I got out of it; and indeed I never did get out of it. I believe his father and mother used to hold me up to him—for he might easily speak well of me while he was fond of me. At least, he seemed bent upon getting above me in class. I did try hard against that; and he saw it, and tried his utmost. I could not like him much then. I dare say I was very ill-tempered, and that put him out. After I had tried till I was sick, to learn my lesson perfect, and then to answer questions, Charley would get the better of me; and then he would triumph over me. I did not like to fight him, because he could not have stood up against me: and besides, it was all true—he did beat me at lessons. So we used to go to bed without speaking. We had quite left off telling stories at night, some time before. One morning, Charley said, when we got up, that I was the most sulky fellow he ever saw. I had been afraid, lately, that I *was* growing rather sulky, but I did not know of any particular reason that he had for saying so just then (though he had a reason, as I found out afterwards). So, I told him what I thought—that he had grown very unkind, and that I would not bear with it if he did not behave as he used to do. He said that whenever he tried to do so, I sulked. I did not know, then, what reason he had to say that, nor what this was all about. The thing was, he had felt uncomfortable, the night before, about something in his behaviour to me, and he had whispered to me, to ask me to forgive him. It was quite dark, and I never heard him: he asked me to turn and

speak to him ; but I never stirred, of course ; and no wonder he supposed I was sulking. But all this is very disagreeable ; and so I will go on to other things.

Mrs. Owen was in the orchard one day, and she chanced to look over the hedge, and she saw me lying on my face on the ground. I used often to be so then, for I was stupid at play, where there was any calling out, and the boys used to make game of me. Mrs. Owen told the Doctor, and the Doctor said there must be something wrong, and he should be better satisfied if Mr. Pratt, the surgeon, saw me. Mr. Pratt found out that I was deaf, though he could not tell what was the matter with my ears. He would have put on blisters, and I don't know what else ; but the Doctor said it was so near the holidays, I had better wait till I got home. There was an end to taking places, however. The Doctor told them all, that it was clear now why I had seemed to go back so much ; and that he reproached himself, and wondered at everybody—that the reason had not been found out before. The top of the class was nearest to the usher, or the Doctor, when he heard us ; and I was to stand there always, and not take places with the rest. After that, I heard the usher very well, and got on again. And after that, the boys, and particularly Charley, were kinder again ; and if I had been good-tempered, I dare say all would have gone right. But, somehow, everything seemed to go wrong and be uncomfortable, wherever I might be, and I was always longing to be somewhere else. I was longing now for the holidays. I dare say every boy was longing for the holidays ; but I was particularly, because everything at home was so bright, and distinct, and cheerful, compared with school, that half-year. Everybody seemed to have got to speak thick and low ; most of the birds seemed to have gone away ; and this made me long more to see my turtle-doves, which Peggy had promised to take care of for me. Even the church-bell seemed as if it was muffled ; and when the organ played, there were great gaps in the music, which was so spoiled that I used to think I had rather there had been no music at all. But all this is disagreeable too ; so I will go on about Charley.

His father and mother asked me to go home with him, to stay for a week ; and father said I might ; so I went—and I never was so uncomfortable in my life. I did not hear what they said to each other, unless I was quite in the middle of them, and I knew I looked stupid when they were all laughing, and I did not know what it was about. I was sure that Charley's sisters were quizzing me,—Kate particularly. I felt always as if everybody was looking at me ; and I know they talked about me sometimes. I know it because I heard something that Mrs. Felkin said one day, when there was a noise in the street, and she spoke loud without knowing

it. I heard her say, "He never told us the poor child was deaf." I don't know why, but I could not bear this. And, after that, some of them were always telling me things in a loud voice, so that everybody turned and looked at me ; and then I made a mistake sometimes about what they told me ; and one mistake was so ridiculous that I saw Kate turn her back to laugh, and she laughed for ever so long after. Altogether, I could not bear it, and so I ran away. It was all very silly of me, and I know I was very ill-tempered, and I know how Mr. and Mrs. Felkin must have found themselves mistaken about me, as a friend for Charley ; but I did not see any use in staying longer, just to be pitied and laughed at, without doing any good to anybody ; so I ran away at the end of three days. I did so long to come home ; for I never had any doubt that everything would be comfortable at home. I knew where the coach passed,—a mile and a half from Mr. Felkin's,—very early in the morning, and I got out of the study window and ran. Nobody was up, though, and I need not have been afraid. I had to ask the gardener for the key of the back gate, and he threw it to me from his window. When I was outside, I called to him to bid him ask Charley to send my things after me to my father's house. By the road-side, there was a pond, under a high hedge, and with some dark trees bending over it. It just came into my head to drown myself there, and I should be out of everybody's way, and all this trouble would be at an end. But ah ! when I saw our church-steeple, I was happy ! When I saw our own gate, I thought I should go on to be happy.

But I did not. It was all over directly. I could not hear what my mother whispered when she kissed me ; and all their voices were confused and everything else seemed to have grown still and dull. I might have known all that ; but somehow I did not expect it. I had been vexed that the Felkins called me deaf ; and now I was hurt at the way in which my brothers and sisters used to find fault with me for not hearing things. Ned said once "none are so deaf as those that won't hear ;" and my mother told me, every day, that it was inattention ; that if I were not so absent, I should hear as much as anybody else. I don't think I was absent. I know I used to long and to try to hear till I could not help crying ; and then I ran and bolted myself into my own room. I think I must have been half crazy then, judging by what I did to my turtle-doves. Peggy had taken very good care of them ; and they soon knew me again, and used to perch on my head and my shoulder, as if I had never been away. But their cooing was not the least like what it used to be. I could not hear it at all, unless I put my head against the cage. I could hear some other birds very well ; so I fancied it must somehow be the

fault of the doves that they would not coo to me. One day I took one of them out of the cage, and coaxed her at first, and tried every way; and at last I squeezed her throat a little. I suppose I got desperate because she would not coo as I wanted; and I killed her—broke her neck. You all remember about that—how I was punished, and so on; but nobody knew how miserable I was. I will not say any more about that: and I would not have mentioned it but for what it led to.

The first thing that it led to, was, that the whole family were, in a way, afraid of me. The girls used to slink away from me; and never let me play with the baby—as if I should strange that! I used to pretend not to care for being punished; and I know I behaved horridly. One thing was—a very disagreeable thing—that I found father and mother did not know every thing. Till now, I had always thought they did; but, now, they did not know me at all; and that was no great wonder, behaving as I did then. But they used to advise things that were impossible. They used to desire me to ask always what everybody said: but we used to pass, every Sunday, the tombstone of old Miss Chapman; and I remembered how it used to be when anybody saw her coming in at the gate. They used to cry out "O dear, here comes Miss Chapman! What shall we do? She will stay till dinner time, and we shall not get back our voices for a week. Well! don't tell her all she asks for. She is never satisfied. Really it is a most dreadful bore," and so on, till she was at the room door. This was because she *would* know everything that everybody said. I could not bear to be like her; and I could not bear now to think how we all used to complain of her. It was only from a sort of feeling then that I did not do what my father and mother told me, and that I was sure they did not understand about it: but now, I see why, and so do they. One can't tell what is worth repeating and what is not. If one never asks, somebody always tells what it is best to tell; but if one is always asking and teasing, people must get as tired of one as we were of poor Miss Chapman.

So, I had to get on all alone. I used to read in a corner, great part of the day; and I used to walk by myself—long walks over the common, while the others used to go together to the meadows, or through the lanes. My father commanded me to go with the rest; and then I used to get another ramble by myself. There was a pond on the common, so far like that one in the lane I spoke of, that it put me in mind of what I mentioned. I used to sit and look into the pond and throw stones in. I began to fancy, now, that I should be happier when I got back to school again. It was very silly when I had once been so disappointed about home; but, I suppose everybody is always hoping for something or other—and I did not know

what else to hope. But I keep getting into disagreeable things and forgetting Charley.

One night when the elder ones were just thinking of going to bed, I came down in my night-clothes, walking in my sleep with my eyes wide open. The stone hall, so cold to my bare feet, awoke me; but yet I could not have been quite awake, for I went into the kitchen instead of up to bed again, and I remember very little about that night. They say I stared at the candles the whole time; but I remember Dr. Robinson being there. I seldom slept well then. I was always dreaming and starting,—dreaming of all sorts of music, and of hearing the wind, and people talking; and then of all sorts of trouble from not being able to hear anybody; and it always ended with a quarrel with Charley, and my knocking him down. But my mother knew nothing of this, and she was as frightened that night as if I had been crazy. The Doctor advised them to send me to school again for one half-year, and see how I got on after some experiments had been tried with my ears. But I want to get on about Charley.

Charley arrived at school, two hours after me. He seemed not to like to shake hands, and he walked away directly. I saw he did not mean to be friends; and I supposed he felt his father's house insulted by my running away. But, I did not know all the reason he had,—neither then, nor for some time after. When we became friends again, I found that Kate had seen how hurt I was at her laughing at me, and that she was so sorry that she went up to my room-door several times, and knocked, and begged that I would forgive her; or that I would open my door, and speak to her, at least. She knocked so loud that she never doubted my hearing her; but I never did, and the next thing was that I ran away. Of course, Charley could not forgive this; he was my great enemy now. In school, he beat me, of course; every body might do that; but I had a chance in things that were not done in class,—such as the Latin essay for a prize, for instance. Charley was bent upon getting that prize, and he thought he should, because, though he was younger than I, he was a good deal before me in school. However, I got the prize; and some of the boys said it was a shame. They thought it was through favour, because I had grown stupid. They said so, and Charley said so; and he provoked me all he could,—more on Kate's account than his own, though, as he told me afterwards. One day, he insulted me so in the play-ground, that I knocked him down. There was no reason why I should not now; for he had grown very much, and was as strong as I had ever been, while I was nothing like so strong as I had been, or as I am now. The moment he was up, he flew at me in the greatest rage that ever you saw. I was the same; and we were hurt enough, I can tell you,—both of us,—so much, that

Mrs. Owen came to see us in our own rooms (for we had not the same room this half-year). We did not want to tell her anything, or to seem to make a party. But she somehow found out that I felt very lonely, and was very unhappy. I am sure it was her doing that the dear, considerate, wise Doctor was so kind to me when I went into the school again,—being very kind to Charley too. He asked me, one afternoon, to go for a drive with him in his gig. The reason he gave was, that his business took him near the place where my father and he used to go to school together; but I believe it was more that we might have a long talk, all by ourselves.

We talked a good deal about some of the fine old heroes, and then about some of the martyrs; and he said, what to be sure is true, that it is an advantage for any one to know clearly, from beginning to end, what his heroism is to be about, that he may arm himself with courage and patience, and be secure against surprises. I began thinking of myself; but I did not suppose *he* did, till it came out by degrees. He thought that deafness and blindness were harder to bear than almost anything. He called them calamities. I can't tell you all he said; he never meant that I should; but he told me the very worst; and he said that he did it on purpose. He told me what a hopeless case he believed mine to be, and what it would cut me off from; but he said that nothing of the sort could cut a person off from being a hero, and here was the way wide open for me: not for the fame of it, but for the thing itself. I wondered that I had never thought of all that before; but I don't think I shall ever forget it.

Well! When we came back, there was Charley loitering about,—looking for us, clearly. He asked me whether we should be friends. I was very willing, of course; and it was still an hour to supper; so we went and sat on the wall under the apple-tree, and talked over everything. There, we found how much we had both been mistaken, and that we did not really hate one another at all. Ever since that, I have liked him better than ever I did before, and that is saying a great deal. He never triumphs over me now; and he tells me fifty things a-day that he never used to think of. He says I used to look as if I did not like to be spoken to; but that I have chipped up wonderfully. And I know that he has given up his credit and his pleasure, many a time, to help me, and to stay by me. He will not have that trouble at school again, as I am not going back; but I know how it will be at Charley's home, this time. I know it, by his saying that Kate will never laugh at me again. I believe she might, for that matter. At least, I think I could stand most people's laughing, now. Father and mother, and everybody, know that the whole thing is quite altered now, and that Charley and I shall never quarrel again. I shall not run away from that house again,—nor from

any other house. It is so much better to look things in the face! How you all nod, and agree with me!

### THE GUEST'S STORY.

ABOUT twenty years ago, I was articled clerk in the small seaport town of Muddleborough, half rural, half fishing, with a small remains of once profitable smuggling, and a few reminiscences of successful privateering, to which one street and several public-houses owed their foundation. The rector, the banker, the lawyer—my master, who had the tin cases of half the county, in the dusty dining-room that formed his office—the doctor, and the owner of the two brigs and a schooner which composed the mercantile navy, were the acknowledged heads of our town.

It was a moot point whether the banker or my master, the lawyer, were the greater man. The banker, Isaac Scrawby, was supposed to be of boundless wealth; it was before the time of Joint-stock Banks, and there was not a farmer or a fisherman who did not prefer Scrawby's torn, dingy notes, to the newest Bank of England. His paper was the stock of canvas bags, and was hoarded away in old women's worsted stockings; as was plainly shown when he stopped payment in the first crisis after Peel's Bill, and paid three shillings in the pound. But then, Lawyer Closeleigh, my master, besides being able to lend everybody money, knew all the secrets of the county, and had a hand in everything—except the births, which he left to the doctor.

There were three or four clerks who jog-trotted through the business. Old Closeleigh generally wore a green coat with gilt basket buttons; breeches, and top-boots; seldom sat down or took up a pen except to write a letter to a great client; but held audiences on market days, and gave advice, and took instructions at coverside in the hunting season.

As a large premium had been paid with me, of course I did nothing; an attempt was made while I was yet green, by old Founmart, the common law clerk, to induce me to serve writs; but, that having failed, I was left to take care of one of the rooms of the deserted mansion which formed our offices, and to entertain the clients who were shown in to wait their turn.

Dulness and respectability were the characteristics of our town. We had few poor, or if we had, we never heard much about them. The same people went through the same duties and the same serious amusements, all the year round. The commencement of the fishing season, and the annual fair, were our only events. There were no fortunes made or lost. Smuggling, under the modern arrangements, had become too hazardous and low for respectable people to venture on, although there were strange stories afloat, as to the adventures of the fathers of the present generation.