An illustration of a woman, Florence Nightingale, sitting in a bed in a hospital room. She is wearing a white headscarf and a brown shawl. A woman in a dark dress and cap sits in a wooden chair at a small round table with a white tablecloth, facing the patient. The table has a teacup and saucer. The room has bookshelves, framed pictures on the wall, and a vase of yellow flowers on a side table.

SHE LIT THE WAY FOR HEALING  
WITH COURAGE AND COMPASSION

THE *Story* OF  
FLORENCE  
NIGHTINGALE

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AMY STEEDMAN

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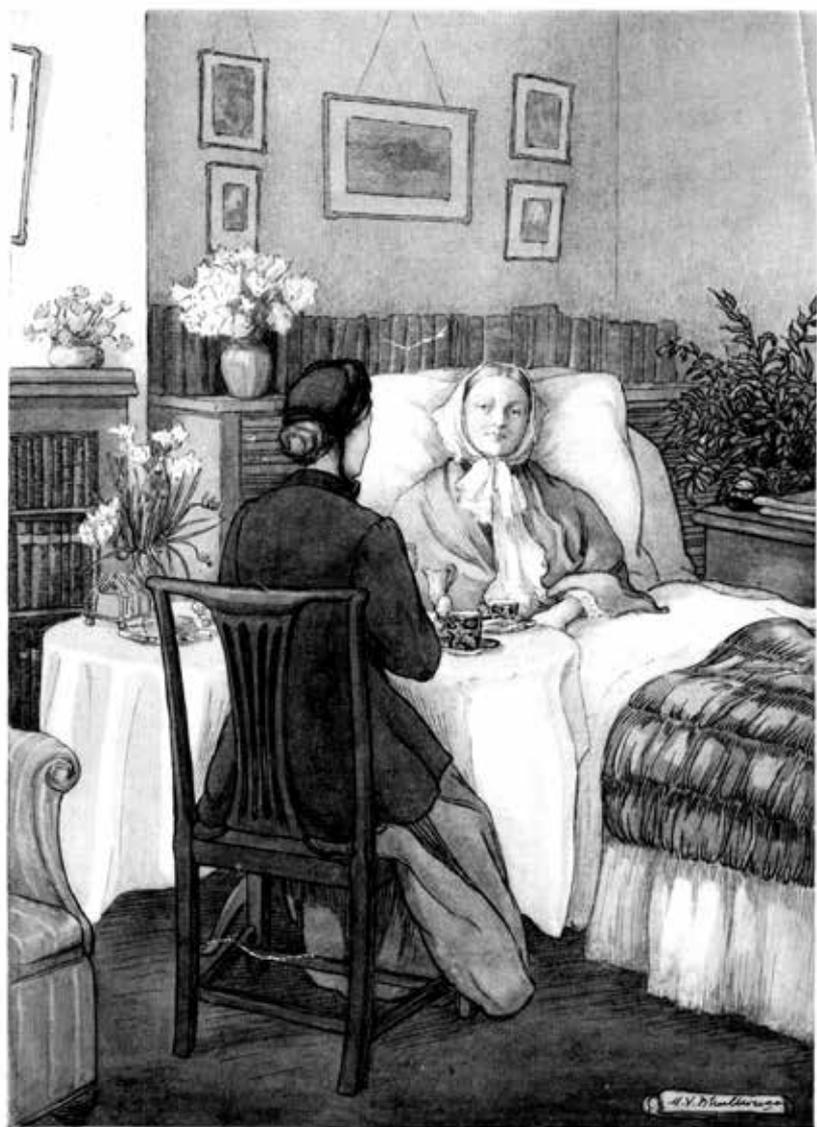


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EVENTIDE

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## 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 it 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 everyone 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 worthwhile 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 be carried to an invalid, or when there was a new baby to be inspected.

She was riding her pony over the Hampshire Downs one day, after she had been paying some visits with the vicar, when she noticed that old Roger, the shepherd, was having hard work to collect his sheep as there was no dog to help him.

“Where’s your dog?” shouted the vicar.

“The boys have been throwing stones at him, your reverence, and have broken his leg,” answered the old man.

“Do you mean Cap’s leg is broken?” asked Florence anxiously. She knew the name of every dog about the place. “Can nothing be done for him? Where is he?”

“There’s naught can be done, Missie,” said the old man, shaking his head. “He’s lying yonder in the shed, and I must bring along a rope and put an end to him this evening.”

Florence turned beseeching eyes upon the Vicar.



THE DOG LAY QUITE STILL UNDER HER HAND

“Can’t we go and see?” she asked.

The Vicar nodded, and they rode over to the shed where they found the poor dog as the shepherd had said. It tried feebly to wag its tail as Florence patted its head, and it seemed to understand that she was a real friend.

The Vicar, after a careful examination, declared that the leg was not broken, and that with careful nursing the dog might get well. Then Florence set to work to bathe the swollen leg and to follow all the Vicar’s directions, and, in spite of the pain, the dog lay quite still under her hand, watching her all the time with his brown eyes full of grateful trust.

A message was sent home to explain where Florence was, and all that afternoon she watched by the side of the suffering dog and bathed its poor leg until the swelling began to go down. Then, when at last the shepherd came sadly in, carrying a rope in his hand, he found to his astonishment that Cap was able to stand up and give him a whine of welcome.

“You can throw away that rope,” said Florence, “for he’s going to get quite well now. Only you must

nurse him carefully, and I will show you how to make hot compresses.”

Perhaps, after all, Florence was very much like other little girls, for there are many who like to doctor their dolls and who are very kind to animals and who enjoy doing kindly things for the poor, but there was one thing about her which made her different to other children, and this special thing she felt from the time she was six years old.

Long ago, on the shores of the Lake of Galilee, some poor fishermen heard the Master's call, “Follow thou Me.” Others, too, heard that voice, and with one accord they forsook all at the sound of the call. All down the ages that call sounded, singling out special people for a special work, and those to whom it has come have answered one by one. It was that call which echoed in the heart of the child, Florence Nightingale. Very faintly it sounded at first, and she scarcely knew what it meant, but deep in her heart she was sure that there was some special work for her to do, that she was called just as certainly as those fishermen of the Galilean Lake.

## CHAPTER II

# PREPARATION

ALL through her childhood Florence had this dim sense of a call echoing in her heart, and when she reached the age of seventeen the voice suddenly sounded more distinctly. She felt sure that God was calling her to His service. She had caught sight of the gleam, and she felt she must follow it now, although, as yet, she had no idea where it would lead her.

It was decided, at this time, that as Florence was seventeen and her sister eighteen, they should see something of the world and have various masters in France and Italy to finish their education. The home at Embley was to be improved and made larger, and meanwhile the family were to travel abroad for two years.

Then followed the gayest of gay times for the two sisters. There were balls and dances at Genoa, where the Grand Dukes were “exceedingly polite”

to the fair English girls. In Florence they went to Court and found every one most agreeable and courteous. They attended so many operas that Florence became quite “music mad,” as she described it. Besides all this, there were interesting places to be seen, strange people to be studied, and foreign politics to be considered, so there was really very little time for Florence to ponder over the old question of what work she was to do in the world. The desire to follow the gleam waned a little perhaps in those happy days when Florence first discovered that it was rather a pleasant thing to “shine in society.”

It was so very easy for her to shine. She was tall and slender and very graceful, and if her face was not strictly beautiful, it was most interesting. Her grey eyes, which held rather a sad look in their depths, could yet flash into sparkling merriment, and she had the sunniest smile imaginable. Then, too, she was extremely clever and could talk brilliantly, so it was no wonder that she enjoyed the glamour of the gay life.

There were plenty of opportunities for the star to shine, both in Paris and when they returned to

London, where Florence made her curtsy to the little Queen Victoria. But although she enjoyed it for a time, the old desire to do something worthwhile seized her again, and she felt like a bird in a gilded cage, from which there was no escape. In her diary some time afterwards she wrote, "Life is not a green pasture and a still water, as our homes make it." She knew that to most people it was a struggle against terrible hardships, and she longed to be able to lift the heavy burden off their shoulders. "In London, at all events, if you open your eyes you cannot help seeing that life is not as it has been made for you," she writes. "You cannot get out of a carriage at a party without seeing what is in the faces making the lane on either side, and without feeling tempted to rush back and say, 'Those are my brothers and sisters.'"

She tried to do the best she could in her gilded cage, but the daily round, the common task, were by no means enough for her and she asked for a great deal more. What could she do? She knew, if she were free to choose, she would have no hesitation in deciding at once. She would be a nurse.

Now, in those days, it was considered really a dreadful thing for any young lady to even dream of becoming a nurse. Nurses were very different then. They were not at all unlike Sairey Gamp with her rusty black gown, rather the worse for a besprinkling of snuff, her want of cleanliness and her habit of drinking more than was good for her.

It was quite natural therefore that Mr and Mrs Nightingale were horrified at the idea of their daughter joining such a company. "It was as if I had wanted to be a kitchen-maid," said Florence afterwards, which really was putting it very mildly. She had made her plans quietly and had hoped to be allowed to go to Salisbury Hospital for a few months' training, but her family declared it would never do, and so all Florence's grand castles-in-the-air came tumbling down.

It was a little difficult for her mother and Parthe to understand Florence, and she was often a great puzzle and anxiety to them. She did not seem to care about the things that made most girls happy, and now that she was disappointed about the hospital work, her health began to suffer. It was a great relief,

therefore, when her friends Mr and Mrs Bracebridge carried her off to Rome to spend a winter there with them. Florence hoped to get quite well and strong and ready for work, while her family secretly hoped that the change would make her forget the work altogether.

Certainly Florence had a royal time that winter and was too busy and happy and interested to worry about anything. The letters she wrote home told of all the delight she took in the wonderful sights of Rome. She could write most charming letters and she took the trouble to make them interesting. The day on which she first saw the Sistine Chapel she calls her “red Dominical, my golden letter” day — the most happy and glorious of all the days she had spent in Rome. As she gazed at those frescoes of Michael Angelo, she did not seem to be merely looking at pictures but to be gazing “straight into Heaven itself.”

It was a great work which Michael Angelo had done — “giving form to the breath of God” — and perhaps it awoke to fresh life the longing to go for-



“YOU CANNOT GET OUT OF A CARRIAGE AT A PARTY WITHOUT MAKING THE LINE ON EITHER SIDE, SEEING WHAT IS IN THE FACES, AND WITHOUT FEELING TEMPTED TO RUSH BACK AND SAY, “THOSE ARE MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS.””

ward and do her own piece of work, to once more strive to “follow the gleam.”

All the beauty of the wonderful city helped to make that a golden day in her life. She describes the look of the Campagna when “the long stripes of violet and pomegranate-coloured light swept over the plain like waves,” when great crimson lights and shadows “like the carnation-coloured wings of angels, themselves invisible,” came swooping along, and then, in the evening, the walk in the silvery moonlight over Ponte S. Angelo, when she breathed a little prayer to S. Michael to help her to be thankful for all this beauty. She belonged to the Anglican Church, but she was quick to see the beauty and helpfulness in other forms of religion, and after mentioning the prayer to S. Michael, she adds, “Why Protestants should shut themselves out in solitary pride from the Communion of Saints in Heaven and in earth, I never could understand.”

She was not at all confused with all the wonderful things she saw in the Eternal City, although she says she often felt like a pagan in the morning, a Jew in the afternoon, and a Christian in the evening. All

the time she was trying to learn something more about God, and that intense interest ran through all the beautiful sights like a thread through pearls.

There were exciting times, too, where the Tricolour of Italy was flown from the capital, where money and jewellery were poured onto the patriotic altars set up in the public squares, and a torchlight procession swept through the city, followed by singing crowds.

“I was certainly born to be a rag-tag and bob-tail,” she writes, “for when I hear of a popular demonstration, I am nothing better than a ragamuffin.”

But there was something in Rome which she found even more interesting than pictures and processions, and this was the work done by Sisters of Charity at a convent school. Their devotion to their work greatly impressed her, and she felt she had discovered the real secret of their success. It was a secret which she never forgot, and she always looked upon devotion as the great motive power in the work of nursing.

That winter at Rome was a time to be remembered for many reasons, and for one especially —

that it was there that her friendship began with Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Herbert, a friendship which was to help her so greatly in after years.

But if her mother had fondly hoped that foreign travel would make her daughter more content with home, she must have been grievously disappointed. Florence returned more restless than ever and more bent on finding work to do. She was eager to help with the Ragged School work in London, but when she suggested going to the slums to see for herself what help the poor needed, she was told that “a young woman in your station of life cannot go out in London without a servant.” And so the struggle went on.

The years were slipping past and there seemed nothing to mark them. She went abroad again, to Egypt and Greece this time, but it all felt rather a weary waste of energy, although she was keen to learn everything she could and make it a time of preparation so that when the work came she might be ready for it. What she enjoyed most of all was a visit to Kaiserwerth, a place in Germany where deaconesses were trained to work in hospital and