

**THE STORY OF A  
NEEDLE.**

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## CHAPTER I. MY EDUCATION.

I REALLY can say nothing of my earliest days except from report. I have heard, but I can hardly believe it, that I was once part of a rough mass of iron ore, that had lain for ages in a dark mine in Cornwall; that I was dug out, and put into a huge furnace, and heated till I became red-hot, and melted; that I was made into part of an iron bar, and when in a fiery glow was suddenly plunged into cold water, which changed my whole constitution and name, for iron was thenceforth called steel. I can just fancy how the water fizzed and hissed, and how my fiery flush faded suddenly away, and I became again quite black in the face! I can fancy all this, as I said, but I really remember nothing about it.

Nor have I any recollection of being drawn out into wire, forced to push myself through little holes, smaller and smaller, till I was long enough and slim enough for the purpose for which the manufacturer designed me. My very earliest remembrance is of finding myself lying on an anvil, along with thousands of others of my species. But you must not fancy me then, gentle reader, in the least like the neat, trim, bright little article that now has the pleasure of addressing you. I fancy that I looked uncommonly like a bit of steel wire, neither useful nor ornamental.

While I lay quietly reflecting in a kind of dull, sleepy doze, for at that time I was not sharp at all, a violent blow on one end of me startled me not a little—I had been hit on that side as flat as a pancake!

“What next?” thought I. I had little time for thinking. I was popped into the fire in a minute, but taken out again before I had time to melt. Then down came another blow upon me, which had quite a different effect from the first. It pierced out a little hole in my flat head, and I received the advantage of having an eye. No sooner did I possess it than I began to use it. I peered around me with much curiosity, now on the long brick building in which I found myself; now on the rough care-worn faces of the workmen, reddened by the glow of the fire-light; now on the multitude of baby needles around me, all looking up with their little round eyes.

I was now placed upon a block of lead, and my eye was punched to bring out the little bit of steel, which was neither tidy nor convenient. Then, to improve the shape of my flat head, it was filed a little on both sides.

I felt now tolerably well satisfied with myself—something like a child (for I have since seen a good deal of the world) when it has mastered the first difficulties of learning, and begins to fancy itself a genius. But there was a good deal more of filing, and heating, and polishing before me; education is a slow and troublesome matter, whether to children or needles!

I am afraid that I should tire you, dear reader, were I to give you the whole story of how I was filed into a point; how I thought the file hard, disagreeable, and rough, as many young folk have thought their teachers; how I was then heated in a fire till I grew as red as naughty boys who have been caned by their master; then left to cool in a basin of cold water, like the same boys shut up to think over the matter.

Then I and a number of my companions were held in a shovel over the fire, and stirred about, and then straightened with blows of the hammer. I thought that I must now be quite perfect; but never was needle more mistaken. How could I go through linen, cloth, and silk—how could young gentlemen and ladies go through the world—without a proper degree of polish! Thousands of us were put on a piece of buckram sprinkled with emery dust; more emery dust was thrown over us, and then a small quantity of oil; for I wish that every teacher would remember that though the emery of discipline is necessary enough, it works best when laid on with the sweet oil of kindness.

Oh, if I could only describe the rolling backwards and forwards, the rubbing and scrubbing again and again, the washing, the wiping, the smoothing on a stone, thought necessary to complete a good needle! Depend upon it, dear reader, your reading and writing, your sums and your tables, nay, even the terrible dog's-eared grammar, are nothing to what the smallest needle must go through before it is fit to appear in the world!

## CHAPTER II. MY FIRST ADVENTURE.

OUR education being now finished, two hundred and fifty of us were packed up together, and remained in darkness and seclusion for some time. We were then removed, separated, and in smaller numbers placed in neat little dark-coloured papers, and kept in a box in a shop. Of all the tiresome parts of my life, this was the most tiresome by far. I longed for the moment when I should be taken from the prison, and see a little of the world. I was quite discontented with my state.

“Why was I made, if not to be used?” thought I. “Why have I undergone all this heating, hitting, and polishing? why am I so sharp, so neat, so bright, if not to make some figure in the world?” I was only a young needle, you see, and impatience is natural to youth: I am not the only one who has found it hard to stay contentedly in the position in which he has been placed.

At length I felt myself moved (you know that I could see nothing out of my paper). I believe that I had been bought and sold; and though not at once released from my confinement, I felt reasonable hopes that I soon should be so. Nor were my expectations disappointed.

“Oh, mamma! dear mamma! what a sweet little work-box—and all fitted up so nicely!” exclaimed a childish voice near me. I longed to have a peep at the speaker.

“I hope that it may assist my Lily to be a tidy, useful little girl, such as her mother would wish to see her.”

“What a pretty silver thimble! and it fits me exactly; just see! You’ve left a place for my scissors, as I have a nice pair already. What neat, tiny reels!—and what’s this? a yard measure—ah! and here is wax to make my thread strong! Thank you, dear mamma, again and again!”

I confess that I was rather in a state of irritation. Nobody seemed to be thinking in the least about me; after all my finished education, it was not thought worth while even to give me a look. At length my paper was moved, very roughly torn open, light flashed upon its contents, and I and my companions were scattered in every direction, I alighting on the Holland pinafore of a fair, chubby-faced boy, who had been the author of the mischief.

“Oh, Eddy! you tiresome child! if you would only leave my box alone—just see what you’ve done with my needles!”

I seized the opportunity of looking around me, in no hurry for my resting-place to be discovered. I found myself in a very comfortable room, full of so many things to excite my curiosity, that I felt as though I could have gazed for ever! But perhaps what interested me most was my first sight of the human beings who occupied the apartment. They were so unlike the workmen to whom I had been accustomed, that I examined them just as a philosopher might examine some newly-discovered curiosity.

In the first place, there was a gentle, blue-eyed lady, who sat near the table on which the work-box was placed; while on her knee rested a very plump little child, calmly engaged in sucking her thumb. A girl of about ten years of age (I knew nothing of ages then, and had not a notion of anything growing, but I have since learned much from observation) was on her knees, searching for

her needles. She was evidently to be my future mistress, and I anxiously glanced into her face to read what sort of a child she might be. I scarcely knew whether her countenance pleased me or not. She had light eyes, like her mamma; rather a turned-up little nose, which gave her a somewhat saucy expression; and I am sorry to say that, just at that moment, I saw on her brow sundry creases, which did not give me an idea of good temper. I know that it is a foolish feeling of mine, but whenever I see those ugly creases rising on the brow of a little boy or girl, I always feel inclined to bestow on them a little prick, just by way of good counsel, you understand! I have seen lines, and very deep lines, made on the forehead by care; I could just faintly trace some on that of Mrs. Ellerslie; they became only too distinct in the course of time, but they never for a moment altered the gentle expression of her face.

I think now that I hear her soft voice as she said,—

“Oh, Lily, do not be so much vexed with your brother. You know that he is only a little boy. Come, my Eddy, let us help to look for the needles; you must not touch the papers again!”

I cannot say much for Eddy’s skill or industry in the search; he was much more intent on making baby laugh by snapping his fingers and grinning at her, turning his head knowingly first on one side, then on the other, till he succeeded in drawing from her a merry crow, and a smile showed her little toothless gums.

Such success elated Eddy, and, determined to press a good kiss on that sweet little mouth, he came close—too close to her, alas! for he caused me to inflict, I am sorry to confess it, a very tiny scratch on the baby’s plump white arm.



You should have heard what a scream she set up! I really felt quite embarrassed: was this to be the commencement of my career, was I to begin my services by mischief? You must consider also, gentle reader, that my astonishment was very great at the effect produced by my head simply rubbing against a child's arm! I myself, though not a thousandth part of the size of the baby, had borne hammering, bruising, and battering, not only in silence, but with little inconvenience; and here the smallest touch seemed to excite terror and pain such as had never even entered into my fancy. Ah! I soon found how very different the human species is from ours; how easily their tender flesh is wounded, and—what I thought still more strange—how easily their feelings are pained! It has seemed to me, from what I have observed in life, and from what I have heard from companions of my own, possessing greater experience, that there are some human beings whose great business seems to be, pricking and paining the hearts of those around them; as if life were not full enough of sorrows without our wilfully bringing them upon our neighbours.

Eddy seemed much more penitent for having hurt baby than for having overthrown Lily's paper of needles, though the latter action had been the cause of the former. He joined his mother and sister in trying to soothe little Rosey, and assured her so often that he was "very, very sorry," and called her by so many sweet names, "little pet, darling, and duck," and kissed the scratched arm so often, that she soon appeared quite pacified. I was not so well pleased at the titles which he gave me, throwing all the blame on "the naughty, ugly needle," that had been the innocent cause of her pain. I was rather in ill humour when Lily hastily replaced me in the work-box, not dreaming of putting me back in my paper, but sticking me unceremoniously into the red silk which lined the top

of the box. And there I was to remain, in company with other articles of metal, with which I soon entered into acquaintance; for all the metals are naturally related to each other, and I was able to make myself understood by everything bearing the nature of a mineral.

### CHAPTER III.

## CONVERSATION IN A WORK-BOX.

WELL, what do you think of your new life?" said the Scissors, as soon as we were left quietly in the box. Perhaps I had better pause for a moment to describe my new companion, before I record our conversation.

The pair of Scissors, with which I had now to make acquaintance, had rather an old-fashioned air. One end was rounded, the other had been sharp, but a little piece had been broken off the point. I fancy that I detected on one of the handles something reddish, like a little speck of rust, and the brightness of the whole article was dimmed. This was doubtless a mark of antiquity, and it was in the patronizing manner of one who was aware of her own superiority, that Mrs. Scissors repeated her question, "Pray, what do you think of your new life?"

"I have hardly had time to judge," was my reply; "but I am rather hurt at the way in which that little boy laid the whole blame of his own fault upon me."

"Oh, that is what you must always expect," laughed the Scissors; "a bad shearer never has good shears. I've been these ten years in the family, and I've always found it the same. When Miss Lily took it into her head to imitate the hairdresser, and practise upon Eddy's flaxen poll, when I glanced aside, and snipped his little ear, whose fault was that but 'the stupid Scissors'!" And when I was seized upon to open a nailed box, whose contents the young lady was impatient to see, whose fault was it when my poor point

suddenly snapped? why, ‘the good-for-nothing Scissors’,’ to be sure.”

“I hope that I shall not be treated in such a way,” said I, rather alarmed at her words; “it would be too bad, after the trouble that has been taken to form me, after having had to pass to perfection through so many hands, to be snapped by a careless child.”

“You would have nothing but the dust-hole before you,” said the Scissors. I thought the remark very unpleasant.

“I almost wish that I had remained in my mine,” sighed I.

“Oh no,” said a soft voice beside me, and I remarked a beautiful little Thimble, of a metal unknown to me before, so bright, and white, and shining, that I felt at once that it was of superior nature.

“Would you wish,” she continued, “to lie useless, to be of no benefit to any? Has not man refined, formed, polished, improved you, and exerted the powers of his reason to render you an instrument of good?”

“What has man’s reason to do with us?” said I.

“I know not whether I can explain myself clearly,” replied the Thimble, “but I will endeavour to show you what I mean. Man has been gifted with a power called reason; by this he governs the world, by this he subdues creatures stronger than himself, and makes all things combine to serve him. He has discovered that iron possesses a strength which he may turn to valuable account. It would be endless labour to plough the fields, if the ground had to be torn up by the hand; it would be terrible work to reap the corn, if each blade had to be pulled off by the fingers. Man determined to aid his own weakness by the wonderful strength of iron. He

made the ploughshare, and the furrows are turned up; he made the sickle, and the sheaves are gathered; huge trees, which he would never have had force to pull down, are laid low by a few strokes of his axe.”

“There is no doubt but that ours is the most useful metal by far,” said the Scissors, with something of a sneer. “Who would use ploughshares, or sickles, or axes of silver? Precious little work they would do!”

“I grant it,” said the Thimble, with perfect good-humour; “but we all have our place in the world, we all have some good purpose to fulfil. Zinc, lead, tin, arsenic, platina, nickel—”

“Stop, stop,” I exclaimed, overwhelmed with such a list; “I never knew there were so many metals before.”



“Mamma, please, will you lay down the hem for me?” said Lily.  
“Nay,” replied the Thimble gaily, “I have not numbered one half of them,—

“Manganese, cobalt, rhodium,  
Copper, potassium, sodium—”  
“Who ever such names bestowed on ’em?  
Such long names I hold in odium!”

cried I.

“There’s rhyme, but not reason,” laughed the Thimble.

“If it is hard to number up the metals,” I observed, “how impossible must it be to count all the uses to which they are put!”

“Impossible indeed,” said the Thimble. “Man avails himself every day, every hour, of the treasures which he has won from the mine—for

“Ploughing, digging, and hoeing;  
Cooking, ironing, mowing;  
Cutting, sawing, and sewing;  
Holding the embers glowing;  
Speeding the vessel’s going;  
Music, when horns are blowing;  
Money, when debts are owing;  
Bridges, where streams are flowing,  
Lace, where finery’s showing;  
Greenhouse, where plants are  
growing—”

“In short, there’s no counting or  
knowing  
All that man to metals is owing!”

cried I.

## CHAPTER IV. A MOTHER'S DELIGHTS.

SEWING! how I hate sewing! I wonder what use there is in my learning to sew," exclaimed Lily, in rather a fretful tone, as she took me out of the box.

"I wonder what's the use of learning to spell!" yawned little Eddy over a dog's-eared book, as he sat on a stool close by his mother.

Mrs. Ellerslie was busy at her desk, examining her monthly accounts, with a grave and anxious expression. She was interrupted, in the midst of summing up a long bill, by her little girl bringing her work to her.

"Mamma—"

"Yes, my dear," said Mrs. Ellerslie, without raising her eyes, and continued murmuring half aloud, "Thirteen pounds and a half at seven-pence three-farthings—I thought there must be an error somewhere."

"Mamma, please will you lay down the hem for me?"

"Really, my love, I am very busy at present. I think that, after all the trouble which I have taken to teach you, you might manage to do that for yourself;" and again she went on with her accounts; while Lily, looking rather discontented, slowly returned to her seat.

"Mamma," said Eddy, rising, and laying his book on her knee, "I know my lesson."



“Wait a minute, my boy; I will hear you almost directly.”

So Eddy waited cheerfully enough, and, to amuse himself in the meantime, began trying to mend his mother’s pen, to the no small damage of the pen, and the imminent risk of his own fingers.

“Oh, Eddy, put that knife down!” exclaimed the harassed lady, when she had raised her head for a moment to see the nature of his occupation. “Come, you had better say your lesson at once,” she continued, hopelessly laying down the bill, and taking up the spelling book. She was too gentle, too loving, to be irritable or peevish; but petty cares and petty troubles were wearing out her strength, and damping the spirits which had once been so light. I saw that though Mrs. Ellerslie fondly loved her children, she could not help feeling them a weariness to her; and though they had much affection for their mother, they had little consideration for her comfort.

“Now, Eddy,” said Mrs. Ellerslie, as the little gentleman stood with his arms pressed down to his sides before her, “how do you spell the word *pan*?”

“B-o-y,” replied Eddy, with emphasis.

“Oh, fie! that’s not knowing your lesson. You had better look it over again,” she continued, as a servant brought in a note with the words, “The messenger is waiting for an answer.”

In the meantime, I was making my first essay in sewing; and though, I assure you, it was from no fault of mine, a lamentably bungling essay it was. The hem laid down by my little mistress was in some parts twice as broad as in others, while in one place the edge was scarcely turned in at all. I was quite hurt at the

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