

THE ANSWERED PRAYER.

All day long the canary bird had sung unheeded in his gilded cage by the door, and the robin had carolled unheard by his nest in the tall maple tree, while the soft summer air and the golden rays of the warm June sun entered unnoticed through the open windows of the richly furnished rooms, where a pale young mother kept her tireless watch by the bedside of her only child, a beautiful boy, three summers old. For many days he had hovered between life and death, while she, his mother, had hung over him with speechless agony, terrible to behold in one so young, so fair as she. He was her all, the only happiness she knew, for poor Lina Hastings was an unloving wife, who never yet had felt a thrill of joy at the sound of her husband's voice, and when occasionally his broad hand rested fondly upon her flowing curls, while he whispered in her ear how dear she was to him, his words awoke no answering chord of love.

How came she then his wife—and the mistress of his princely home? Alas! wealth was then the god which Lina Moore worshipped, and when Ralph Hastings, with his uncouth form and hundreds of thousands asked her to be his wife, she stifled the better feelings of her nature which prompted her to tell him No, and with a gleam of pride in her deep blue eyes, and a deeper glow upon her cheek, she one day passed from the bright sunshine of heaven into the sombre gloom of the gray old church, whence she came forth Lina Hastings, shuddering even as she heard that name, and shrinking involuntarily from the caresses which the newly made husband bestowed upon her. And so the love she withheld from him was given to the child who now lay motionless and white as the costly linen on which his golden curls were streaming.

All day she had watched him, for they told her that if he lived until the sun setting, there was hope, and as the hours wore on and the long shadows, stretching to the eastward, betokened the approach of night, oh, how intense became the anxiety in her bosom.

Fainter and softer grew the sunlight on the floor, and whiter grew the face of the sleeping boy. 'Twas the shadow of death, they said, and with a bitter wail of woe, Lina fell upon her knees, and as if she would compel the God of Heaven to hear her, she shrieked, 'Spare my child. Let him live, and I will bear whatsoever else of evil thou shalt send upon me. Afflict me in any other way and I can bear it, but spare to me my child.'

In mercy or in wrath, Lina Hastings' prayer was answered. The pulse grew stronger beneath her touch—the breath came faster through the parted lips—a faint moisture was perceptible beneath the yellow curls, and when the sun was set the soft eyes of Eddie Hastings unclosed, and turned with a look of recognition upon his mother, who, clasping him in her arms, wept for joy, but returned no word or thought of gratitude toward him who had been thus merciful to her.

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In a small brown cottage in a distant part of the same village, another mother was watching beside her first-born, only son. They had been friends in their girlhood, she and Lina Hastings. Together they had conned the same hard tasks—together they had built their playhouse beneath the same old chestnut tree—together, hand in hand, had they wandered over the rocky hills and through the shady woods of New England, and at the same altar had they plighted their marriage vows, the one to the man she loved, the other to the man she tolerated for the sake of his surroundings. From this point their path diverged, Lina moving in the sphere to which her husband's wealth had raised her, while Mabel Parkham one sad morning awoke from her sweet dream of bliss to find herself wedded to a drunkard! Only they who like her have experienced a similar awakening, can know the bitterness of that hour, and yet methinks she was happier than the haughty Lina, for her love was no idle passion, and though weal and woe she clung to her husband, living off on