

His wife went sadly into the little sitting-room and resumed her sewing.

Two years before, this young couple had begun life together, and all was fair to view and not a cloud dimmed the bright sky; but shortly the clouds began to gather slowly, and now was heard the rumbling of the approaching storm.

It was the old story, which many wives have learned; the first glass indulged in with no fear of danger, and the gradual strengthening of the grasp of the demon upon the loved husband, which brings him down to the lowest degradation and vice, and the dependent wife and children to most abject misery and poverty.

Frank was a noble young man at heart and loved his wife and child, but the tempter had come behind the mask of friendship, and despite the entreaty of his wife, and warning of friends, the young man was yielding slowly but surely; every day getting further from all that was good and pure in life.

Tom Kennard was a reckless, unprincipled man, and his influence over Frank was nothing less than a curse. He was one of those peculiarly fascinating, agreeable men whom it is so hard to be angry with and to break away from, even when one knows there is danger in their very presence.

Mrs. Foss sat thinking mournfully of her husband, and praying, oh, so earnestly, for heaven to save him, for could there be any other hope?

The bitter tears were still falling when Joe Hardy came in unannounced, and found her.

Joe was a staunch friend of both husband and wife, and before Frank had fallen among evil companions, had been his nearest and most intimate friend. He had done all that man could do, to win Frank from his sin, but without avail.

He needed not to ask the cause of the tears; did he not know of old, the whole miserable story?

How the young mother sat weeping, night after night, as the hours dragged slowly on, waiting for the return of him who had promised so many times to break away from evil associations and the allurements of the fatal cup; how that husband would come reeling home at the midnight or early morning hours, stupefied by drink, and singing foolish and obscene songs; how that husband had, when inflamed by the liquor even raised his hand against the loving wife he had promised, before God and man, to honor and cherish.

Mrs. Foss looked up as the young man entered the room, but her only greeting was a fresh out-burst of grief.

"Has he gone out again?" he asked, compassionately.

"Yes, he said he must see Kennard on some business, but I am afraid of that man; Frank was good and noble until he met him, and he would be so happy if he would let drink alone. I have pleaded with him, and he has promised again and again, but he forgets when he gets away from home with those wicked men," she said, sobbingly.

"It is hard," he replied, "we must try in every way possible, to win him back. I will go down town, and perhaps I may find him and get him to come home with me," saying which he turned and was gone before she could thank him.

As he reached the street he found that a storm was rising fast, the ominous growl of distant thunder coming faintly to his ears, while an occasional flash of lightning threw a blinded glare over the houses and pavements as he hurried along.

"I'll try Holland's first," he muttered, and was soon before that establishment.

Going in he walked boldly up to the bar and asked the man if Mr. Foss was there.

"He was here an hour ago," replied the person addressed. "You won't get him home to-night," he replied with a fiendish grin, "he and 'Tom are on a jolly spree."

Without a word he turned away and sought another saloon.

The storm was now at its height, the rain beating down fiercely, while the blue lightnings flashed and quivered in the air, and the terrific peals of thunder seemed to shake the very ground. Heedless of all, Joe went back and forth searching in vain for his friend, drenched through and weary and almost despairing.

He visited saloon after saloon, rum shops of all grades, but his search was unsuccessful, and at length he turned toward home thoroughly disheartened.

Suddenly he heard the cry of fire raised and hurrying along he soon reached Holland's saloon, from the doors and windows of which the thick black smoke was pouring in great volumes.

Gathered in front of the building were a group of men, some half tipsy and all looking very much frightened.

The bar tender was among them, and approaching him, Joe asked the cause of the fire.