

"Why are you abroad in such rough weather?" he asked. "Your parents certainly cannot have sent you?"

The child's under lip trembled with emotion, and tears sprang into his eyes. "My father is dead," he said, "and my mother is very ill and destitute of bread."

"Poor child!" said my uncle, compassionately, "and this is the reason why you are out; you are too fine a little fellow to be sent on begging expeditions."

The boy's cheek flushed, but it was with mortified pride and anger.

"I am *not* a beggar," he said, disdainfully. "I never took a copper in my life, and never mean to, without giving something in return. My mother sent me out this morning to sell this, and not to beg." As he spoke, he drew from his pocket a small roll. I watched and admired the little fellow as he untied the string and unrolled the brown paper that enclosed his treasure.

I was surprised when I saw it at last held up for exhibition. It was a white satin apron, beautifully painted and trimmed,—one which must at some time have belonged to the most honorable of the Fraternity.

My uncle was a bright Mason. I saw his eye kindle and his cheek flush at the sight of the satin texture now offered in exchange for bread,—for the common wants of life.

"To whom did this belong, my boy?" said my uncle, in a mild voice: "was this your father's?"

"Yes," said the child; "my father used often to wear it, and a pretty sight it was, sir, to see him dressed out in his beautiful regalia. My mother hates to part with it, sir; indeed she has parted with everything else before she would part with this, but she is sick and in great distress. This morning she said I must offer this for sale, for she cannot bear to see me beg, and we have nothing else to sell. A man up town to whom I offered it told me that he was not a Mason, and had no use for such regalia, but if I would come here perhaps I could sell it. I accordingly came, and now how would you like to buy it sir?"

"Buy it!" cried my uncle; "no, I would not buy it for the world; but your mother, if she is the widow of the man who wore this, shall never again send you forth on such an errand. I pledge the word of a gentleman and Mason. Take your hat, boy, and show me the way to your residence."

My uncle had taken his cloak, and was already clasping it around him.

"You will not surely go forth, uncle, in such an hour, and with your East India constitution, to brave this inclement storm," I said, rising and standing before him. "You can send money and relief to this unfortunate lady, without exposing yourself."

"I cannot send," he replied implicitly. "If the widow and child of a Mason can brave the rigors of the storm, I certainly am not too weak, too effeminate, for the task. Give me my cane and hat.

I handed them to him, and, taking the child by the hand, he went forth into the wind and sleet, for the latter had commenced falling. I went to the window, and watched them both until they were out of sight. I felt, as I saw my uncle's stalwart frame braving the inclemency without, and yielding support to the delicate, fragile boy, that he was indeed one of God's noblemen, and I mused over the mysterious organization of men to which he belonged, and the benevolence of whose creed had led him forth to peril the safety of a constitution rendered peculiarly sensitive to cold, from a long residence in a foreign clime.

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It was quite dark before my uncle returned. He came in, and to my surprise, exhibited no great symptoms of cold. He leisurely unclasped his cloak, and sat down to the supper table, which was already spread, without a remark.

I looked into his face as I sat down to pour the coffee into the cups, but it was unreadable as a scratched and torn page. I could not unravel his thoughts. He was serious, without being sad, and gave brief answers to all my questions.

"Did you find that poor woman in great distress?" I queried.

"Yes," said he.

"She is suffering for the want of the necessaries of life, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Did you do anything for her?"

"To be sure I did; that was what I went for."

"True, true," I said, "but I thought you would only look into her condition, and then lay her case before the Lodge."

"Lay her case before the fiddlesticks," said he abruptly. "Adelaide Sullivan's case is already attended to. She will never seek relief from a Masonic Lodge while there is strength in this right arm to provide for her and her boy."

"Adelaide Sullivan!" I exclaimed in surprise. "It is not possible that your old flame, Adelaide Sullivan, has been reduced to widowhood, penury, and want, and that you have just found her?"