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## ORRIN LACEY;

OR, THE TEACHINGS OF THE SICK ROOM.

Wild and fearful emotions had, through the previous night, tortured the soul of the once gay and reckless Orrin Lacey, and now as the morning light began to gleam between the parted curtains of his sick room, and he listened to the departure of the friends who had watched through the dreary night at his bedside, and heard the soft tread of his wife as she closed the door after them; now, said he to himself, I will compel Jane to tell me what the doctor thinks of my case—at least what he chooses to tell her is his opinion. I think he wants to frighten me, lest I should yet drink to excess: I'm determined, to know what he tells Jane, and he rolled himself to the front of the bed, by great exertion, and as his wife settled his pillow under his feverish temples, and kindly enquired how he had passed the night, he answered her hurriedly, and at once began to interrogate her as to the purport of Dr. Harris' conversation the day previous.

"Dear Orrin, don't exert yourself now to converse; you are too weak, pray compose yourself?"

"I will, Jane, if you will tell me word for word what he said to you; he talked strangely to me, and I am determined to know whether he dares talk to my wife in the same manner." "What did he say to you, Orrin?"

"I shan't tell you, Jane, now, but if you have yet any love left for me, or if you desire to save my life tell me at once, tell me now what he told you yesterday without any equivocation."

Jane cast one glance at her husband's countenance, and his emotion almost overpowered her. His eyes were frightfully distended and bloodshot, his cheeks crimsoned, and a livid hue about his mouth, while his breath came thick and gasping, and the grasp of his hand on her fair and beautiful shoulder, seemed like a giant's hold.

She saw at once that equivocation would not now answer with her husband, and sadly she began to give him the promised information, dreading at every pause lest death should be the result of his agonizing emotions. Orrin lay passive as a child, still maintaining his hold, his eyes fixed on her, and his hot breath almost scorching her brow, as she told the physician's opinion—that he might and probably would recover from that attack, but if he ever dared trifle with the accursed cup again, madness or death must inevitably ensue.

As she ceased speaking Orrin's hand fell nerveless at his side, the blood forsook his cheek, the livid hue of his lips changed to a ghastly white, and tears, the first his wife had known him to shed during his sickness, literally poured from his eyes and drenched his pillow. His whole frame quivered and shook, and Jane horrified and alarmed, flung herself on her knees by the bedside, unable even to call for assistance.

After a while this paroxysm subsided without throwing him into fits, as Jane had feared, and by a strong effort he at last murmured out,

"Jane, did you think me a drunkard before this fit of sickness came on?"

Jane hesitated to answer the question.

"Tell me, dear Jane, tell me; did you think I had become a slave to drink? Don't fear to tell me what you thought, Jane," and he gazed up into her face with such an expression of intense and bitter agony, she felt half inclined to suppress the truth; but her better principles prevailed, and she faintly whispered,

Yes, Orrin, the fearful conviction that your habits were leading you towards the drunkard's grave, has been gradually settling upon my mind, and throughout the last year doubt has yielded to certainty."

"Why, Jane, did you not tell me this before, why did you not warn me of my danger? You have been just as kind and affectionate the past year as ever; I never mistrusted your feelings—why did you not tell me your fears and show me my danger? How could you be thus kind and affectionate to one you had ceased to respect?"

"Ah! my dear husband, you were ever kind to me, you provided for all my wants, and seemed to love me as tenderly as ever; and how could I reproach you. You may remember I frequently entreated you to go with me to temperance meetings, but you always put me off with some excuse, telling me I might be as temperate as I pleased, but as for you, your public life forbade it; and I dared not tell you what I feared lest you might hate me, so I resolved to study to promote your comfort in every possible way, hoping that you might become aware of your situation, and once again put forth the energies of your nature and free yourself from this degrading thralldom."

Orrin heard her through, and catching at the last words she had uttered, exclaimed with some animation.

"Did you think—do you think, I have energy sufficient to free myself from the love of intoxicating drinks? You have studied my disposition, Jane; tell me candidly, can I, think you, be once more what I was when we were married?"

"No, Orrin, you cannot safely be what you was when we were married, but you can become even better than you were then," said Jane, as she kissed his pale cheek, and parted with a woman's fondness the matted hair upon his noble brow.

What do you mean, Jane? surely I cannot hope to become better than I was then; oh no, my youthful energies are wasted, the stamina of my constitution destroyed, how can I then become a better man in any sense?"

"You were a moderate drinker when I married you, Orrin, and now if God spare your life, and raises you up to health again, ere you go out into a tempting world you must become a total abstinent, and then—"

"And then," said the desponding Orrin, "I must become a laughing stock for all my acquaintances. What will Judge Wharton and Lawyer Reynolds, think you, say?" and a cloud gathered on his brow, and he muttered something indistinctly.

Well, my husband, I will not urge it; you are now in possession of your sober senses, and can properly be left to the unbiased decision of your own judgement; but bear with me while I tell you what will be the consequences, if you suffer yourself to determine to retain the habit of drinking, let it be ever so moderately. For a while you will drink but little possibly, and they won't laugh at you, but the first time you refuse to go with them to a gentleman's champagne party, or go, and do not drink, they will mock your sobriety, laugh you out of your scruples, and then the scenes of the last three weeks will be re-enacted, but the result will not be the same. You know Dr. Harris' skill and experience, you know too that he is a candid honourable man, and remember, Orrin, the fearful alternative he sets before you, madness or death. Oh, my beloved, if I may plead with you yet longer, think, I beg of you, think, what I shall have to suffer if you value Judge Wharton and Lawyer Reynolds higher than you value either your life or me? Do not, I beg of you, do not think you can tamper with the wine cup any longer. You are brought to the edge of the precipice, will you throw yourself down, or will you retrace your steps?"

"Leave me, Jane, leave me," said her husband in a voice husky with emotion; "don't come into the room again under an hour, by that time I will decide this question. Don't say any more—don't regard me so tenderly—may be I shall belie all your hopes and