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THE DRUNKARD'S WIFE.

The grey of morning was already dawning, when a miserable wretch turned into a dirty alley, and entering a low, ruinous door, groped through a narrow entry, and paused at the entrance of a room within. That degraded being had once been a wealthy man, respected by his neighbours, surrounded by friends. But, alas! the social glass had first lured him to indulgence, and then to inebriety, until he was now a common drunkard.

The noise of his footsteps had been heard within, for the creaking door was timidly opened, and a pale, emaciated boy, about nine years old, stepped out on the landing, and asked, in mingled anxiety and dread,

'Is that you, father?'

'Yes, wet to the skin—curse it,' said the man, 'why aint you in bed and asleep, you brat?'

The little fellow shrunk back at this coarse salutation, but still, though shaking with fear, he did not quit his station before the door.

'What are you standing there, gaping, for?' said the wretch, —'It's bad enough to hear a sick wife grumbling all day, without having you kept up at night to chime in the morning—get to bed, you imp—do you hear?'

The little fellow did not answer—fear seemed to have deprived him of speech; but still holding on to the door latch, with an imploring look, he stood right in the way by which his parent would have to enter the room.

'Aint you going to mind?' said the man with an oath, breaking into fury, 'give me the lamp and go to bed, or I'll break every bone in your body.'

'Oh! father, don't talk so loud,' said the little fellow bursting into tears—'you'll wake mother, she's been worse all day, and hasn't had any sleep till now,' and as the man made an effort to snatch the candle, the boy, losing all personal fears in anxiety for his sick mother, stood firmly across the drunkard's path, and said, 'you musn't—you musn't go in.'

'What does the brat mean?' broke out the inebriate, angrily; 'this comes of leaving you to wait on your mother till you learn to be as obstinate as a mule—will you disobey me?—take that, and that, you imp;' and, raising his hand, he struck the little sickly being to the floor, kicked aside his body, and strode into the dilapidated room.

It was truly a fitting place for the home of such a vagabond as he. The walls were low, covered with smoke, and scained with a hundred cracks. The chimney-piece had once been white, but was now of the greasy lead color of age. The ceiling had lost most of the plaster, and the rain, soaking through, dripped with a monotonous tick upon the floor. A few broken chairs, a cracked looking-glass, and a three-legged table, on which was a rimless cup, were in different parts of the room. But the most striking spectacle was directly before the gambler. On a rickety bed lay the wife of his bosom, the once rich and beautiful Emily Languerre, who, through poverty, shame, and sickness, had still clung to the lover of her youth. Oh! woman, thy constancy the world cannot shake, nor shame nor misery subdue. Friend after friend had deserted that ruined man; indignity after indignity had been heaped upon him, and deservedly, year by year, he had fallen lower and lower in the sink of infamy; and yet still through every mishap, that santed woman had clung to him—for he was the father of her boy, and the husband of her youth. It was a hard task for her to perform, but it was her duty, and when all the world deserted him, should she too leave him? She had borne much, but, alas! nature could endure no more. Health

had fled from her cheeks, and her eyes were dim and sunken. She was in the last stage of consumption, but it was not that which was killing her—*she was dying of a broken heart!*

The noise made by her husband awoke her from her troubled sleep, and she half started up in bed, the hectic fire streaming along her cheek, and a wild, fitful light shooting into her sunken eyes. There was a faint, shadowy smile lighting up her face, but it was as cold as moonlight upon snow. The sight might have moved a felon's bosom, but what can penetrate the scarred and hardened heart of drunkenness? The man, besides, was in a passion.

'Blast it, woman,' said the wretch, as he reeled into the room —'is this the way you receive me after being out all day in the rain to get something for your brat and you? Come, don't go to whining, I say'—but as his wife uttered a faint cry at his brutality, and fell back senseless on the bed, he seemed to awaken to a partial sense of his condition, he reeled a step or two forward, put his hand up to his forehead, stared wildly around, and then gazing almost vacantly upon her, continued, 'but why—what's the matter?'

His poor wife lay like a corpse before him, but a low voice from the other side of the bed answered, and its tones quivered as the y spoke.

'Oh! mother's dead!'

It was the voice of his son who had stolen in, and was now sobbing violently as he tried to raise her head in his little arms. He had been for weeks her only nurse, and had long since learned to act for himself,—He bathed her temples, he chafed her limbs, he invoked her wildly to awake.

'Dead!' said the man, and he sobbed at once; 'dead, dead,' he continued, in a tone of horror that chilled the blood, and advancing to the bed-side, with eyes starting from their sockets, he laid his hand upon her marble brow, 'then, oh, my God! I have murdered her! Emily, Emily, you are not dead say so—speak and forgive your repentant husband!' and kneeling by the bed-side, he chafed her white, thin hand, watering it with his hot tears as he sobbed her name.

Her efforts at length partially restored her, and the first thing she saw upon reviving was her husband weeping by her side, and calling her 'Emily!' It was the first time he had done so for years. It stirred old memories in her heart, and called back the shadowy visions of years long past. She was back in their youthful days, before ruin had blasted her once noble husband, and when all was joyous and bright as her own happy bosom. Wealth, shame, poverty, desolation, even his brutal language was forgotten, and she only thought of him as the lover of her youth. Oh! the moment of delight! She faintly threw her arms around his neck, and sobbed there for very joy.

'Can you forgive me, Emily? I have been a brute, a villain—oh! can you forgive me? I have sinned as man never sinned before, and against such an angel as you. Oh! God, annihilate me for my guilt.'

'Charles,' said the dying woman, in a tone so sweet and low that it floated through the chamber like a whisper of a disembodied spirit—'I forgive you, and may God forgive you too, but, oh! do not embitter this last moment by such an impious wish.'

The man only sobbed in reply, but his frame shook with the tempest of agony within him.

'Charles,' at last continued the dying woman, 'I have long wished for this moment, that I might say something to you about our little Henry.'

'God forgive me for my wrongs to him, too,' murmured the repentant man.