

to wonder at this. When he was twenty-one, his mother put into his hands all of her property. It was not much, but it had been enough to take care of them comfortably, and to give him an excellent education. He and his mother even took a little trip abroad, after he left college, and travellers who met or journeyed with them, remembered long afterwards the timid, gentle little woman, always dressed in black, and her tall, handsome son who gave her the devotion of a lover.

But even in this trip they carried the memory of the absent father with them. Mrs. Dawson had gone abroad with her husband soon after their marriage, and she re-visited with Stuart every spot hallowed by those happy days. The trip was like a series of pilgrimages to different shrines.

To Stuart, all these reminiscences were very sweet and sacred. He was now nearly as old as his father was when he married, and he had a strong sense of companionship with this young, gallant father, standing upon the threshold of his life.

When they came home Stuart went into business, working hard and earnestly.

He was a quiet reserved man, almost shy in the presence of women, a man of deep emotions, and of strong, but well-controlled passions. He was a son of whom any woman might be proud, honest, loyal and pure. The two deepest feelings of his heart were a tender reverence for the name and personality of his dead father, and a love that was almost idolatry for the little mother, who seemed dearer to him than any other woman could ever be.

The picture of his father hung higher on the wall now, but the loyal little woman could stand before it, as she had done that night in the nursery years ago, and feel that she had kept her vow. His son loved him as few fathers are loved.

Stuart Dawson was in his twenty-fifth year, when one day he was suddenly summoned by the senior member of his firm and requested to go to New York at once and attend to some business complications that had arisen there. He had only about two hours in which to get ready.

He rushed home, told his mother, and ate a hasty luncheon while she packed his bag. Then he kissed her very tenderly, and telling her that he would write, and when to expect him home, he ran down the steps, turning to look back as he went up the street. She was standing in the window as he knew she would be, a little, slender, black figure outlined against the white curtains. He smiled back at her and waved his hand.

There were no drawing-room cars in the train which he had chosen, and the seat which he at first took, was, he discovered later, on the sunny side of the car. So leaving his bag in the little rack overhead, he seated himself across the way. At the first station two men entered, and took the seat directly in front of him. Stuart had finished his newspaper, and was leaning back half drowsily when he was surprised to hear his own name mentioned.

"Stuart Dawson," said one of the men, "that's the name on that bag over there, and somehow it sounds very familiar. I must have known that man somewhere."

"Stuart Dawson!" his companion repeated, "why, that was the name of the cashier of the —th National Bank in New York, don't you know? His accounts were forty thousand dollars short, and he shot himself, I believe. It was over twenty years ago, but I was with Baldwin & Co. at the time, and happened to know all about it."

"Yes," said his friend, "I remember now. Strange, isn't it, how many men in that position do that thing? The sight of money seems to be to them like the smell of whiskey to a drunkard; they can't help taking it."

Stuart Dawson sat perfectly still. It did not seem possible at first that their talk could have any reference to him. His brain seemed to become so numb that he received impressions

very slowly. It was quite a little time before he realized that it might be his father, his loved and honored father, of whom they were speaking. When he did realize it a great wave of indignation swept over him. He longed to rise and confront these men, to hurl at them hot, bitter words of anger and abuse. But he did not; he sat still, and then his hands and feet seemed to grow quite cold as he said over to himself the words that he had just heard.

"Stuart Dawson!" It was not a common name. It was his father's name, the name that he had tried to bear pure and blameless for his dead father's sake.

After all, no one had ever talked to him about his father but his mother. He realized it now for the first time. But could she—that sweet, saint-like woman—have deceived him all these years? Oh, no! His heart leaped with love and trust when he thought of his mother. He could have laughed at the thought of doubting her. This was some ridiculous mistake, some confusion of names, that was all. He would not even grieve his mother by repeating to her what he had heard. He determined to put it all out of his mind, but it was a vain determination. He found himself brooding over it, and wondering if such a thing were possible. Even when his mind was full of other things something weighed upon him and depressed him. He returned to it again and again. He tried resolutely to throw it off, but it was as impossible to evade as a fog or darkness. It surrounded him quite against his will.

He was glad to get through with his business in New York and return to his mother. He had made up his mind now to tell her. It seemed to him that it would be a great relief to see her look of scorn and disdain. He could not expect that she would laugh with him over it, but he thought that her indignation, when she knew that the name of her idol had been assailed, would be very pleasant to see.

So, as he sat by the fire with his mother after his first dinner at home, he determined to tell her. He had been smoking, but he tossed the stump of his cigar into the grate and leaned across and took her hand.

It was a very little hand, slight and thin. The wedding ring on it looked hardly large enough for a child. He stroked it softly.

"Mother," he began, "I overheard a queer talk on the cars." He was surprised to find that his voice trembled a little.

She looked at him, responsive and interested.

"What was it, Stuart?"

"It was about me, or rather about my father. At any rate, it was the same name. One man said that Stuart Dawson was cashier of the —th National Bank twenty years ago, that he stole forty thousand dollars, and then killed himself."

He had tried to speak lightly as if it were almost a joke, but his voice failed.

There was silence in the room. His mother did not answer him, or move, but the interested, expectant look faded from her face and she grew very white.

"Mother!" he exclaimed, his voice sounding harsh and unnatural, "why don't you say something?"

He held her small hand so tightly that it must have hurt her.

"Mother!" he repeated, "speak, tell me—was it so?"

"No, Stuart," she said slowly, "It was not so."

But her words gave him no sense of relief. Her whole manner was so different from what he had expected that the terrible doubt seemed to be crystallizing like ice about his heart.

"Mother!" he said sharply, "tell me the truth about my father!"

"I do, Stuart," she said sadly. "I have always told you the truth."

If he could only have believed her! But it was not like this that he expected her to deny it. Where were her surprise, her indignation, her righteous wrath?