

His mother idolized him and spoiled him; so his father thought he was going straight down to perdition, perhaps.

Who knew?—for now it seemed very likely to the father Ned had stolen that five-pound note. For the present, however, he kept his thoughts to himself, merely commanding his wife, who came into the room in a few moments to search it thoroughly, and to make sure the money could not be found.

"Then he locked himself in his study, and suffered horribly in silence for four long hours when an interruption came in the shape of an old man, one of the poor of the congregation, who had a dolorous tale to tell of hard times at home.

Believed with some small change and a large bundle of tracts, this good man was about to depart, when a thought seemed to strike him, and he turned towards the pastor, opened his mouth, shut it again, and was about to pass through the door, when the clergyman said—

"Well, Watkins?"

And he came to a halt again.

"I suppose it ain't none o' my business," he said. "But I felt I'd order tell."

"Do as your conscience prompts you, Watkins," said the clergyman.

"Yes, sir," said Watkins. "But, you see, may be you won't thank me. Other folks' affairs, you see. Yourn, you know, sir. So, there, it's out."

"Mine?" cried Mr. Holbrook.

"Yes," said Watkins, "yourn, sir. Tain't so very bad, only I don't think you'd like your young gentleman for to go carering about with the Gregg boys, and then to see him arm in arm with 'em, buying gunpowder at old Dike Decker's and playing bagatelle for ginger beer. Why, I didn't think you'd like it, sir."

"Like it?" cried Mr. Holbrook. "Watkins, come back into the study. There, wait a minute; let me collect myself. When did you see my son at that—horrible place? The man who keeps it is the worst man in the town. There with the Gregg boys? When?"

"Only this morning," said Watkins. "There the boys was, sir. Yourn, sir, had his books in a strap, and it was long after school opened. They hired old Decker's boat, and went out in it, and broke an oar, and then they had to pay for it."

"Thank you, Watkins," said the clergyman, sadly. "It is better news; but you have done your duty."

And Watkins departed.

Five minutes after he had gone the clergyman's son, flushed with exertion and excitement, opened the front door and ran upstairs to his own room.

Ere he reached it, his father's voice sounded through the house.

"Edward. Come here."

Edward obeyed.

He came into the study slowly, and behind him followed his mother, with a face that denoted her premonition of a coming scene.

"Hester," said Mr. Holbrook, "since you are here, you may stay, but you must not interfere. It is my duty to be firm. Sit down, Hester. Edward, come here."

The boy advanced and stood before his father, swinging his strap of books to and fro uneasily.

He was a handsome fellow, with gipsy eyes and curly black hair.

"You have been playing truant to-day, Edward," said the father.

"Oh, no!" cried the mother.

"Yes," said the boy; "I won't lie about it, sir; I have."

"With those Gregg boys," said the clergyman. "You were at the shop of Decker. You spent a great deal of money there."

"Yes," said the boy, "we did."

"And you stole that money from me before you went, as you pretended, to school," said the clergyman. "It was given to me for the church by one who could ill afford it, and you stole it."

"Sir!" cried the boy; "stole it! I—I steal money from you, or anyone? Oh, father, how can you say such things?"

"I have given you no money, nor has your mother, I know," said the clergyman. "I missed the money after you left home. You have spent a large sum."

"I will not tempt you to falsehood by asking you to explain. I only tell you this; confess and prove yourself penitent, and I will kneel down and pray with you for forgiveness."

"Refuse to admit your guilt, and I will flog you as long as I have strength to lift the whip. I will not spare the rod and spoil the child. God would not hold me guiltless if I did."

The mother, who was weeping bitterly, hid her face in the sofa cushions.

The boy, flushing scarlet, drew closer to his father.

"Father," he said, humbly, "I know it seems as if I took it, but I did not. I would not do so vile a thing."

"Let me tell you the truth. I saw the note on the table, and I left it there, of course. I went to school as usual."

"I meant to go, and on the way I met Tom Gregg; and as we passed the confectioner's we saw a chaise, with a very pretty little girl—a mere baby—sitting alone in it; and just then the horse started, and—and—it wasn't anything to do, but I stopped it."

"And the gentleman—the child's father—thanked me so much, and said I'd saved her life, and he wanted to give me the money, and I wouldn't take it, and he gave it to Gregg."

"Gregg took it. It was a five-pound note. And after that I did wrong, for we went off

together on a jollification, sir, and that's the truth, I assure you.

"You believe me, mamma? You do, too, father? Oh, say you do! Let me bring Gregg. He'll tell you it is so."

"No doubt," said the clergyman; "nevertheless, I do not believe you. I will have you here until this evening. When I return, you must confess, or suffer punishment. Hester, come with me."

"Oh, Alfred!" sobbed the mother, "don't be so unjust—don't doubt our poor boy. Can't you see it's true? Ned, darling, I know it is."

But the strong hand of the clergyman drew his wife from the room, and turned the key upon the boy, who stood staring after them with despair in his great black eyes.

In his heart Mr. Holbrook felt assured that his boy was both a thief and a liar.

But the mother knew better.

The poor, loving, broken-hearted mother, who wept and prayed together, and felt that at last indeed God had deserted her.

The day passed on.

The untasted dinner was served and sent away again.

The evening lamps were lighted.

The clergyman arose from his chair and went towards an old-fashioned chimney closet, and took from thence a riding-whip.

The mother gave a scream, and flew towards him, and clung to his arm. He put her aside and passed out of the room, and stood in a few moments alone with his son in the study. The boy had been weeping.

He lifted his swollen eyes to his father's face, and spoke—

"Father, I don't mind a flogging. That's not it. I deserve one for playing truant, perhaps; but tell me you know I am not a thief, and then I won't care how hard the blows are. Tell me that father."

"You will not confess, then?" said the clergyman.

"I did not steal the money," said the boy.

"God hears you," said Mr. Holbrook.

"I know it," said Edward.

"Edward," said Mr. Holbrook, "I am a strong man. You are not able to bear the whipping; I will give you. It will come to confession at last. Spare us both."

For answer the boy cast off his jacket.

"Go on," he said. "I'm ready. You may whip me to death, if you like. I'll never call myself a thief."

It sounded like defiance, and the first blow fell.

With the first blow all the evil passions that lay dormant in either breast awoke.

The violent obstinacy of the boy, his unflinching reception of the blows, made the father furious.

Every stroke drove the good angels farther from the boy.

Suddenly a flood of rage, that passes all description, filled his young heart, and an oath burst from his lips.

Following that oath came such a blow as no Christian ever gave an unmanageable horse, a blow with the clubbed handle of the whip, and he fell to the ground like one dead.

The father bent over him for a moment, and then opened the door.

The mother, trembling and sobbing, rushed in.

The old servant woman followed.

The clergyman, sick at heart, staggered into the parlor; he sat down in the great Turkish chair, and looked vacantly at the figure of his little girl busy at the table.

She had brought into the parlor a little box which she dubbed her baby-house; and unconscious of what had been taking place in the study, was furnishing it to her heart's content.

Now it was ready for the reception of the doll, and she put out her little hand and plucked her father's sleeve.

"Papa," she said, "see my houthie?"

The father absently nodded, but the child was not satisfied.

"Look," she said—"it's got a bed and pillows, and a table and a thove, and a pickshure. Look at my pickshure, papa?"

Absently still, the clergyman gazed into the baby-house.

In a moment more an awful look swept over his face.

"Your picture!" he cried. "Is that what you call your picture? Where did you get it?"

"Off the table," said the child. "My pretty pickshure. I hung it up with a pin."

It was a five-pound note that was pinned against the wall of the doll's parlor.

It was the note that had been lost that morning.

She had never had anything else given to her for money, but a few copper coins, and the idea of the note being money never struck the child, when her father asked her if she had seen or taken any that morning.

Her passion for pictures was great.

Innocently she had taken this note to decorate the walls of her doll's house.

People sometimes ask why the Rev. Mr. Holbrook, who was so useful in his congregation, preaches no longer, and lives in a lonely little country place, apart from all who ever knew and admired him.

One woman knew—his sad, yet forgiving wife.

As for the poor idiot who crawls about the house, a pitiful object to look upon, a more pitiful one to listen to, he knows nothing.

He has never known anything since that last fatal blow, of which the father dreams perpetually, ended all for him.

THE SWEET DREAM IS GONE.

Yes, the intense, sweet dream is gone, is over; I've burst away from passion's maddening thrill;

Once more I stand a pure and perfect woman, Tried, proven; tempted, yet all stainless still.

'Twas hard to bid his fierce, unyielding nature Drink passioned love in chary, tiny sips;

'Twas harder still, the one he madly worshipped, Should dash the chalice brimming from his lips.

'Tis easy, too, in life's eventful battle, Untried, to act the blameless, sinless part;

But, oh, so hard, to coldly chide the erring, When error comes not from a wicked heart.

'Tis sad to note the keen, brief joy pulsations, When passion, wave-like, laves the being o'er,

So sad to witness the remorse-filled hours That blast the tried soul to its tenderest core.

'Tis true, we talk of insult, deeply stinging; Assume high tragic; scorn the tempter's plea;

Oh, man, is that our life's ennobling mission, Or, Christ-like, help the shackled, tempted free?

I know, in years to come, the sweet soul vision Will come to him, when I, a firm friend stood,

While baffling yearning's dangerous siren pleading, Restored his faith in perfect womanhood.

HOW IT ALL HAPPENED.

It was a curious place for a tall, bearded man, to stand gazing into a shop-window, full of embroidered sashes, socks and bib-aprons; but then it looked so neat and bright, and everything was arranged so enticingly—and the pretty girl who sat sewing behind the counter, seemed so thrifly intent on her work—that Carl Auchester, after a minute or two's further survey of the tucked cambric robe that occupied the central place of honor, pushed open the door and entered valiantly.

Lucy Dallas dropped her work, and rose hurriedly from her seat, as the little shrill-tongued bell behind the door tinkled a warning. She looked even prettier, on a closer view, than she had done behind the delusive sheet of glass. A rosy, fresh-faced girl, with brown hair banded across her brow; large hazel-brown eyes, and one of those well-rounded chins, just dotted by a dimple, which betokened firmness and decision of character; and there was something about the black dress, snugly-fitting, and relieved only by simple ruffles at the throat and wrists, that gave her a trim homewifely look, entirely different from the be-ribboned, be-flounced and be-pannered damsel, who fluttered butterfly-like past the great shop-window.

"What shall I show you, sir?" asked Lucy simply, as the great, clumsy six-footer stood staring helplessly across the counter, as if he didn't exactly know himself what he wanted.

"Have you babies' frocks?" he asked, a little awkwardly.

"Yes, sir, all kinds."

And down came an avalanche of paper boxes all over the counter, while the thrifty little shop woman expatiated on the relative merits of ruffles, tucks, insertion and real valenciennes trimming.

"For every day, you see," she said, "there's nothing so pretty as simple clusters of tucks, and an edge of Hamburg embroidery, and they do up exquisitely."

"Do up, eh?" repeated Mr. Auchester vaguely, as he saw that she expected him to say something just here—"do up what?"

"Wash, you know—wash and iron," she explained.

"Oh!" said Mr. Auchester.

"And for dress occasions," added Lucy, giving a long robe a whisk over her arm, to make its folds hang more naturally, "puffings and insertion, and a finish of real valenciennes lace, is the thing."

"Is it?" said Carl helplessly. "Well, you ought to understand these things, I suppose; I don't. I'll take one for every day, with the clusters of flowers and stitching, and one for Sunday with t'other sort of thing."

"Oh, but, sir," cried Lucy, lifting up her soft brown eyes with pleading earnestness, "that won't do at all!"

"Why not?"

"You require at least half-a-dozen for ordinary use."

"Put up half-a-dozen, then, and half-a-dozen for Sundays."

"No, sir," corrected Lucy; "there will be enough. Will you have French yokes or gabrielles?"

"What's that?" demanded our hero.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Lucy, hesitatingly, "but—wouldn't it be a great deal better if your wife were to come and look at these things?"

"That's just it," said he. "I have no wife—I am a widower."

"Oh, sir!" said she; "and who takes care of the dear little baby?"

"I have a nurse," he answered; "but I can't trust her to buy anything—she cheats me so abominably."

Lucy Dallas appeared to meditate as she folded a little pearly-stitched robe into his box.

"But how can I tell what size to put up for you, sir?" said she doubtfully.

"My little girl is three months old," suggested Carl. "The three-months-old size, I suppose, would be about the correct thing."

"Oh dear, not at all!" said Lucy decidedly. "There's as much difference in the size of three-months-old babies as there is in thirty-years-old men."

"I never thought of that," said Mr. Auchester dolefully. "She's fat and plump."

"Yes; but how fat and plump?"

Carl Auchester was puzzled. He tugged at his moustache and shifted his weight from one foot to the other. How was he to solve this riddle?

All of a sudden Miss Dallas' bright eyes sparkled out a signal of reinforcement.

"If you please, sir," said she, "could you just step into the back parlor? My babies are there, and perhaps your little one might be about the same size, and—"

"Your babies!" echoed Carl. "Why, you look like a girl of eighteen!"

"I am nineteen and a half," said Miss Dallas with dignity. "They're not exactly mine, but the children of my only sister. Their parents were both lost on the wreck of the 'Silviance' only six weeks ago, and I am all they have left in the world, poor little lambs! Pray excuse me for inflicting my family history on you, but—"

Carl Auchester held out his hand.

"It isn't necessary to apologize," said he. "You and I have a common ground of interest on which to meet. Thank God, my little one has at least a father left!"

So Miss Dallas opened the door into a sunny little back room, where plants filled the case-ments, a canary poured its rivulet of song on the air, and two rosy babies rolled and floundered hither and thither on a rug—two babies bearing an impress of the serene animal enjoyment, like two young kittens.

Carl stood and looked down on them, through an unwonted mist.

"There, sir," said Lucy, relapsing once more into the intent and business-like little shop-keeper, "perhaps your baby may be about the size of one of these."

"I think it is," said Carl hoarsely. "The smaller, perhaps."

"That's little Amy," said Lucy briskly; "the other is Charlie. Twins, you see, sir; bless their dear little hearts!"

And she knelt down to let the little ones clasp her around the neck, and draw their tiny fingers caressingly over her face.

"Now, sir," said she, "we will go back and pick out the robes."

"Do you leave 'em all alone?" said Carl wonderingly.

"I can watch them through the glass door," said she; "and they are so good!"

"You are fond of children?" said Auchester.

"Who could help it, sir? Such little helpless, innocent things, and all alone in the world, too!"

And Lucy brushed away a tear as she piled the dainty little dresses one on another. "It is such a lucky thing," she added, "that I had made enough by teaching school to open this little shop. Now I have some prospect of providing for them comfortably in the future. Thank you, sir!" as he laid down the cash. "Where shall I send these things? And if they shouldn't suit, of course I will exchange them for anything else you wish."

When Miss Dallas went back to the twins, she cried a little over the creases of Charlie's fat neck.

"To think of that poor little motherless babe left in the clutches of a heartless nurse!" said she, half aloud. "Oh, Amy! you're pulling all auntie's hair down!"

The next day, Carl Auchester made his appearance again in the little shop. Lucy hurried in from the back room with a perturbed countenance.

"Didn't they suit, sir?"

"Oh, yes, they suited," said Carl; "but the nurse didn't suit. I've discharged her. The baby's outside in a cab. I thought, maybe, as you had two already, you wouldn't mind a third. I will pay you whatever you choose to ask."

Lucy stared, as well she might.

"But—" she began.

"Now please, don't!" said Mr. Auchester, imploringly elevating his hands. "I must find a home for the poor little thing somewhere! I have no relatives and its mother's friends are in the country. I can't drown it, can I? or choke it?"

"No, of course not!" cried Lucy, flushing up.

"I'll take it, sir, if you are willing to trust it to me. Poor little lamb!" as Carl Auchester laid it in her arms; "I dare say you think me very silly, sir; but I can't help crying when I look into its sweet, motherless face!"

"You'll be good to it, I'm sure," faltered Carl.

And she answered:

"As I hope Heaven will one day be good to me, in my sorest need!"

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"We shall find a very good article of hand-sewed clothing here," said old Mrs. Battersby. "I always buy of Lucy Dallas when I can, because she's a lady born, and only keeps shop to support her sister's orphan children. Come in, Mrs. Tyler—come in? Where's Miss Dallas?"

"Oh, don't you know, ma'am?" said Miss Rebecca Wilsey, all smiles. "She was married this morning to Mr. Auchester."

"Married?"

"Yes, please, ma'am; and she, and her husband, and the three children—"

"Three children!" cried Mrs. Battersby.

"Yes, ma'am—one of his'n, ma'am, and two of her'n. They've come on a tour somewhere,