

"Certainly, though my breakfast will be necessarily a short one. My little boy is asleep up stairs, and I have left him in charge of a maid for a few minutes only."

They proceeded with their meal. Matilda left in a short time, and Mr. Ayres, or rather Brower, who seemed to have nothing to do, after finishing, leisurely sauntered around the office picking his teeth. Finally, lighting a cigar he took a seat, where he could have a full view of the main staircase as well as the elevator, and composed himself to wait.

At twelve o'clock Matilda received a telegram from Edward to take the first afternoon train on a certain road, and he would meet her at the depot. He did not give any explanation in his telegram, only that it was important to come at once. She hastened to get herself in readiness, and in a short time after dinner took a seat in the omnibus, with little Arthur in her lap, on her way to the depot. As the omnibus turned the corner, Brown stepped into a hack and followed, leaving word at the hotel to send any message that might come after him.

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After the crash and shock I had known nothing whatever of what had happened, or how much time had passed. I was conscious of painful sensations running through my sleep and strange visions tingling my dreams, but of anything tangible I could form no idea. Once or twice I had come partly to myself, and had become indistinctly conscious of forms sitting around, and of someone holding something to my lips to drink. I had tried to raise my arm, but could not. I had tried to turn myself over, but had no power; so I sank off to sleep again, giving up the puzzle hopelessly.

Upon waking up for the first time thoroughly, I found it was a bright, fresh morning, well on towards the middle of the day. I was in a neat little cottage resting in bed, but how I came there or how long I had been there, I could not tell. I saw that my arm was bandaged up, and felt also wrappings around my head. After a considerable time spent in looking leisurely around and wondering what it all meant, I closed my eyes again. A footstep caused me to open them once more, and I saw Edward Blank bending over me.

His fine eyes were filled with tears as he gazed down upon me, crushed and battered as I was, lying there swathed and bandaged, hand and foot, helpless as an infant.

"Oh Tom!" said he in a voice as soft and tremulous as a woman's. "Thank God, you are found at last!"

"Edward! Found! How found? What is it all about?"

"Forgive me, Tom, forgive me for God's sake, or I shall die," continued Edward, imploringly.

Like a rush of waters when a barrier has given way, came the flood of thought upon my returning memory. Everything connected with my unfortunate speculation, all my feelings of remorse and despair, the journey and the accident, stood out before me in a series of vivid pictures. As the fatal truth came surging full upon me, the thought that I lay there not only crushed in body, but ruined in fortune, hopes, and friends, caused me to close my eyes and groan aloud.

"Can you forgive me, Tom, for all the wretchedness of which I have been the unhappy cause?"

"Certainly, Edward, I freely forgive; you acted in good faith, you did not seek to deceive me, you were deceived yourself. But how can I forgive myself for the wicked foolishness of which I have been guilty. I, who all my life have been so severe on others that hoped to take a short cut to wealth, and gain money without work or saving: I, who have been the constant champion of honesty and truth, what excuse have I to offer when I deliberately gambled with the money of another, and, after the first stake was lost, coolly lied to my own brother in order to get more money and continue the game!"

"It was I that tempted you."

"Nay, it was my own heart. Would God I had died when the crash came."

"Talk not so, Tom, or you'll break my heart. Who knows what is in the future for either of us."

"There is nothing in the future for me; loaded with debt, bankrupt in reputation, I cannot bear to return among my friends. Had I been killed, that would have put an end to my troubles, and my poor wife and darling little boy could have lived nicely on the proceeds from the insurance on my life."

The doctor came in at this moment. As my eyes were flashing and a hectic flush mounting in my cheeks, he forbade any further conversation at this time, and Edward, after pressing my hand, withdrew. An opiate calmed my agitation, and after a time I sank into a quiet sleep.