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## WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT IT?

BY HOWARD GORDON.

It was a cold, blustering November night, the first truly cold night of the season, and an earnest reminder of the severe winter which was soon to hold its icy sway. Few there were who ventured out of doors, unless compelled by necessity, and then they hurried rapidly through the streets, in order to get home again as soon as possible, and drew up before a good fire, now indispensable.

James Wrighton was hastening along with the rest, but with no cheerful prospect before him. No, if one observed him closely, distress was very visible upon his face. Stout man as he was, he now and then brushed away the tears that blinded his eyes, and then hurried on faster than ever.

Well might this man be sorrowful. Any one in his circumstances might be pardoned for it; for would not the bravest heart tremble before the picture that rose this night to his view?

James Wrighton was as brave, honest, and industrious a man as ever lived. Although very poor, and burdened with much trouble through sickness at home, yet he had always had plenty of work for the maintenance of his wife and two children. This autumn, however, had been unfortunate for him. The large establishment in which he was employed was suddenly destroyed by fire, and he was cast out upon the world to start anew somewhere else. Far from being discouraged, he tried in every way to get employment; but all to no purpose. The scanty amount he had been able to lay by from his earnings was soon exhausted, and he was beginning to be very low spirited, when he heard of a new chance for work. He applied in vain; and as he went home this night, with no plan or hope for the future, and the insufficient provision for the present, his heart sank within him, and he shed in silence the tears which he never would have suffered his family to witness.

As he neared his home, a change took place in his manner and countenance. He stepped more briskly, and a cheerful expression spread over his face; he even began to whistle. In a minute more the door of the house opened, and a bright little boy ran out, exclaiming:

"Hallo, papa! You don't know how long I have been listening to hear you whistle?"

"Have you been waiting dear?" responded the father, as he took his boy up in his arms and kissed him over and over again.

Then a fair, graceful girl about fifteen years of age met him, throwing her arms about his neck to share his coveted welcome.

"My own pet, Amy! What should I do without you? And how are you to-night, May, dear?" he asked, as he bent down to kiss his invalid wife.

"Nicely, James," said his wife, brightening up.

"Always cheerful and happy! I never saw anything like it!" exclaimed the admiring husband.

"Not more so than you always are, dear," replied Mrs. Wrighton. "Any success to-day, James?"

"No, Mary; but it will be all right soon. I will do my very best, and if we all try to do that, and help our selves, God will not see us suffer beyond what we are able to bear."

"True, James. How could one despair while you were near to speak such cheering words. If I only had my health, how much I could help you, while now I can do nothing."

"Oh, yes, you can and do," rejoined the other. "Think how

much you cheer and encourage me on. But, now, what is there for supper? Anything?"

"Yes, father, dear; but not much. Mr. Bagley did not pay me to-night, as he promised, for the ruffles I completed. I was so disappointed; for I knew you would be very tired, and was determined you should have a nice, hot supper."

"Never mind," said James, smiling brightly, as he sat down to a simple meal of hot corn-cakes and some very weak tea. "How very delicious these cakes are, Amy. Did you make them?"

"Yes, but mother directed me how. I am glad you like them; I was so afraid they would be heavy," said the young housekeeper, blushing with pride and delight at her success.

The watchful father saw the look, so he ate all the faster, as he rejoined:

"Splendid! Not in the least heavy. As light as a feather!"

Having finished his meal with great difficulty, for his heart was so full that every mouthful seemed to choke him, he drew his chair beside his wife, and taking little Eddie in his arms, while his daughter sat at his feet with her head resting upon his knee, began to relate the events of the day, and discuss what was to be done in the future.

During the day of which this evening was the close, the fashionable store of Bagley & Co. had been much frequented by gay ladies, who looked at this thing and that, making few purchases, but much trouble, until the wearied clerks were nearly taxed to the extent of their patience. A large party, the opening one of the season, was to take place the following night, and all interested therein were naturally in a high state of excitement, buying the last finishing touches to "set off" already overdone costumes. One of the most conspicuous of butterflies, hovering about the tempting counters, was Miss Edson, the handsome daughter of a retired merchant. She was what the world terms a beauty; and the world admired her for her magnificent personal appearance, and acknowledged her a perfect queen; but it could make nothing of her otherwise. It was sometimes a question whether she had any heart within her, she always appeared just so cold and dignified.

Not an intimate friend did she possess. Yet she was ever surrounded by admirers, while no entertainment of any kind was complete without her. She was the first one to be missed.

Miss Edson was being waited upon by the get themandy proprietor himself. Mr. Bagley was among the number of those who fluttered about the sight of Miss Edson's presence, and he felt quite satisfied with the position—so much so that he was considering within himself when would be the most opportune time to suggest to her an opportunity he could mention of changing her name.

The young lady had bought a few articles, and was chattering merrily with Mr. Bagley, when her eye fell upon some beautifully wrought ruffles. She examined one closely; then said:

"Where do you get such exquisite ruffles, Mr. Bagley? Are they imported from Paris?"

"Oh, no; they are made here. Hand manufacture. That which you hold in your hand was made by a girl only fifteen years old."

"Is it possible? Who is she?"

"Only one of those low sewing girls. Her name is Wrighton, and lives on Elton street, I believe."

"Ah, indeed! It's too bad, isn't it? I sometimes pity those creatures. It is a hard life."

"They don't need pity," replied Mr. Bagley. "Why, I wouldn't trust one of them out of my sight in the store. All they want is to steal."

Miss Edson soon left the store, and went to her elegant home, and spent the evening quietly; for it was not one to tempt callers, even for the sake of a smile from a fair belle.

The next night the long-anticipated party drew together, for the first time that season, the elite of the city. The guests seemed to have vied with each other for the most fascinating appearance, succeeding to such an extent that a gayer assemblage could hardly be met with.

The evening advanced, and the arrivals ceased. Although the rooms were crowded so that one would have supposed it difficult to tell who were and who were not, yet there was one for whom everyone looked, but whom no one found. As the time wore on, everyone asked: "Where can Stella Edson be?" But no one could answer the question.

The party was over; the last guest had gone; but the much desired one was not among them. Great was the wonder; for never was she accustomed to absent herself, and she had announced her full intention of going; had even promised her hand for some of the dances.

Miss Edson had thought very much of her conversation with Mr. Bagley, and the more she thought the more she was puzzled. "Surely," said she to herself, "a girl that can do such work as that, and does it for a livelihood, cannot be very low down; it is an honorable calling, and deserves praise, not censure. I would like to see such a person, and judge for myself. I have nothing to do this afternoon, and the walk will do me good before that hot party. I have a great mind to go out and find her, so as to satisfy myself."

Queer words for Stella Edson to utter—the proverbially proud, cold, fashionable Miss Edson, who never was known to stoop below a certain level, much less descend so low as this. But she was odd in some things, every one said; and when she made up her mind, or took a fancy to anything, it was of no use to gainsay her.

She said nothing to any one of her intention, only mentioned to her maid that she was going out, and that it was uncertain when she should return.

Dressing herself in a very plain suit and with a thick veil, so that she never would be recognized, she ventured forth. She came at length to a part of the city entirely new and unknown, but she saw it was not a bad locality, only the abode of poverty. She was obliged to make many inquiries, not only for the street, but after that for the house. Her courage began to fail her a little when she at last found it; but having gone so far in her purpose, she was not the one to turn back from it now.

Her knock was answered by Amy herself.

"I came to inquire," said Miss Edson, "if anyone lived here named Wrighton."

"There is a family here by that name," replied Amy, pleasantly; "it is my own. Will you walk in?"

Amy took her caller into the common room; but there was no one there. Miss Edson saw everything at a glance, without appearing to; and although the room was poorly furnished, she was struck with the extreme tidiness of everything.

Amy seated herself in some embarrassed position, and waited for her visitor to announce her errand, which Miss Edson did, after having noted

what a pretty girl she was talking to, and how different she found everything from what she expected.

"Are you the young miss who made those beautiful ruffles which Mr. Bagley has for sale?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied Amy, blushing deeply, but why she hardly knew; yet her heart was in a flutter.

"I have been admiring them; they are lovely indeed. You must earn a great deal of money by such fine work?"

Amy hung her head but made no reply.

"I presume you think I am interfering where I have no right," said Miss Edson. "Pray excuse me."

"No," said Amy, looking up; "not that, but you are very much mistaken. I earn very little, indeed."

"No; I can make a number in a day, now that I have become accustomed to it. But the pay is very small," said Amy timidly.

"Do not think me meddling if I ask you how much are paid for one," said Miss Edson. "I have a good object in doing so."

"I am paid twelve cents apiece, when I get my money," answered Amy.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the other, starting to her feet. "Are you telling me the truth, child? Of course you are; your face shows it plain enough! Twelve cents apiece! Why, Mr. Bagley charges three dollars for the plainest, while some he asks as high as five dollars for! And what do you mean by your last expression—when you get your money? Doesn't he pay you promptly?"

"No, ma'am; it is very seldom I can get it. And when I tell him we need it very much to buy something to eat he sometimes laughs at me; but sometimes gets angry, and says he is doing me a favor by keeping me employed, out of mischief."

"For how many does he owe you now?"

"For sixteen."

"That would be one dollar and ninety-two cents, for what he will get not less than forty-eight dollars, supposing he sells them at no more than three dollars apiece, which would be a low price for him," said Miss Edson, after she had figured it a little. "Is this the man who hopes to secure me for his wife?" she thought within herself.

For a few minutes there was an unbroken silence. Miss Edson sat in deep thought, while Amy feared very much that she had done something wrong in telling what she had, especially as she did not know who her visitor was.

At length, the lady said: "I know Mr. Bagley very well, and it you work for him any more, shall see that you are better paid. I will undertake to pay you now for what you have done, and will settle it with him myself, for you need the money." And she handed Amy a five dollar bill.

"I have no change," said the poor girl, about to return it.

"No matter; you have earned it all; you shall not be paid at the rate of twelve cents any longer. Say no more about it. I wish now to talk of something else. Will you not tell me about your family and circumstances?"

As soon as Amy could sufficiently master the tears of gratitude that came thick and fast, she told her visitor all she desired to know faithfully, without in the least trying to excite sympathy. Miss Edson saw and felt that it was only the strict truth, and her heart warmed towards this worthy, unfortunate family.

Ah! devotees of the fashionable world, how would your lips have curled in scorn, and your eyes flash-

ed with contempt and derision, could you have seen the tears that blinded the eyes of the queen of your circle, as she sat in a very humble room, listening to a simple tale of woe; yes, a subject so common that it could be heard at any time, without taking the trouble to go and hunt it up, as she had done.

But Miss Edson was far from thinking of her fine friends; she was thinking what a new world had been suddenly opened to her view; what an extensive sphere of life she had now for the first time received a glimpse of, when a groan from the neighboring room drew her attention.

"Will you excuse me a moment?" asked Amy. "I fear mother may be worse."

Mrs. Wrighton had been taken quite sick the previous night, but during the day had slept most of the time, so that nothing serious was anticipated. Now, however, she woke up in a much worse state, and Amy was gone so long that Miss Edson ventured to peep through the door; but when she saw the condition of things went in.

Amy was holding her mother's head, and trying to quiet her to sleep again; but without avail, for the disease was much worse.

Miss Edson glanced at the feeble fire, beside which little Eddie lay sleeping, threw off her cloak and hat, and, sitting down at a little table, took out a small note-book, from which she abstracted some blank leaves, and wrote some brief directions. She then went to the bedside, and said to Amy:

"I will take care of your mother, while you do these errands. First, send a good physician here; then leave this note at a grocer's; after which take this to a druggist, and wait for what he may give you to bring back. There will be nothing to pay."

Amy could do nothing but obey; and after she went out Miss Edson seated herself by the bedside, and began to do what she knew how to quiet the poor woman.

Presently the doctor arrived, and proceeded to examine his patient, while soon after Amy came in, loaded with a variety of articles, and medicines from the druggist's, which would all be needed for the comfort of the invalid. Not long after, the grocer's man brought a quantity of fuel and delicate provisions, upon which Miss Edson directed Amy to make up a good fire, while she would attempt to make something which Mrs. Wrighton would be able to eat.

The doctor spoke encouragingly of his patient, and having done all that was necessary went away, promising to call in the morning.

As James Wrighton came within sight of his house, after another unsuccessful day, trying in vain to whistle, his face instead of wearing the usual cheerful expression, took that of the most intense surprise.

"What does all that light mean in the house?" he exclaimed; "and it's flashing, too—it must be on fire!" Upon which he ran in wild excitement, and burst open the door. He stopped on the threshold, however. The common room was lighted with one candle only; but from the door of the inner streamed a flood of light which almost dazzled his unaccustomed eyes.

"What does all this mean?" he asked Amy, as she met him with a smiling face.

"I shan't tell you till you kiss me." The bewildered father conformed to the condition, and then Amy told him all that had taken place.

"Who is the kind lady?" asked James.

"I don't know. In fact, so much has been going on that I have had

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