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Selected Story.

Ruth's Stepmother.

A curious trade to take to, but then it has grown to be profitable. Things were at a low ebb with me when I took it up, while now—

There, I won't boast, only say that I'm thankful for it. Poverty comes in at the door, and love flies out of the window, so they say; but that's all nonsense, or else your poor people would be always miserable, while according to my experience your poor man is always more light-hearted than the man with thousands.

I was at my wife's ends for something to do, and sat nibbling my nails one day and grumbling horribly.

'Don't go on like that, Tom,' says my wife; 'things might be worse.'

'How?' I said.

'Why, we might have Luke at home, and he is doing well.'

Luke's our boy, you know, and we had got him into a merchant's office, where he seemed likely to stay; but I was in a grumbling fit then, and there was a clikety-click noise going on in the next room that fidgeted me terribly.

'Things can't be worse,' I said angrily; and I was going to prove myself in the wrong by making my wife cry, when there was a knock at the door.

'Come in,' I said, and a fellow-lodger put in his head.

'Are you good at works, Mr. Smith?' he said.

'What works?' I said; 'fireworks—gasworks?'

'No, no; I mean works of things as goes with wheels and springs.'

'Middling,' I said, for I was fond of pulling clocks to pieces and trying to invent.

'I wish you'd come and look at this sewing-machine of mine, for I can't get it to go.'

Sewing-machines were newish in those days, and I got up to have a look at it, and after about an hour's fiddling about, I began to see a bit the reason why—the purpose, you know, of all the screws and cranks and wheels; I found out, too, why our neighbor's wife, who was a dressmaker, and had just started one, could not get it to go; and before night, by thinking, and putting this and that together, had got her in the way of working it pretty steadily, though with my clumsy fingers I couldn't have done it myself.

I had my bit of dinner and tea with those people, and they forced half-a-crown upon me as well, and I went back feeling like a new man, so refreshing had been that bit of work.

'There,' said my wife, 'I told you something would come.'

'Well, so you did,' I said; 'but the something is rather small.'

But the very next day—as we were living in the midst of people who were fast taking to sewing-machines—if the folks from the next house didn't want me to look at theirs! and then the news spreading, as news will spread, that there was somebody who could cobble and tinker machinery without putting people to the expense that makers would, if the jobs didn't come in fast, so that I was obliged to get files and drills and a vice—regular set of tools by degrees; and at last I was busy as a bee from morning to night, and whistling over my work as happy as a king.

Of course every now and then I got a breakage, but I could generally get over that by buying a new wheel or spindle, or what not. Next we got to supplying shuttles and needles and machine cotton. Soon after I bought a machine of a man who was tired of it. Next week I sold it at a good pro-

fit. Bought another and another, and sold them; then got to taking them and money in exchange for new ones, and one way and the other became a regular big dealer, as you see.

Hundred? Why, new, second-hand, and with those being repaired up-stairs by the men, I've got at least three hundred on the premises, while if any body had told me fifteen years ago that I should be doing this I should have laughed at him.

That pretty girl showing and explaining in the machine to a customer? That's Ruth, that is. Poor girl, I always think of her and the bread thrown upon the waters at the same time.

Curious idea that, you will say, but I'll tell you why.

In our trade we have strange people to deal with. Most of 'em are poor, and can't buy a machine right off, but are ready and willing to pay so much a week. That suits them and it suits me, if they'll only keep the payments up to the end.

You won't believe me, perhaps, but some of them don't do that. Some of them leave their lodgings, and I never see them again; and the most curious part is that the sewing-machine disappears with them, and I never see that again. Many a one, too, that has disappeared like that I do see again—perhaps have it brought here by some one to be repaired, or exchanged for a bigger, or for one by a different maker; for if you look around here you'll see I've got all kinds—new and old, little domestics and big trades—there, you name any maker and see if I don't bring you out one of his works.

Well, when I ask these people where they got the machine—fer I always know them by the number—it turns out that they've bought it through an advertisement or at a salesroom, or may be out of a pawnbroker's shop.

But I've had plenty of honest people to deal with, and I've come straight forward and told me they couldn't keep up their payments, and asked me to take their machine back, when I'd allow them as much as I thought fair, and 'twould be an end of a pleasant transaction.

The way I've been bitten, though, by some folks has made me that case-hardened that sometimes I've wondered whether I'd got any heart left, and the wife's had to interfere, telling me I've been spoiled with prosperity and grown unfeeling.

It was she made me give way about Ruth, for one day, after having my bristles all set up by finding out that three good sound machines, by best makers, had gone nobody knew where, who should come into the shop but a lady-like looking woman in very shabby widow's weeds. She wanted a machine for herself and daughter to learn, and said she had heard that I would take the money by installments. Now, just half an hour before by our shop clock, I had made a vow that I'd give up all that part of the trade, and I was very rough with her—just as I am when I'm cross—and said 'No.'

'But you will if the lady gives security,' says my wife hastily.

The poor woman gave such a woe-begone look at us that it made me more out of temper than ever, for I could feel that if I stopped I should have to let her have one at her own terms. And so it was; for there, if I didn't let her have a first-class machine, as good as new, she only paying seven and six down, and undertaking to pay half-a-crown a week, and no more security than nothing.

To make it worse, too, if I didn't send the thing home without charge, Luke going with it, for he was back at home now, keeping my books, being grown into a fine young fellow of five and twenty; and I sat and growled the whole of the rest of the day, calling myself all the weak-minded idiots under the sun, and telling the wife that business was going to the dogs, and I should be ruined.

'You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Tom,' she said.

'So I am,' says I. 'I didn't think I could be such a fool.'

'Such a fool as to do a good kind action to one who was evidently a lady-born, and come down in the world!'

'Yes,' I says, 'to living in Bennett's Place, where I've sunk no less than ten machines in five years.'

'Yes,' says the wife, 'and cleared hundreds of pounds. Tom, I'm ashamed of you—you, a man with twenty

workmen busy up stairs, a couple of thousand pounds' worth of stock, and in the bank a—'

'Hold your tongue, will you!' I said roughly, and went out into the shop to try and work it all off.

Luke came back soon after, looking very strange, and I was at him directly.

'Where's the seven an' six!' I says, angrily.

He didn't answer, but put three half-crowns down on the desk, took out the book, made his entries—date of delivery, first payment, when the other's due, and all the rest of it—and was then going into the house.

'Mind,' I says, sharply, 'those payments are to be kept up to the day; and to-morrow you go to Rolly's, who live nearly opposite to 'em, and tell 'em to keep an eye on the widow or we shall lose another machine.'

'You needn't be afraid, father,' he says, coldly; 'they're honest enough, only poor.'

I was just in that humor that I wanted to quarrel with somebody, and that did it.

'When I ask you for your opinion, young man, you give it me; and when I tell you to do a thing, you do it,' I says, in as savage a way as ever I spoke to the lad. 'You go over to-morrow and tell Rolly to keep a strict lookout on those people—do you hear?'

'Father,' he says, looking me full in the face, 'I couldn't insult them by doing such a thing; when, without another word, he walked quietly out of the shop, leaving me worse than ever.

For that boy had never spoken to me like that before, and I should have gone after him feeling mad like, only some other people came in, and I didn't see him again till evening, and a good thing, too, for I'm sure I should have said all sorts of things to the boy, that I should have been sorry for after. And I saved with every body's answers, snapping at the wife, and feeling as a man does feel when he knows that he has been in the wrong and hasn't the heart to go and own it.

It was about eight o'clock that I was sitting by the parlor fire, with the wife working and very quiet, when Luke came in from the workshop with a book under his arm, for he had been tooting up the men's piecework, and what was due to them; and the sight of him made me feel as if I must quarrel.

He saw it too, but he said nothing, only put the accounts away and began to read.

The wife saw the storm brewing, and she knew how put out I was, for I had not lit my pipe, nor yet had my evening tea. So she did what she knew so well how to do—filled my pipe, forced it into my hand, and just as I was going to dash it to pieces in the ashes, she gave me one of her old looks, kissed me on the forehead, as with one hand she pressed me back into my chair, and then with the other she lit a splint and held it to my tobacco.

I was done. She always gets over me like that; and after smoking in silence for half an hour, I was lying back, with my eyes closed, dropping out to sleep, when the wife said (what had gone before I hadn't heard)—

'Yes, he's asleep now.'

That woke me up, of course, and if I didn't lie there whinpering and heard all they said in a whisper.

'How came you to make him more vexed than he was, Luke?' said the wife; and he told her.

'I couldn't do it, mother,' he said, excitedly. 'It was heart-breaking—She's living in a wretched room there with her daughter; and, mother, when I saw her I felt as if—there, I can't tell you.'

'Go on, Luke,' she said.

'They're half starved,' he said, in a lousy way. 'Oh, mother, it's horrible. Such a sweet, beautiful girl, and the poor woman herself dying almost with some terrible disease.'

The wife sighed.

'They told me,' he went on, 'how hard they had tried to live by ordinary needlework, and failed, and that as a last resource they had tried to get the machine.'

'Poor things!' says the wife; 'but are you sure the mother was a lady?'

'A clergyman's widow,' says Luke, hastily; 'there isn't a doubt about it.'

Poor girl! and they've got to learn to use it before it will be of any use.'

'Poor girl, Luke?' says the wife, softly; and I saw through my eyelashes that she laid a hand upon his arm and was looking curiously at him, when if he didn't cover his face with his hands, rest his elbows on the table, and give a groan! Then the old woman got up, and behind his chair, and began to pat and caress his hair like the British bid mother would.

'Mother,' he says suddenly, 'will you go and see them?'

She didn't answer for a minute, only stood looking down at him, and then said softly—

'They paid you the first money?'

'No,' he says, hotly, 'I hadn't the heart to take it.'

'Then that money you paid was yours, Luke?'

'Yes, mother,' he says, simply; and those two stopped looking one at the other, till the wife bent down and kissed him, holding his head afterwards for a few moments between her hands; for she always did worship that chap, our only one; and then I closed my eyes tight and went on breathing heavy and thinking.

For something like a new revelation had come upon me. I knew Luke was five and twenty and that I was fifty-four, but he always seemed like a boy to me, and here I was waking up to the fact that he was a grown man, and that he was thinking and feeling as I first thought and felt when I saw his mother, high upon eight and twenty years ago.

I lay back, thinking and telling myself I was very savage with him for deceiving me, and that I wouldn't have him and his mother laying plots together against me, and that I wouldn't stand by and see him make a fool of himself with the first pretty girl he met—

At last came an afternoon when I knew there was something wrong.—The wife had gone out directly after dinner, saying she was going to see a sick woman—I knew who it was, bless you! and Luke was fidgeting about, not himself; and at last he took his hat and went out.

'They might have confided in me,' I said bitterly, but all the time I knew that I wouldn't let them. 'They'll be spending money—throwing it away. I know they've spent pounds on them already.'

At last I got in such a way that I called down our foreman, left him in charge, and took my hat and went after them.

Everything was very quiet in Bennett's place, for a couple of dirty, dejected-looking women, one of whom was in arrears to me, had sent the children that played in the court right away because of the noise, and were keeping guard so that they should not come back.

I went up stairs softly, and all was very still, only as I got nearer to the room I could hear a bitter, wailing cry, and then I opened the door gently and went in.

Luke was there, standing with his head bent by the sewing-machine; the wife sat in a chair, and on her knees, with her face buried in the wife's lap, was the poor girl, crying as if her little heart would break; while on the bed, with all the look of pain gone out of her face, lay the widow—gone to meet her husband where pain and sorrow are no more.

I couldn't see very plainly, for there was a mist like before my eyes; but I know Luke flashed up as he took a step forward, as if to protect the girl, and the wife looked at me in a frightened way.

But there was no need, for something that wasn't me spoke, and that in a very gentle way as I stepped forward, raised the girl up, and kissed her pretty face before laying her little helpless head upon my shoulder, and smoothing her soft brown hair.

'Mother,' says that something from within me, 'I think there's room in the nest at home for this poor, forsaken little bird. Luke, my boy, will you go and fetch a cab? Mother will see to what wants doing here.'

My boy gave a sob as he caught my hand in his, and the next moment he did what he had not done for years—kissed me on the cheek—before run-

ning out of the room, leaving me with my darling nestling on my breast.

I said 'my darling,' for she has been the sunshine of our home ever since—a pale, wintry sunshine while the sorrow was fresh, but spring and summer now.

Why, bless her! look at her. I've felt ashamed sometimes to think that she, a lady by birth, should come down to such a life, making me—well, no, it's us now, for Luke's partner—no end of money by her clever ways. But she's happy, thinking her husband that is to be the finest fellow under the sun; and let me tell you there's many a gentleman not so well off as my boy will be, even if the money has all come out of a queer trade.—George Manville, in Cassell's Magazine.

'Do you think you can do it now?'

'Oh, yes, I think so; I am so glad you came.'

'So am I,' says I, gruffly; 'it will make it all the easier for you to earn the money, and pay for it.'

'And I will work so hard,' she said earnestly.

'That you will, my dear,' I says in spite of myself, for I felt sure it wasn't me speaking, but something in me—

'She hasn't long?' I said, nodding towards her mother.

'Months,' she said, with tears starting in her pretty eyes; 'but,' she added brightly, 'I shall have enough with this to get her good medicines and things she can fancy; and as I looked at her, something in me said—

'God bless you, my dear! I hope you will,' and the next minute I was going down stairs calling myself a fool.

They thought I didn't know at home, but I did; there was the wife going over and over again to Bennett's place; and all sorts of little nice things were made and taken there. I often used to see them, talking about it, but I took no notice; and that artful scoundrel, my boy Luke, used to pay the half-crown every week out of his own pocket, after going to fetch it from the widow's.

And all the time I told myself I didn't like it, for I could see that Luke was changed, and always thinking of that girl—a girl not half good enough for him. I remembered being poor and miserable, and how I might have got on better in the business, and then he was my partner.

'No,' I says; 'if you plot together, I'll plot all alone,' and then I pretended to wake up, took no notice, and had my supper.

I kept myself gruff the next morning, and made myself very busy about the place, and I dare say spoke more sharply than usual, but the wife and Luke were as quiet as could be; and about twelve I went out, with a little oil-can and two or three tools in my pocket.

It was not far to Bennett's place, and on getting to the right house I asked for Mrs. Murray, and was directed to the second floor, where, as I reached the door, I could hear the clicking of my sewing-machine, and whoever was there was so busy over it that they did not hear me knock, so I opened the door softly and looked in upon as sad a scene as I shall ever, I dare say, see.

There in the bare room sat, asleep in her chair, the widow lady who came about the machine, and I could see that in her face told plainly enough that the pain and suffering she must have been going through for years would soon be over, and, situated as she was, it gave me a kind of turn.

'It's no business of yours,' I said to myself roughly; and I turned then to look at what was bending over my machine.

I could see no face—only a slight figure in rusty black; and a pair of busy white hands were trying very hard to govern the thing, and to learn how to use it well.

'So that's the gal, is it?' I said to myself. 'Ah, Luke, my boy, you've got to the silly calf age, and I dare say—'

I got no farther, for at that moment the girl started, turned around, and turned upon me a timid, wondering face, that made my heart give a queer throb, and I couldn't take my eyes off her.

'Hush!' she said softly, holding up her hand; and I saw it was as thin and transparent as if she had been ill.

'My name's Smith,' I said, taking out a screw-driver. 'My machine; how does it go? Thought I'd come and see.'

Her face lit up in a moment and she came forward eagerly.

'I'm so glad you've come,' she said, 'I can't quite manage this.'

She pointed to the thread regulator,

and the next minute I was showing her that it was too tight, and somehow, in a gentle timid way, the little witch quite got over me, and I stopped there two hours helping her, till her eyes sparkled with delight, as she found out how easily she could now make the needle dart in and out of hard material.

'Do you think you can do it now?'

'Oh, yes, I think so; I am so glad you came.'

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crease in height. Aided by the pulling and pushing power, the inventor claims that he will be capable of making the ship stand still in the air over any given point. Practical use will be made of this advantage by taking a photographer along, for the purpose of securing photographic views of certain sections of the country. From a certain height in the air he says he can see the bottom of any body of water, whether how deep.

The photographic views which he proposes to have taken will be chiefly useful to the topographical corps.

Mr. Schroeder says that his experience has proven to him that in higher atmospheres approaching North Pole, where the lower current increase in cold the upper current increase in warmth, and he is the confident that he is capable of over this region, and finding the which millions have been spent many valuable lives lost—a passage the open Polar Sea.

The first ascent will be made about two weeks—Cincinnati Commercial.

THE FORTUNE TELLER'S ALMANAC.

To dream of a millstone around your neck is a sign of what you may expect if you marry an extravagant wife.

It is very lucky to dream that you pay for a thing twice over, since afterward you will probably take care to have all your bills receipted.

For a person in embarrassment, it is very fortunate to dream that he is paying to him on no account to accept a bill.

To dream of a fire is a sign that, if you are wise, you will see that the lights in your house are out before you go to bed.

To dream of having a great number of servants is—madness.

To dream of a bear foretaken mischief; which your vision shows you is a bruin.

When a fashionable young lady dreams of a fibert, it is a sign that her thoughts are running upon the colonel.

If you dream of cloths it is a warning not to go to law, for, by the rule of contraries, you will be sure of a nonsuit.

When a young lady dreams of a coffin it betokens that she should instantly discontinue tight stays, and always go warmly and thickly shod in wet weather.

CARRY THE LAMBS.

Speaking of a pastor who had been requested to preach to children, the Congregationalist says:

'He now replies that, having given the subject due reflection, he has concluded to preach regularly to the children, with a sermon one Sabbath afternoon in the month to adults. He says that the main hope of the church is the rising generation. The thoughts and intents of his grown-up hearers are in the main fixed; but those of the youth are yet to be shaped and directed. If he can get the boys and girls of to-day for Christ, he has made sure of the men and women of to-morrow. His business is to carry the lambs.'

The music to the hymn 'From Greenland's icy mountains,' was composed by Lowell Mason, in Savannah, Georgia, in 1827, at the suggestion of a young lady. The circumstances were thus related by Mr. Mason in a letter to a friend: 'One day as I met her (Miss Moward) she said to me in substance: "Mr. Mason, I have just received from a friend the copy of a beautiful hymn, but it is of so singular a meter that I cannot find any tune to it. Will you write one for me?" "Certainly," I replied. I took it home and wrote the music *impromptu*. When I saw her soon after, I handed it to her. I do not remember that it was sung in public in Savannah, but it became so popular that, not long afterward, I had it printed by Parker, of Boston, and published by him.'

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