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(From Harpers' Weekly.)
A TROUBLED NIGHT.

Some few autumns ago the rector of a little sea-side parish sat conning his books in the quiet of his own study. It was a wild October evening, the wind twirling and rushing up the short drive that lay between the front door of the house and the gate in the shrubbery which divided the grounds from the road; dashes of rain beat against the window; and underlying all came the faint monotonous break of the waves upon the shore, some half mile distant.

Mr. Fergusson was puzzled over his work—bothered by it in fact; finally he sought assistance of the inferior order of creation—to wit, his wife, who sat opposite to him busily knitting children's socks.

"Kate!" he ejaculated, in an injured tone.

"Well, John?"

The knitting-needles kept going, though the plier thereof moved to her husband's side and stooped to glance at what troubled him.

"These accounts are a frightful nuisance. I wish I had never undertaken such a piece of business; it's no work for me and not half a dozen people will thank me for it after all."

Mr. Fergusson perfectly revelled in all sorts of parish work; clubs, schools, "feasts, fests and festivals,"—nothing came amiss to him if he thought he saw his flock's welfare furthered thereby; but he was a man who delighted in a good hearty grumble now and then, and his wife, understanding such moods well, always found it an excellent plan to treat them homeopathically; so to-night she proceeded on her usual tactics.

"Suppose you shut the book up, John, and let us chat for an hour. You'll be sure to make your head ache and then you won't sleep properly if you go on. The people won't be coming up for their money before Thursday or Friday and that's only Monday."

"The people will be coming up for their money, you most procrastinating woman," answered the husband.

"Suppose you were to help me, now, instead of going on with that eternal knitting. We might manage this between us and have the gossip you are longing for afterward. Now, then, who is Simon Green—the one on the Common; and did he have his money out in April to buy a pig? Now we shall get on perhaps."

The knitting vanished and the pair were soon immersed in club accounts, Mrs. Fergusson's capital memory supplementing the rector's rather carelessly kept accounts admirably.

An hour's work brought them to the end of their labors, and Mr. Fergusson, on going to a large, old-fashioned desk and drawing therefrom three canvas bags full of gold and silver, had the satisfaction of finding the sum they contained tallied exactly with what was required to pay all the depositors in the club their proper amounts.

"I shall be glad when we get rid of it," he said, as he replaced the bags. "I am so unused to having such a sum as seventy pounds in the house that I don't feel quite safe with it. It's to be hoped we shall never be rich, Kate. I've been accustomed to two hundred pounds so long now that I should feel out of my element with a larger income."

When the day was done and the two children were asleep, they talked of their parish, their church, their home and their children and of what a terrible rough night was coming on.

"Then don't give her the chance, Kate. You never find me leaving my letters about—"oh, John"—or if I do they are such as are not of the least consequence. As a matter of course, servants are inquisitive, women-servants particularly; their mistresses are not half careful enough in guarding against this natural curiosity and then all the blame fall on the servant. Women are so unreasonable."

Disregarding the uncivil comment on her sex, Mrs. Fergusson went on. "I did not know so well when I engaged Sarah what a bad character her family bore; one brother has been in prison twice."

"All the more reason for keeping the girl safe from evil influence. I hope—who's that, I wonder?"

A heavy step passed the window, followed by a ring at the hall bell. Mrs. Fergusson opened the study door as Jane, their steady elder servant, passed down the stairs, candle in hand.

"I've been sitting by Miss Rosie, ma'am; she seems feverish like and restless, and I liked being with her better than sittin' alone in the kitchen."

"I wonder if that's Sarah come home to-night instead of to-morrow?" said her mistress.

"Lawk, no, ma'am, not likely," answered Jane; "but we'll soon see who it is; and pulling away the chain from the door, she opened it, disclosing a man's figure without. He was dripping wet and had to hold his hat on with one hand or the wind would have carried it far away; the other hand he extended with a large damp yellow envelope therein. "A telegraph!" cried Jane, taking the missive from him and passing it on to her mistress, who in her turn carried it to her husband and watched his face anxiously as he opened and read it.

A grave, perplexed look came over his features as he handed it back. The message was from his brother at Fordham, a place forty miles distant, and ran thus:

"Come immediately—a third had fit—father anxiously expects you."

"No help for it, Kate," said Mr. Fergusson, answering his wife's appealing look. "So much may depend on my seeing him once more that I dare not choose but to go. How am I to get to the station, though, in time for the ten o'clock mail, I wonder? It's nearly nine now, and five miles on such a night as this would take me more than an hour to walk."

"Walk you cannot, John," answered his wife, diverted easily from her first feeling of personal vexation by the dilemma her husband was placed in. "I know," she cried quickly—"the man who brought this message must go past Mr. Holland's; I will write a note asking him to send Arnold and their dog-cart up for you. Anything is better than walking. I know he will do it for you."

Mr. Holland was the clergyman's church-warden and very good friend in all parish matters, and was always ready to do his rector a service, even to the extent of sending out his horse and man for a drive of ten miles. Mrs. Fergusson wrote her note hurriedly while her husband spoke to the telegraph official, who promised to go to Mr. Holland's at once.

When he had gone, Jane stood looking blankly from master to mistress, and then she said dolefully, "And please, sir, what's to become of us?"

"Become of you? Why, you will stop and take care of the house, to be sure," said her master rather shortly. "Just take my thickest great-coat and air it by the kitchen fire, please, and bring me back my boots. We will have the horse up before I am ready if you don't look brisk." Then, closing the study door upon himself and his wife, he added, "But I don't half like leaving you at such a time and with only one servant, too, and all that money in the house. How awkwardly things happen sometimes."

He was so heartily concerned, so evidently uneasy, that, as a matter of course, his wife cheered him up by assuming a bright courage that she was far from feeling. She fetched his coat and helped him on with it and even made him take some supper—a hurried, stand-up affair—but

anything, she said, was better than going hungry on a journey; then she found a big umbrella, winter gloves and a thick rug, which, if they got soaked in the rain, could come back in the dog-cart; and all these preparations made, she lighted a candle and held out her hand. He understood the gesture.

"God bless them!" he said and followed her up-stairs to where the children slept, to give their little sleeping faces a farewell kiss.

As he stood by their bed he heard the horse coming up to the door—the half hour had passed too quickly; but another thought struck him at the last moment.

"Don't leave that money down stairs all night, Kate; put it in my dressing-room; or, stay, put it in your's; and he pointed to a door partly overhung with a curtain.—"That's the safest room in the house. Good-by, my darling; I will telegraph in the morning in time for the post-man to bring the message. If I'm not back to-morrow, get Allen and his wife to sleep in the house. God bless you! Good-by."

Another moment and he was gone and Jane and her mistress looked too very lonely and deserted females indeed, as they stood peering out into the darkness, listening to the receding wheels.

"Come, Jane, this will never do," said her mistress at last, wiping some rain drops and drops of another nature from her face. "Let us see that all the doors and windows are fast; then you had better get your supper and we will make haste to bed."

But Jane liked a grievance occasionally, and being a little bit of a coward she felt bound to make the most of her situation. She declared if it were not for leaving her mistress alone, she would go, then and there, and fetch Mr. Allen, the schoolmaster, up to come and protect them during the night; "for, oh! the awful things she had read in the paper only the week before of lone houses being robbed, and the master being beat and the maid's mouth tied up!" At this her mistress began to laugh.

"I do think, Jane, I must tie your mouth or you will make me nervous. Get your supper and come and tell me when you are ready for bed."

Then she herself re-entered the study and sat down to collect her thoughts somewhat after the hurry and turmoil of the last half hour.

This illness of her father-in-law! Would he relent at the last and let her husband share his property with his other children? Differences arising out of John Fergusson's marriage with a dowdless woman, fomented by petty family jealousies, strengthened by the independent attitude the young man had assumed—such differences had been after all the heaviest grief of Mrs. Fergusson's married life. And now she wondered and pondered on them till the clock on the chimney-piece struck the hour of ten and startled her out of her meditations.

"This is the night," she thought, "for winding that time-piece up; and she sought among the ornaments for the key. In her search she found something she had not expected—this letter, not in an envelope, slipped behind the time-piece, most likely, as soon as read:

"DEAR SIR—The sum you name in your letter of the 6th—i. e. £70—will be remitted to you in the form you request on Monday the 10th inst. The receipt of Mr. Holland will be quite sufficient. We beg to remain yours obediently,
"WM. & FRED. MATHERS,
"Mang's of Fordham Savings Bank."

"Oh, John, you careless man!" murmured his wife; "and yet you say you never leave anything about! This is the 10th; so that's been lying there three days, I suppose. I'm very glad Sarah has been out most of the time!"

"If you please, m, I'm going up stairs now as soon as I have cleared these things away," said Jane, entering with a respectfully aggrieved air; "and glad I shall be to get to bed; for what with the night being so rough, and master his goin' off so suddint, I feel all queer like and as if I had the cold shivers runnin' down the spine of my back."

When the servant left the room Mrs. Fergusson remembered her husband's injunction, took the bags of money from the desk, and carried

them to the room he had desired, there locking them securely in a small closet or safe.

This done, she went and stole her youngest-born, Ruth, from her little cot and carried her off to her own bed. A lingering good-night over her darling Rosie, the six-year-old daughter, whose sweet, tender young face looked wonderfully like her mother's and soon Kate Fergusson was sleeping by her child, with her husband's likeness under her pillow and a prayer for his quick return filling even her sleeping thoughts.

It seemed to the mistress of the house that she had slept so long that morning must be near, when she awoke with an inexplicable feeling of something, or some one, near her.

"What is it?" she cried, starting up in the bed, and instinctively catching the sleeping child in her arms.

No answer.

Only a distinct sound of breathing, and then of a movement like a hand feeling along the wall—toward her!

She began to tremble violently; nothing but the presence of the child on her panting bosom saved her from fainting.

"Who is it?" she cried, her voice so shaking and hollow that it awakened Ruth, who clung to her, sleepy and scared.

This time she had answered.

"We will do you no harm," a voice spoke out of the darkness, "if you give up that money you've got."

And then, before Mrs. Fergusson could muster courage and breath to speak, another voice, out of the room apparently, added in a rough undertone, "And tell her to look sharp about it, too!"

"Two of them! O God, help me!" she whispered to herself, and Ruth began to break into screams and sobs.

"Keep that brat quiet," angrily muttered the voice on the landing, "and don't keep us here all night!"

Now surely if ever a woman was in a miserable plight, Mrs. Fergusson was that woman. Not a house nearer than the Hollands', a full quarter of a mile off; no soul near to help, for Jane, who worked hard by day, slept hard by night, and slept, moreover, in a queer little room at the very top of the house; all alone—worse than alone, utterly helpless, and a woman who confessed to the usual feminine share of cowardice.

Still she drew her breath, and there flashed from her heart a cry for help; and then, for a few brief moments, she thought—thought with all her mind and soul—was there any way for her out of this?

And her reason told her there was none.

"Come," said the voice in her own room, "I'm a good-tempered chap enough, but my mate's in a hurry; don't provoke him. Look alive, and tell us where to find the swag—money!"

She groaned and shook and all her limbs turned cold, as the voice drew nearer and nearer; and at the last words a heavy hand was laid upon the bed. Then, further to torment her, came the thought that once this money were gone, there would be none to meet the people with—the people who had saved it week by week, day by day, all the past year! Heavy drops ran down her shaking form, her hands turned numb, and her lips clammy and cold, while the beating of her heart was like the quick tolling of a bell—louder, louder till it deafened her.

"I'll find a way to make her speak," growled the second voice. "Here's another kid in the room." Then, in one instant, a thin streak of light shot across the landing and the next—

"Mother, mother, MOTHER!" shrieked Rosie's voice; and at that sound Ruth redoubled her cries, and the unhappy mother sprang up, clasping one child, mad to protect the other.

"Silence, you fool!" said the man by her, speaking harshly for the first time. "You'll drive that fellow you do to the child a mischief, if you won't do as I tell you. Keep down, won't you?" For she was struggling wildly to pass him, to get across to

the room to Rosie—Rosie, whose cries were sounding strangely stifled. "Look here, if you don't give up this game, by the Lord, he'll knock you on the head, if I don't." And clasping one wrist like a vice, the man held her fast, while with the other hand he turned on the light from a small lantern slung at his side. She lifted her eyes slowly, as fearing whom she might see; but there was little enough visible of the burglar's face—a wide hat, a thick reddish beard, and a loose rough gray coat were all she saw.

"Now," said he, "you're plucky enough for a woman, but I can't waste all the night talking to you;" and then he gave her a look that made her shiver from head to foot anew. "Bundle those two brats of your's into one bed, and come and get us what we want."

She seemed powerless now, and her soul fainting within her as she crept after the tall dark figure, over the landing, into Rosie's room.

"Oh, my child!" cried the poor woman, and essayed to run to the little bed where lay the small figure, pinioned down by the heavy grasp of a taller, darker man than her own captor.

"Hands off, missus!" growled the jailer, while Rosie, uttering cries of mingled fright and joy, writhed and twisted like an eel to slip into her mother's arms.

"Hands off, now! Just put that other one in here along of this one and I'll take and turn the key on 'em both, while you take us yonder to what we're lookin' for."

No choice again but to obey; two passionate kisses and a low "God keep you;" and between the two men she was marched from the room, followed by the children's pitiful cries, their wild, frightened sobs.

As she passed out, "May I?" she asked, catching at a shawl which hung over a chair. They assented, shortly, and she wrapped it round her shivering figure, and prepared to take them to where their booty lay. She led them then down the first short flight of stairs to the door which, as we have already said, was partly overhung with a curtain. This door opened into a room which had been used by Mr. Fergusson's predecessor as an oratory. In a deep recess, at the further end, had been placed a small altar, upon which had stood a tall bright crucifix. But now the room was bare and almost empty. The doors—for there were two—fastened with a spring on being pushed to, and could only be opened by a hand accustomed to the task, and they also were furnished with heavy bolts on the outside; one door opened on the landing; the other, a smaller one, in one side of the recess at the further end, led into a bedroom.

Here, as the kitchen clock below struck the hour of three, stood the strange trio—the muffled, disguised men, the trembling, white-faced woman.

But one of them carried a light; the other had left his lantern outside.

"Now," said the darker of the men, "here's the room, you say. We'll finish this business pretty quick;" and he added, with a rattling oath to his comrade, that they'd been kept too long by half already.

The small safe let into the wall, was directly before them; below it four drawers reached down to the floor; in the lower of these, at the back of it, Mrs. Fergusson had laid the key.

She pointed silently to the drawer which they at once dragged out, with too much strength, for they jerked it quite out on the floor. One of them suddenly turned particular about making a noise, and bade their unwilling helper "shut that door." As she felt the spring catch securely beneath her hand there suddenly flashed upon her a thought—a hope—a way of escape for herself, a way of saving yet that fatal money.

From the look the men had cast around the room, Mrs. Fergusson was sure they knew nothing of their whereabouts.

"Shut that door!" the man had said, and never so much as cast a look toward where was the other door, completely concealed in the shadow of the recess.

Every pulse beating wildly, she glanced furtively across the room. Through the tall, narrow, church-like window yonder she could see the moon struggling through thick clouds, and she could see—her sight quickened by the peril of the moment—she could see a faint thread of light on one side, which told her that the further door stood unlatched.

"Oh, Heaven help me, and give me time!" she prayed; but her hand shook so that it could scarcely obey her swift thought. Another moment and she took in her exact position—the men stooping over the keys, the lamp on the floor—and the next she had flung her shawl over the lamp, darted across the floor, out into the room beyond, and flung to the door with all her force.

Yet more to be done. She drew the bolts with frenzied speed, above, below—that way was safe; then, with the passionate strength of the moment, she sped through the room, out on the landing to the curtained door and made that fast from without, while the furious captives beat at it from within; and then—ah, then, poor thing, her fortitude forsook her, and a thousand fears she had not counted on most cruelly beset her.

The frightful oaths and curses that reached her as she leaned panting by the wall filled her with horror; the heavy blows upon the panels filled her with dismay. They would escape yet. Her children—on them they would wreak their vengeance. At the thought her cries and tears broke forth. "They will die and I shall have killed them!" she cried out; and then blindly reaching forth to feel her way back to their room, all sight, sense and sound, seemed suddenly to desert her. She slid down a few stairs, clinging to the rail; then, losing her hold, fell heavily on the stone floor of the hall below.

Mr. Fergusson had reached his nearest station in safety, had sent back the wraps his careful wife had guarded him with and started by the ten o'clock train to Fordham.

The rain beat on the windows as the train flew along in the darkness, and presently a prolonged whistle told him they were approaching a certain junction where he would have to wait some ten minutes or so.

Two or three lamps on the platform by which they drew up showed some few passengers and a couple of sleepy porters. Another train had just come in from the opposite direction, from Fordham, now only fifteen miles distant; and some of its passengers had alighted and were making their way past the line of carriages.

Looking out upon his fellow travellers, without much curiosity or interest, Mr. Fergusson caught sight of a face which he had little expected to see. Shouting to a porter to open the door of his compartment, he sprang out and grasped the arm of a man very much like himself—in fact, his own elder brother.

"George," he exclaimed, "were you going for me? Is my father worse?"

"What on earth do you mean, and wherever did you spring from?" was the answer he got, accompanied by a look of profound amazement. "Why, man alive, have you gone crazy, that you stand staring at me so?" And George Fergusson checked a disposition to laugh at his brother's bewildered expression only when he saw the pallor that overspread his face.

"Oh, George," he said, with a gasp, "did you not telegraph to me this evening that father had had another fit?"

"Most certainly I did not."

"Oh, my wife, my wife!" said the clergyman; and then he staggered to a heap of luggage and sat down and hid his face in his hands. His brother saw the matter was serious, so he let his own train pass on without resuming his journey and was soon in possession of all the explanation John Fergusson could give him.

"Porter," he asked, "what time does the night mail go through to Wheelborough?"

"One-twenty-five, sir," answered the man; "reach Wheelborough two-fifteen." The distance was twenty-five miles; the present time a quarter, or, by the