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THE RASH WISH;

OR,

LOVE AND PASSION.

"I wish he were dead—I hope he may never enter this house again alive!" and even as the rash words were spoken, the lips that gave them utterance quivered, a half suppressed fear that the dreadful wish might be realized, and the little pale, nervous woman, sank down upon a chair, and gave vent to a burst of passionate tears—half of anger and half of penitence.

Adela Raymond was neither so young nor beautiful now, as ten years ago when she stood, a proud, happy bride, beside him who had won her pure, girlish heart, and pronounced those solemn vows, that through weal or woe, were to bind to him alone through life; yet down deep in her heart there remained a green spot, where love still grew as bright and fresh as in her sunniest days, save when the rank weeds of passion strove for a brief season to root out the more gentle and unassuming, but deeply rooted plant.

And if the disappointment, trials and vexations of life ever render woman pardonable for irritability or ill-humor, surely Adela Raymond could claim the excuse. Scarcely had two years of wedded bliss been enjoyed, ere William Raymond—under the pernicious influences of those with whom his business obliged him to associate—began to tread the downward path, which sooner or later leads to irretrievable ruin.

When first the fatal truth burst upon Adela, the shock seemed too great for her sensitive nature to bear, and her heart appeared utterly crushed beneath its weight of woe. But life's thread is sometimes very tenacious—it will stretch on, through long years of sorrow, ere it snaps assunder.

And so Adela, when the first shock had passed, nerve her soul to bear with strength and fortitude the impending fate that she feared awaited her, and then in earnest, tearful accents, besought her loved husband to shun the wily temper that was fast winding his insidious coils around the poor, deluded, unresisting victim.

Days and months lengthened into long, weary years, and still Adela continued her pleadings, and not a harsh nor unkind word escaped her lips; she understood enough of human nature to know that what loves persuasive eloquence cannot overcome, severity can never conquer.

But William Raymond heeded not the tears and entreaties of her whom he had pledged himself to love and cherish, and each succeeding year saw him sink lower and still lower in that pit of degradation, at the bottom of which yawns a drunkard's grave. Business was neglected, accounts forgotten, and work of any kind abandoned for the tavern and the gambling-house, where alternate day and night found him with his even more dissolute and wretched companions. Poverty soon came striding across over his threshold; their gaunt grim want, until all that remained of former luxury—and almost of comfort—had gone to satisfy the demands of hunger.

Then it was that Adela's long tried patience gave way, and frequent and violent were the storms of passion that burst from those lips which had never breathedught but love and tenderness. Ah! she had forgotten to ask for patience and wisdom to bear the heavy burdens of her afflictions. She had ever been a fragile flower—wholly unfitted by nature to bear the chills, rough winds that powerfully slept mercilessly over her; and yet for many long months the toil of her delicate hands had been the only means of support for herself and three helpless little ones, aye, and had oftentimes (through seas) furnished her unfeeling husband with the means of procuring the exciting beverage, the effects of which sank him beneath the brute. It was after one of these cruel demands upon her slender earnings that made by the unfeeling husband that Adela gave vent to the exclamation which opens this little sketch. Raymond had just left the room where his wife was pursuing her wearisome toil with half the proceeds of her last week's labor in his own indolent hand but had not reached the outer door ere those rash bitter words fell upon his ear. Had he been intoxicated then, he would have turned back and retorted—perhaps with blows; but for once he happened to be perfectly sober, and a sudden and stern purpose instantly entered his mind, which a dogged resolution enabled him to carry into effect.

Her wish shall be gratified—I never will enter this house again alive,' so help me God,' and with this oath upon his lips, and a curse in his heart for her whom he had driven to the utterance of that terrible wish, William Raymond turned his feet from the home which his own vile passions had made wretched.

Darkness shadowed the earth, Cynthia sat high upon Night's sable throne, and yet the husband returned not; and there, in that scantly-furnished room, by the dusky light of one small lamp, sat Adela, straining her tear-dimmed eyes to finish the garment upon which she had been stitching since early dawn. The non-arrival of her husband did not alarm her, for very often were his nights spent in those gateways to eternal ruin through which thousands annually enter but to plunge into the dead sea beyond.

Often was she obliged to lay down her work, for the tears fell so thick and fast as to blind her entirely; for memory was busy at her heart, and in the gloom and darkness of that little room, she was living over the last ten years that had been added to her young life.

Away back through the long vista, she beheld a fair, fragile girl, the only bud upon the parent stem, and on that account all the more tenderly cherished surrounded by every appliance that parental affection could suggest, until another came and bore her away, to be cherished and worn on his bosom, as she then thought, the end of life's journey. Again in memory she wept over her father's grave—that kind father, who, had he lived, might now shield her from cruel want; again she saw her mother, bearing bravely up for a short season against the cruel stroke that swept away her only means of support; but at length, sinking down beneath consumption's fatal gripe, until her loved form was laid beside that of the husband and father, and she was left to tread her future, dark, dreary path, with none to counsel, encourage or assist.

Then she thought of all the sorrows, and privations, and sufferings of the last few years, and all caused by him who once professed to love her more than life—him whom she felt she still loved more than all things else, even though in a moment of anger she had uttered the dreadful wish that he were dead; and that fearful imprecation rose up before her she shuddered, lest it might be fulfilled.

"Oh, if he should die before I ever see him again, I could not survive the pangs of regret that my rash temper has caused me. God forgive me that terrible sin, and I will try henceforth to set a seal of patience upon my lips," and instinctively she was aware, Adela dropped upon her knees, and poured out her soul to Him who alone is near when all other help fails.

A peaceful calm filled her soul as Adela laid her weary head upon her pillow that night, and she resolved to commence a new life; and if she could not be the means of reclaiming her erring husband, she would instruct her children in those paths that eventually lead to eternal life. She arose in the morning, and knelt again and prayed for strength to support her in every trial that might lay before her that day, and then calmly prepared to enter again upon her unceasing toil.

And divine strength was needed. Towards night a letter was brought her by the post, and with trembling hands she broke the seal and read as follows:

"Adela,—Yesterday you wished me dead, and if your wish cannot be immediately granted in full, it shall in part at least. I have shipped on board a 'man-of-war,' and will never trouble you with my presence again." WILLIAM."

Adela gave one wild shriek, and fell fainting to the floor. Her little children clung, frightened and crying to her inanimate form—believing her dead—but the eldest, a bright, noble boy of nine years, with the thoughtfulness of a maturer age, brought water and bathed her face and caressed her hands until animation was restored, and she sat once more in her chair with all the depth of her misery pictured upon her pale face. Not one word or token of love, or even regret at parting from her, who had borne and suffered so much for him—with no thought of wife, children, or home, in his heart, save of rash words that his cruelty had called from her lips, he had gone—gone, never to return. And she had driven him away. Oh, what would she not now give to recall him once more to her side—how she would work day and night for him and utter no complaint.

After the first shock of her agony had subsided, Adela began to think of her future. How was she to act—what was she to do? she sought help from heaven, and found strength and peace in seeking Divine assistance.

And now there they sit—the past long ago forgiven, and now all forgotten, in the blissful present.

Oh, never ascended more fervent thanksgivings to heaven than were poured forth from those two reunited hearts on that eventful evening, and never a happier, more loving pair traveled side by side to the end of life's journey.

William Raymond, now wholly cured of his thirst for the intoxicating beverage entered again upon his business avocations of life, and after ten years had passed, he, with his noble, manly boy, William Raymond, jun., as partner, became the wealthy owners of a large mercantile establishment.

And all through coming years, whenever any of those petty vexations and annoyances which must sometimes unavoidably intrude, even upon the happiest household shrine, tempted Adela Raymond with an impatient thought, the memory of those five long years of sorrow, and of her narrow escape from a widowhood bedstricken! He was dead then—her rash wish had been granted—he

had died without knowing how deeply she had repented, how much she had suffered, and how dear he still was to her loving woman's heart. These were the thoughts that rushed upon Adela's mind as she read the terrible lines. No human power could now alleviate the keenness of her anguish, no earthly consolation pour the healing balm into her torn and bleeding heart.

Until now she lived in the hope that her husband would one day return, and give her the opportunity of proving her great love; but now all hope died out of her heart, and she would surely have sunk down beneath this accumulation of sorrow had not the Father sustained her.

Two more sad, dreary years rolled by, and then there came one who had been the playmate of her childhood, and offered her protection, and the heart that had been hers ever since those juvenile years, though he had judiciously shunned her presence during all her wedded life. But she, had no love to bestow; it was all, all buried beneath the green sea wave, never, never again to be awakened to a new life.

Had her husband died a natural death, at home, where she would have had the consolation of administering to his dying wants, and smoothing the dark passage for a short season against the cruel stroke that swept away her only means of support; but at length, sinking down beneath consumption's fatal gripe, until her loved form was laid beside that of the husband and father, and she was left to tread her future, dark, dreary path, with none to counsel, encourage or assist.

But now the attempt to win her would be worse than useless, and so, with the assurance of her friendship, he left her, feeling that never here could he be permitted to enjoy the companionship of her whom he had so long loved.

A few weeks after this event, Adela Raymond sat one evening in her little, neat, and comfortable, but scantily-furnished room, with her children around. It was Saturday night, and the labor and toil of the week had been laid aside for the higher duties of preparing the mind for the Sabbath.

A little table stood beside, upon which lay the well-worn family Bible that her mother had bequeathed to her upon her death-bed, with the solemn injunction to peruse its sacred pages often, that from them she might derive consolation in any of the various trials and afflictions that beset life's changeful pathway.

Adela had just finished a chapter, when lay the well-worn family Bible that her mother had bequeathed to her upon her death-bed, with the solemn injunction to peruse its sacred pages often, that from them she might derive consolation in any of the various trials and afflictions that beset life's changeful pathway.

"Adela, have you forgotten your erring but repentant husband?" and the arms of the weary worn man were stretched towards her.

"William, my husband! God be praised!" and she sank fainting on his bosom.

The story is soon told. William Raymond, with three others, had clung to pieces of the wreck, and after two days' suffering on the raging sea, without food or water, they were floated to a desolate island, and there, for two years, had sustained life with fruits and roots, and such fish and game as they could procure. Then they were discovered by a passing vessel, their necessities attended to, and they eventually arrived in England.

We will not attempt to describe the rejoicings of the long estranged husband; he found himself at the mercy of the waves, with the prospect of speedy death before him, that his heart softened towards his long-neglected wife. But in those two days while floating between life and death, he had lived over his ten years of wedded life, and in them he could find nothing wrong with which to accuse her; conscience true to its mission, constrained him to acknowledge himself the guilty one; and he there vowed that were his life spared to return, the future should atone for the past. And there, too on the boisterous waves, he had called upon him who alone is able to rescue from death; His name had never before dwelt upon his lips, save with irreverence and profanity; and through those two dreary, desperate years, he had not forgotten often to call upon His sacred name, and implore Divine assistance.

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He was dead then—her rash wish had been granted—he

THE WOOD FIEND.

BY SYLVANUS COBB, JR.

Monmouth was a market town. It was not a very pretty place, but then its central position gave it advantages which larger towns did not possess. The market was here once a week—on Thursday's at which were bought and sold everything either raised or consumed in the country. Horses, cattle, meat, vegetables, butter, eggs, milk, together with various articles of "Dry and West India" goods, were to be found for sale on market days. And Monmouth had been a market town for many years—for so many that even the oldest inhabitant remembered no time when it was anything else.

North from Monmouth stretched away a fine agricultural country without other break than a few hills and streams, while in the south lay a deep wood which had never been cleared up because the ground was so swampy, and wet and cold. One edge of this wood rested almost upon the village, being within two miles of the market ground. It was some eight miles broad, from Monmouth across to the next town south, and in length it extended through a boggy vale of twenty miles. It was called Monmouth wood, and was really a dismal place, full of bats, and owls, and all sorts of horrid serpents and deadly reptiles.

The next town south of Monmouth was Emmerton, and the road lay through this deep wood, over which all the people who lived in the southern towns had to travel. One market day—it was a damp, dismal day, and the sales were all effected under cover—the whisper went round that the wood was haunted. Those who lived north took up the theme freely while those who lived south would not believe it, as they had seen nothing of it.

That very night, however, as the first party of straphounds started for home they saw the Wood Fiend! It was dark when they entered the wood, and they had got about one third of the way through, when they beheld a sight that froze their blood with terror. Right ahead of them, and directly in the road, stood a gigantic being with eyes and mouth of fire, and flames issuing from his nostrils. He raised his arms aloft like the huge branches of a tree, and uttered a yell that made the very earth quake. The party turned back and rode towards Monmouth as quickly as possible. To all whom they met they told the fearful story, and some turned also back, while others kept on. But those who thus kept on their way did not go far. They met the horrible fiend in the wood, and then retraced their steps in haste. So that all who lived beyond Monmouth wood saw few that started off before dark, were forced to remain in the market town over night. But Mark Hatton, the jolly old host of the "Hound and Stag," gave them good entertainment. His inn was spacious, for sudden storms often caused great numbers of people to remain over night, and he wished to accommodate them.

But Mark laughed at the good people's fears, and swore their eyes had deceived them. He offered to go out with them and see the fiend. Some of those who had only turned back upon the assertion of others resolved to accompany him; so when the fat host was mounted he found six men on his back. Off they started, and when they had entered the wood several of them began to think of returning. The place was so dark that the road could with difficulty be seen; the atmosphere was damp and ungrateful; the moaning of the wind through the great trees was mournful; and then the dull croaking of the frogs, and the hootings of owls made up the sum of surrounding horrors. Yet the laughing jests of the jolly host gave them new courage and they kept on.

But not far—not far. Suddenly, as they turned a point where the road bent into a deep morass, the gigantic form of the fiend loomed up before them. It seemed at least as large as a house, and the roar which came forth from its fiery mouth was like a clap of thunder in power. With a continuation of yells which were fairly deafening the huge monster swung his massive body forward and caught the poor host in his arms. The wretch howled in fear and agony, but his companions dared not help him. They turned their horses' heads and galloped back like lightning.

It was ten o'clock when the six men reached the Hound and Stag, and when they told their story the people were filled with horror. The host's wife rushed out of the house, and before any one could stop her she was gone. Some of the more venturesome proposed that they should all go in a party and see what had become of the poor publican; yet none started.

At just midnight Mark Hatton entered the bar room, where most of the male guests were seated—some of them keeping watch, and others nodding under the influence of great doses of punch taken to keep their spirits up. This sudden appearance of the host seemed to operate for the moment fearfully upon the guests, for they regarded him almost in the light of a ghost. He was pale and wan; his garments torn to tatters, and his face and his hands covered with blood. The people crowded about him, but he would say nothing of his adventure.

"Don't ask me!" he gasped. "Don't ask me. I mustn't speak our word, if I don't ask you. Oh! God have mercy on her rash wish had been granted—he

me!" And this last ejaculation he repeated many times.

Much effort was made but not one word would the host utter as to his interview with the Wood Fiend.

On the following morning the people went home in a body, and they cleared the wood without seeing anything to alarm them.

On the next market day the time was so much spent in talking about the terrible fiend of Monmouth Wood that the sales lagged, and the work was not done until dark. After this hour most of those who lived in and beyond Emmerton would on no account go home. Yet a few who were not present on the preceding market day resolved to push on. They reached the wood, and had passed half through it when a low, rumbling voice, like the growling of a wild beast, fell upon their ears. It was so dark that they could see nothing save the dim outlines of the road, and they were lost upon the point of pushing on when—*Mercy!* A cry of horror burst from their lips that made the wood resound. There—directly before them seemed to have come up bodily from the earth—stood the Fiend! He uttered a terrific roar, and the foremost horseman dropped from his saddle. The others turned back and fled in wild dismay.

When they reached the inn they found one man missing. They dared not go back for him. They waited—one two-three hours—until past midnight, and then he came. He could only tell that the moment he saw the Fiend he felt a blow upon the head, and that he remembered no more until he found himself lying in the grass, all alone, his horse gone, and his head dizzy and aching.

Ere long the country became aroused.

The horrible spectre was often seen and at length no one could be persuaded to go through the wood after nightfall. On market day those who could do so finished up their business and got home before dark, while the less fortunate who chanced to have their wares left on their backs till sundown, were forced to remain all night. Parties had scoured the woods by daylight, but nothing could be found; and the good people began to fear that some dire calamity was to happen, for the Fiend had distinctly spoken to a traveler one night, the word "REVENGE."

It was nearly six months from the first appearance of the Wood Fiend that Jack Stanton returned to Emmerton from a cruise at sea. Jack was a wild fellow about thirty years of age, the master of the boxing and wrestling gangs, and leader in all athletic sports. He was a powerful man—the most powerful in the country so far as physical strength was concerned, and as bold and fearless as he was powerful. And he had sound sense, too.

Jack heard the story in all its lights and shades, and he pondered deeply upon it. He went to the host of the Hound and Stag, and having heard his story he shook his head and said 'twas dreadful.

"I should want to be caught in the wood after dark," he said, as he turned away.

"Oh! you'd never see your home again!" returned the host, very feelingly. On the next