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The White Apron.

BY FANNIE B. DAMON.

Something about the cotton mill had broken down which must be set in order by speedtime the next morning, and John Newman was one of the machinists to whom the repairs were allotted. He had eaten a good supper, taken a rest, and gone whistling away to his heavy and disagreeable work. The children, disappointed to lose the chief factor in the evening's frolic, were ready to go to bed by eight, leaving the house to an unusual and lonesome quiet.

Mrs. Newman softly opened the door and stole out upon the piazza. The hour was safe and restful in the grassy court. The moon swung in a sea-green sky, against which maples lifted their heavy plumage. Towering above them, an elm flung its glorified leafage, fountain-like, over the roof of the little red cottage. Mrs. Newman's heart swelled with gratitude for the beauty that shone about her humble dwelling, and, as she walked slowly up the court, by a hedge of cinnamon roses, she repeated aloud, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."

Not so goodly, indeed, as Mrs. Trowbridge's house, which stood at the head of the court. Mrs. Trowbridge was not exactly rich, perhaps, but she must handle ten times as much money as her nearest neighbor. Neighbor! Mrs. Newman laughed at the thought. Mrs. Trowbridge kept a servant or two, and rode in her own carriage. It never occurred to her, of course, that the woman who did her own work in the little red cottage was a neighbor. Little Miss Trowbridge sometimes ventured down the court and looked longingly toward the Newman girls, playing at their own sweet will, but she was always followed, seized by the arm, and marched back to her "proper lot and place." Evidently the Trowbridges understood that children are unswervingly democratic when left to themselves.

Between the two houses, in the bleaching moonlight, stretched a clothesline hung with the Trowbridge linen. Mrs. Newman's eye, running along the folds of heavily-laced underwear, rested on a small white apron, suspended by two dainty shoulder-straps.

"I wish Kittie had an apron like that," she said to herself. "That style just suits me."

She advanced a step or two, hesitated, laid her hand on the apron, looked nervously up the court, snatched the garment from the line, and glided swiftly into the dark cottage. Hurriedly she struck a light and drew down the curtains. Clearing the table at a bound, she spread out a newspaper, and on the newspaper smoothed out the little white apron.

"I never did such a thing in my life before," she thought, as she looked about excitedly for the shears. "I wouldn't have John or the children know it for anything. But I don't see what possible hurt it can do any one. Oh, dear, where in the world did I lay those shears! Kittie must have had those shears!"

She was on the search, looking high and low, rushing about the room with a flaring lamp in one hand, when a sharp knock added to her excitement.

She thrust the apron under a sofa-pillow and threw the newspaper over it, before going to the door. She was confronted by a large, red-faced woman, whom she recognized at once as a servant from the house at the head of the court. Mrs. Newman's heart plunged frightfully, and she felt the color ebbing from her cheeks.

"I come down for the clothes you've just stole from the line."

Mrs. Newman retreated and set the lamp shakily on the table.

"I have stolen nothing from your clothesline," she protested, with an effort to keep her head high.

The woman with the red face laughed coarsely and pointed to the corner of a white ruffled garment protruding from under the sofa-pillow. She stepped up and pulled it out.

"I call that Susie Trowbridge's apron, what do you call it?"

"I suppose it is Susie Trowbridge's apron," admitted Mrs. Newman, steadying herself by a trembling grasp at the table, "but it isn't stolen."

"No, indeed, it's found," retorted the woman, with a sneer.

"But I mean I didn't take it to keep; I—I just thought I'd cut a pattern of it. See, I'd spread out this newspaper and was just going to—"

"Oh, of course!" broke in the woman, folding up the apron and turning toward the door. "But maybe 'twas just as well I happened to see you. You might have forgotten to bring it back, you know. Folks that live in this house do, sometimes. Got anything else tucked away here—towels, or napkins, or the like?"

"You are welcome to all you can find," said Mrs. Newman.

"Welcome or not, I reckon 'twould be all the same if I should get my hands on anything you'd cabbaged. I

give you warning that clothesline thieves had better keep shy of our premises. Mr. Trowbridge don't practice law just for the fun of it. You'll have to pay for this handsome. You'll be marster lucky if you get off without being took up."

Mrs. Newman was speechless. The moment the woman was gone, she dropped in a heap on the floor. She did not faint or cry out, but she felt that her misery was greater than she could bear. She cared nothing for the insulting and threatening words that rung in her ears,—she understood well enough how little they signified,—but she thought that she had foolishly placed herself under suspicion was the very gall of bitterness to her soul. Soon struggling to her feet, however, she crept out of the cottage, locking the door behind her. She dragged herself up the court and along the concrete walk to the Trowbridge house. She rung the bell and breathlessly awaited the appearance of her accuser.

"I am sorry to trouble you," she began, as soon as the door started from the latch, "but if it is a possible thing I feel that I must see Mrs. Trowbridge."

"'Twon't do no good," said the servant, crossly.

"What is it, Sarah?" called an impatient voice from within.

"Who is it that wants to see me?"

"Oh, it's the woman that lives in the court," answered Sarah, pausing on the sitting-room threshold with her arms akimbo. "She stole Susan's white apron from the clothesline, but I got it again. She hid it under a sofa-pillow. I told 'er she'd have to pay for it; and I dunno but she's come to settle."

"Dear me! I did hope we shouldn't get another light-fingered family down there, I wish that cottage would burn down. It's a constant menace to our peace."

"Oh, please let me go in," said Mrs. Newman, laying her hand on Sarah's brawny arm, but Sarah moved not an inch. Mrs. Newman was a little woman and, stooping quickly under a protruding elbow, she appeared in a blaze of light on the other side. She stretched out her hand imploringly toward Mrs. Trowbridge, and burst forth impetuously:

"I beg for pity's sake that you will let me set myself right. You may not care whether I stole the apron or not—you care that it be not stolen, of course;—but I mean it is likely, so that you do not lose it, you care very little whether I really intended to keep the apron or not. But I care a great deal, and I beg you to hear me a little further. I saw Miss Susan with the apron on the other day and I wished my Kittie could have one like it. And this evening I happened to see it on the line—so plain in the moonlight—and I thought I could cut a pattern of it in two minutes and hang the apron back on the line, and nobody be the wiser or be any the worse for it. I had it spread out on a paper on the table and was looking for the shears when I heard the rap, and it frightened me so that I did, indeed, thrust it under the sofa-pillow. It was all a mistake, oh, I admit it was a dreadful mistake—I never made such a mistake in my life before—it was a senseless way to do—but it is not true that I stole the apron, or that I ever stole anything, or ever shall."

"Well, I hope you never will," answered Mrs. Trowbridge, condescendingly, from her large easy chair, "yet I confess I can't understand how you could take the apron without leave or license if you are as honest as you pretend. Of course we can't feel quite safe about you after this. Whether you stole the apron or only borrowed it, you've acted very queer, now, haven't you? Besides, it isn't necessary that your girls should wear aprons like my girl. It isn't called for. Sarah, you may give her that apron now. I can't consent to have Susan wear it again. You know everybody has lived in that house. This woman may be well enough in the main, but give her the apron and let her keep it. That's all."

"I shall not take the apron," said Mrs. Newman, distinctly. "You can burn it or dispose of it in any other way you see fit. I ask you to forgive me for causing you so much annoyance, but I hope this"—she advanced and laid a bill on Mrs. Trowbridge's knee—"will pay you for your loss."

"Nonsense!" cried Mrs. Trowbridge. "Here, Sarah, give her back the money and send her home."

But Mrs. Newman hurried on as if she heard her not, and thanked God when she was once more under her own roof.

She sat up for John and told him the story before he was half through the little luncheon she had prepared for him.

"Would you have believed it of me, John?"

"Hardly," he said kindly, but gravely.

"And you think it was just about as bad as stealing, don't you?"

"I don't believe you've committed the unpardonable sin, dear,—no I don't; but you've made a serious mistake. It's never safe nor comfortable, nor economical, nor—just right to do anything that is the least bit unhand-d."

"Oh, don't I know it, John?" said his wife, brokenly.

"Did I ever do anything like it before? or will I ever again?"

"No, indeed, of course not. But we ought to consider that feeling sorry it happened and being certain it can never happen again isn't going to make everything just as it was before. Pretty likely some people will always keep an eye out on us after this. Then such things hang about one, somehow, and have a trick of turning up every now and then."

"Haven't I thought of all that, John?"

"Besides, I do think you ought to pay Mrs. Trowbridge for ruining her precious apron."

"Oh, I did pay her. I forgot to tell you that I gave her the two dollars I had put by for new bonnet trimmings."

"That's all right," said John. "My night's work brings me in about that much extra, so the bonnet trimming is secure."

"No, John, I shall wear the old bonnet trimming. I shall feel better to wear it. It will ease my conscience a little, I think. Besides, I've lost a good deal of my desire for purple and fine linen."

"And white aprons," said John, with a laugh.—Morning Star.

Tommy.

BY BERTHA E. BUSH.

Tommy was very annoying that day. The little red head was turned from one direction only to be whirled around toward the other, and his innocent, short-sighted blue eyes regarded everything but his book. Three times he was called to order, responding most promptly, but not staying in order a minute. At last when the most important point in the lesson was completely spoiled by a shriek from the unfortunate child who occupied the seat in front of Tommy, as his back was transfixed by a pin skillfully placed in that small boy's desk, Miss Brown's patience gave out. "Tommy," she said, "you may go to the closet," and Tommy marched out of sight and out of mind.

The number lesson went on, but interest lagged. Teddy Jones shifted his bare feet in curious fashion.

"What's the matter, Ted?" asked Miss Brown.

"The floor burns me."

Miss Brown stooped. It was certainly warm to the touch, and, with a perception that something was wrong, she sent the class to their seats and began to investigate. But it was too late. A sudden burst of smoke filled the room, and flame licked up from the corner. There was a panic-stricken rush to the back wall. "Go to your seats," commanded the teacher in a voice they dared not disobey. "Gather your books, pass through the cloak-room for your wraps, and march down the stairs in order," and with a superb self-command she marshaled those fifty frightened children in unbroken ranks down the long winding stairs to the outer air.

Room after room emptied itself as the children swarmed like bees from their smoking hive. The fire had been smoldering between the floors, and had broken out at once in several places. By the time the last teacher followed the double file of children out of the lower door the upper part was burning fiercely.

The fire engine came rushing up and the crowd that always assembles at the stroke of the fire bell. In ten minutes the quiet school yard was turned into a place of greatest tumult and confusion. Miss Brown stood in the midst of her flock much shaken but still with a feeling of elation that her pupils had marched out without a panic, when little Lucy Dalling, who was clinging to her skirts, gave a convulsive grasp to her hand.

"Teacher, teacher," she whispered, "Tommy Bell is in the closet."

The closet in that fire encircled room! and he would never think to come until she told him! For a second Miss Brown seemed turned to stone. Sight and hearing failed, and the agonizing sense of not being able to move, came to her like a terrible dream. Then a vision of the little red head in the midst of the flames roused her. Snatching a coat from the ground she wrapped it around her, and plunged through the door and up the stairs which were already burning.

"Stop her; she's gone crazy," yelled a bystander, but no one was quick enough. She groped her way to the door with the roaring of the flames sounding over her head like the rushing of a cataract. With a throb of thankfulness she perceived that the corner which held the closet was yet untouched by the fire, and at a bound she reached the door and pulled it open.

There in the kindly gloom stood Tommy, the tears of penitence still wet upon his freckled little cheeks, waiting in sincerest confidence for his teacher to come and let him out. She caught him in her arms and wrapped him in the coat while she made the passage across the flame-filled hall. It was impossible to go down the stairs now. She started toward a window in the adjoining room which the fire had not yet reached. But she

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