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THE STORY OF A FEATHER.

BY DOUGLAS JERROLD.

MRS. CRUMPET, AND PATTY.—CRAMP, THE
CARD-MAKER.

My first introduction to Patty had made me acquainted with the gloom and wretchedness of a London garret. I was, nevertheless, startled by the extreme misery about me. The room was rather a rook, a hole for useless lumber, than a place for a human being. The landlady, a little woman, could scarcely stand upright beneath the slanting roof; the gusty wind shook the small latticed window, and entered through broken panes, defying the rags and paper thrust therein to keep it out. In a corner, on the bare floor, was the bed or mat; and there, beneath a web of a blanket, lay Patty Butler. Poor thing! After my first surprise, I took a sad pleasure from her feeble voice. I heard sweet music from her feeble voice. They are changing, I thought, happily changing. A few more heavy days—some few restless, fevered nights, and that poor creature, dowered with the gentlest, purest spirit, will now smile down upon the injustice and iniquities of a world that now cast her, like a useless weed, into its foulest places.

As I continued to gaze upon her, I felt a strange curiosity to know her history, since we last met. There was something more than the pain of sickness in her face. Was it shame, I asked; and immediately felt mean for the suspicion. Had her affections been snared by heartless device—or had she, secretly, nurtured a love that, in its very hopelessness, consumed her? Yearning for sympathy where the world would sneer and mock at the desire, had she, in dumbness, suffered that inward bleeding of the heart, whereof more die than coroners dream of? There was a sad story in that shrunken face.—The history of the world is made of battles—conquests—the accession and death of kings—the doings of statesmen, and the tricks of law. This makes the vulgar story of the external world. Its deeper history is of the hearts, even of its lowest dwellers—of the ennobling impulses that swell them, of the unconquerable spirit of meekness which looks calmly upon terror, and turns even agony to patience. A London alley might produce a more gloriously heralded—if emotions could be quailed—than Poitiers or Blenheim.—How many a man whose only history is written in a baptismal register and undertaker's account, has conquered suffering stronger in its onset than a squadron! If true magnanimity awarded knighthood, how many who want even shoe-leather, have won their spurs!

With these thoughts passing in me, I continued to contemplate the poor girl before me. She lay wholly exhausted by the effort of striking the light; whilst Mrs Crumpet, with characteristic consideration for the weakness of her lodger, attempted not to disturb her, but, with due self-preservation, fortified her own system with a glass of wine—with another—and another. This done, she spoke.

'Well, I'm sure, my dear, if you'd only have let me know that you had such a friend about you, do you think I'd ever have put you in this room? Bless you! child, what do you think I'm made of?—you might have stayed in the other apartment.' (This, I afterwards found, was only the next garret, but then the easement was whole; the bed was of decent flock; it had more than one blanket, and had the elevation of a truckle.)

'Thank you, this will do very well,' replied Patty, with an effort: 'very well—for my time.'

'As I'm a Christian, you sha'n't sleep here another night,' answered Mrs Crumpet with vivacity. 'No: I promised the gentleman to do all I could for you, and my word's my bond. Well, if you don't remind me of my dear, lost child, Maria! Here the landlady wiped probably a tear from her eye, and again lifted the glass.

'What gentleman do you speak of?' 'There! now—if I hav'n't blabbed; and I promised never to say a word about him. But he is a gentleman—a real one; nothing sham in him, my dear: and more than all, you've only to get well—and ha! ha! why you look better while I talk to you, and you've colour in your face that a duchess might give her ears for!—Well, as I was saying, you've only to get well, to be made a lady of.'

'Pray tell me—pray do! Of what gentleman do you speak? I know no one—no one, who—' she, excited by the manner of her landlady, Patty lay incapable of further speech; and her heart—I was sure of it—fluttered like a bird.

'Come, child,' cried the gossip, 'you're faint—only a little faint. I've

brought you some wine; a glass—no little glass—will make you alive again.'

'I thank you—none—none,' said Patty, feebly.

'But you must, my love; you shall, my darling,' exclaimed Mrs Crumpet, and she stooped towards the bed, with the bottle and glass. 'There,' she cried, filling, 'and if I stay here all night, you shall, my angel, drink it.'

Patty cast a helpless look towards the landlady, and then resigning herself to the necessity, raised herself in bed. She stretched her hand towards the glass, and already had the liquor to her lips.—'Ha!' chuckled Mrs Crumpet, 'if the gentleman who brought that wine for you, could only see you now.' Patty instantly withdrew the glass, and in a faint, yet determined voice, said—'I will not taste a single drop.'

'But you must, my cherub,' cried Mrs Crumpet, with renewed vigor.

'Not a drop,' repeated Patty, 'until you let me know to whom I am to owe it.'

'Fiddlesticks!' exclaimed the landlady, 'that you'll know some day, and that shortly, if you'll only make yourself well and hearty. drink the wine, child.'

'No,' said Patty, with calm purpose, and she placed the glass upon the floor.

Again and again, Mrs Crumpet tried to prevail, but Patty was obdurate; she would not taste the wine until informed of the donor. This knowledge Mrs Crumpet refused to communicate: let me, however, do the poor woman justice. I verily believe she would have hesitated not a second to gratify her tenant, but for one circumstance; she had not the means. She was as ignorant of the benefactor who had left the wine and money as was Patty herself. She, therefore, with the cunning of an experienced gossip, thought she might guess the person of the stranger, could she only know her lodger's previous history. This she had often endeavored, but in vain, to learn. In the present instance, she determined to make an indirect levy upon Patty's gratitude; and, therefore, resolved to impart to her the history of Mrs Cramp in advance for Patty's own. To this politic end she bent her discourse.

'Well, my dear, I don't know if you ar'n't right. But who'd have thought that any body so young should have such caution—Ha! if my good friend Mrs Cramp had been like you! You've seen Mrs Cramp, my dear?'

'I have heard you speak of her,' said Patty, whose thoughts were plainly far away from the subject-talk of her landlady.

'To be sure, I'd forgot—you never have. Well, she was here to-night. She's been to a route of some sort, and so she was obliged to come here to dress.'

'To dress?' said Patty, languidly.

'Bless you, yes; I keep all her face things for her. You see, she's married to a man forty years older than she; and though every body thought he was dying when she had him, he's only dying now. Well, although he's as rich as King Solomon, he won't let his wife have a decent rag upon her. And so, poor soul! there's nothin left to her but to cheat her husband right and left.'

'Cheat him—her husband?' asked Patty.

'And as, by good luck, he's bedrid, why it's cheating made quite easy, my dear. The worst of it is for poor Mrs Cramp, although she's heaps of fine things, she musn't wear them in her own house. There, she must look no better than a cinder-vench; or else the old villain might go out of the world with malice in his heart, peril his own precious soul, and ent the wife of his bosom out of his will. Well, my dear, that would be dreadful, wouldn't it?' asked Mrs Crumpet in a tone that preternaturally called for an answer.

'Yes,' replied Patty, almost unconsciously.

'And so, to hinder that, whenever Mrs Cramp goes out, she comes here to dress, and then comes back and shifts her finery for her old clothes to go home in.—That's tricking the miser, isn't it?' cried the landlady with a laugh.

'Doubtless,' answered Patty.

'Now, here's this beautiful feather,' and Mrs Crumpet took me up, 'she's bought it at quite a bargain. But do you think she might show it to old Cramp?—Bless you, she might as soon take a crocodile into the house. Well, thank goodness! the old villain has his reward.—Bless you, his conscience must be like a cullendar. The devil's always at his bedside, that's one comfort.'

'What do you mean? What crimes has the poor man committed?' asked Patty.

'Why, no crimes in particular, as you and I should think 'em: only you see, he made all his money by making packs of cards. Now, in his old age, he's turned

so shocking religious! You'd never believe it; but he thinks he's haunted by all the kings and queens he ever passed across his counter. He vows they all peep in and gnash their teeth at him through the bed-curtains; and once—you'd have died a laughing to hear him, for 'twas nothing but the fleas, my dear—once he swore he was bitten all over by the Jack of clubs.'

'Poor man!' said Patty.

'Ha! if poor Mrs Cramp had only known him before she married! And that brings me back to what I was going to say, that it was so proper in you not to take the wine afore you knew who sent it.'

'Then you will tell me?' asked Patty.

'To be sure, I will, when you tell me how it was that you, with such friends, should have ever wanted any thing.—How wis it that you came in such a pickle to me? Without a farthing—without a—'

'My story is not worth the telling—is nothing,' said Patty.

'La!' cried Mrs Crumpet, unconscious of the truth she uttered, 'there's nobody as hasn't a story, if they know how to tell it. You must have had comforts about you.'

'I have found friends, in my worst afflictions,' answered Patty. 'When my mother died, and I was left homeless, I found a home.'

'And why did you leave it?' asked the landlady, 'afore you found a better?'

'Because I feared I caused unhappiness where I would have given my life to have given joy. Oh, so good a man—so kind, with such a gentle heart towards every thing!'

'Was he a married man, my dear?' asked the landlady.

'He was, answered Patty; whereupon Mrs Crumpet looked suddenly very sagacious, as though by inspiration she had solved the problem.

'I see,' said she; 'you and the wife couldn't agree. The woman was—'

'Kind—excellent—most kind,' cried Patty with animation, 'but weak and passionate.'

'And jealous, of course,' added Mrs Crumpet.

'I saw that my presence gave pain to her, and I left her house, determined, whatever might be my portion, to keep my hiding place a secret from herself and husband.'

'But he has found you out,' said Mrs Crumpet.

'Mr Lintley?' cried Patty.

'And has brought wine and left money for you; for Mrs Crumpet immediately concluded that the stranger must be the apothecary. 'What say you to 'at, child?' asked the lady.

Patty could say nothing. She was silent and in tears.

CHAPTER XVI.
AN INTRUDER.—A STOLEN WATCH.—PATTY NEW AFFLICTIONS.

'If it doesn't delight my heart to see you cry,' said Mrs Crumpet; 'twill do you good, my lamb—it always did me good when I was young. Ha! they don't make the bottles as they used to do!' she added, perceiving that all the wine was gone—a discovery which the wine she had already drunk scarcely enabled her to compass. 'That's Mr Abram,' she cried, as a loud knock at the street door rang through the house. 'He's always in such a hurry! Good-night, my darling—go to sleep and dream yourself a lady.' Saying this, the landlady managed to pick her steps from the room, in her vineous forgetfulness leaving me behind.

Heavily the hours passed! Poor Patty! I heard her lips move—heard her turn restless in the bed—moan and sigh, as though her little heart was vainly struggling with its sorrow. 'Twill soon be over—I then heard her murmur in a sweet resigned voice—'very soon;' and then she slept.

How I wished myself in the hand of some good fairy! Some beneficent sprite, piteous of human wrong and human suffering! Then, I thought, should this dark dim garret pass away! Then should rise a small, quiet nook of a place, nestled among trees, and carpeted with green around. And there a brook should murmur with a voice of out-door happiness—and a little garden brimming over with flowers, should mark the days, and weeks, and months with bud and blossom; and the worst injuries of time be fallen leaves! And there health in balm should come about her path, and her mind be as a part of every fragrant thing that shone and grew around her. And thus, poor, wearied creature!—she should draw her daily, gentle breath, till ripe for heaven.

I had fallen into a delicious lull with these thoughts, when I was startled by a sudden uproar proceeding from the lower part of the house—There were loud, blaspheming voices—the shrill cries of

women,—and on the following instant, the garret door was burst open, and a man rushed in. As he did so, his head struck against the lower roof, and he fell with a heavy weight upon the rotten floor, swearing and cursing with half smothered passion, which it cost him a hard effort to control. 'What's that? who's there?' exclaimed the terrified Patty.

'Nobody—silence, where's the window?' replied a voice, gaspingly. The window was in a second opened, and the intruder, I could perceive, endeavored to escape by it. The aperture was too small for his big, burly anatomy, and there for a brief space he remained with his shoulders wedged in the narrow space, on the sudden he was silent, and again and again I heard his hard breathing, and felt the garret shake as he strove to effect his purpose. The noise increased below, and coming steps and voices convinced me that the fellow was closely pressed. For a moment he paused, as to collect and intensify his energies for one last dreadful effort—for one gigantic struggle; another instant, and he had cleared the window.

As he did so, I thought I heard a heavy substance fall. Upon the escape of the intruder the garret was filled with watchmen and others, carrying lanterns; Mrs Crumpet, upon whom sleep and surprise had induced a beneficial sobriety, now bustling through them, with a loud voice, declaratory of the wondrous honesty of her habitation, and all the ledgers therein dwelling. Every body passed at the window. 'Abraham's gone—the bird's flown,' said a man, who, I imagined was in higher authority than his followers.

'Tis impossible, Mister Hardmouth, said a watchman; 'a moral impossible, out of this window. Why, it isn't no bigger than a rat-hole.'

'Ha, Snigs, don't you know what a man will do with Jack Ketch at his heels?' answered Mr Hardmouth. 'Well, better luck next time,' said the philosophic functionary. 'But I tell you what, Mrs Crumpet, the parish of Bloomsbury will give you a taste of Bridewell, if you don't keep decenter people about you.'

'! Mr Hardmouth! I'm a peaceable woman, and never troubles my head with my neighbours. I'm a woman as pays my church-rates, and can look the queen herself in her face! My husband could have bought and sold you all, every jack of you—but he's in heaven.' And Mrs Crumpet continued to spin off this old, homespun sort of yarn with practiced volubility: at the same time, as I observed, that she carefully covered a watch which had fallen from Mr Abram in the hurry of his departure, and which lay beneath the window. This operation she very adroitly effected; and then continued her self-assertion of punctilious honesty, the while with her foot she pushed and slid the watch close to Patty's bed.

'And who's here?' cried Hardmouth, taking a lantern from a watch-man, and holding it towards Patty, who cowered and trembled, with blushes in her face that seemed to scorch her. For the first time, I saw within her eyes a look of scorn, of passion. Her hands shook together, as she appealed to the landlady, 'Will not these men go?'

'To be sure they will—never fear 'em, my love,' cried Mrs Crumpet, seating herself upon the edge of the bed. 'And if they won't, I'll never leave you; never, my darling.'

'And so this is Mrs Abram, is it?' asked Hardmouth. 'Poor thing! Well, with all her husband's luck upon the road, he might house her better.'

'She is no Missus Abram; nor nothing of the sort. Don't cry, child, they're brutes, a waking honest people in their beds. I should like to know when you're going?' asked Mrs Crumpet of her intruders.

'When we've done a little more business. 'Off' to that, mother Crumpet; you and I are old friends and ceremony's lost between us.' Saying this, Mr Hardmouth—if justice be a woman, she ought specially to protect her sex—seized Mrs Crumpet by the arm, and swung her from her seat on the bed. 'Now my dear, where's the trap?' asked the officer with most familiar insolence.

'I know not what you mean—not a word—but leave me—only a few minutes, whilst I rise and dress.' Thus spoke Patty; and for a time she seemed to vanquish sickness by the strong sense of her offended modesty. There was a look of command in her face—a look in which were lost the care and feebleness of an hour since. 'I beg—I desire that you leave me.'

'To be sure—leave us,' exclaimed Mrs Crumpet in trembling notes, and imitating though with shrewish awkwardness, the imperative manner of Patty. 'How can we dress with men in the room? Are you lost to nature, you brutes?' cried the landlady.

'Mrs Abram can dress alone,' said Hardmouth, and so saying, he twirled Mrs

Crumpet from the attic, that lady loudly denouncing the brutality of the men. Nor was she content with this; for as she stood outside the door, she called loudly to Patty, telling her to show her spirit, and conjuring her upon her true womanhood, not to rise for the best man as ever walked upon shoe leather.

Patty, however, regardless of such conjuration, dressed herself with her best speed; nor did the multiplicity or combrousness of her garments very much retard the operation. Her offended feelings and energy of maidenly shame gave her strength and energy of purpose. Sickness seemed banished from her cheek; and in its place there was a look of sorrowful dignity—a mingling of grief and elevated patience.

'Come, Missus Abram, you're not dressing for the mayor's show,' called out Hardmouth.

'You may come in,' said Patty; and she sank upon the one chair.

The watchman and officers again entered the garret, and again with quickened looks did Mrs Crumpet press forward amongst them, watching with feline eagerness the motions of Hardmouth. 'I thought as much,' cried that wary servant of police as he kicked aside the bedding, and discovered a watch. Mrs Crumpet, in the vigor and confusion of her wrath, nearly bit through her thumb-nail, the watchman laughed and chuckled knowingly; whilst for Patty she sat unmoved, and seemingly careless of all that passed round her.

'The very watch as we have had information of, said Hardmouth turned over and over the bed, Mrs Crumpet all the while abusing him, and asking him if he knew where he would go to? She then nodded to Patty and whispered 'Never mind, my darling, for this little mishap—your friend will see you righted.'

'What friend?' inquired Patty, almost unconscious of the words.

'What friend? Why, you haven't forgot the wine and guinea I told you of?—These words brought to the mind of Patty the kind benevolent Lintley. The recollection was again too much for her. She looked about her—at the faces hurrying around her, and smitten by the remembrance of her past sufferings—by her belief in future misery—she hid her face in her hands and wept bitterly.

'It's a bad job, Missus Abram,' said Hardmouth; but if people was only to think of being found out afore they begun, why we might turn Newgate into another playhouse, and turnkeys might go a-begging. Come, he added, you must go along with us for this.' Patty, aghast with terror—worn with sickness—looked silently in the man's face. She tried to answer him, but the words choked her.

'What do you mean?' cried Mrs Crumpet, in a screech, and suddenly trembling all over.

'Mean! Why my meaning is as plain as Tyburn. This watch is stolen, and that girl—Mrs Abram, if she is Mrs Abram, and if she isn't she ought to be—why she knew all about it.'

'I know nothing—nothing,' said Patty, with a voice lessened to whispering, by terror.

'If you don't, man and wife is one flesh all the world over; and as it was your husband's bed—'

'I have no husband,' cried the girl.

'Well, that's your business, I can't help that,' said Hardmouth.

'No one—no one—I am alone in this cruel world—alone, with none but God to help me.'

Here Patty was again convulsed in tears; whilst Mrs Crumpet, infected by the sorrow, continued to weep and cry, 'If I had only known it had come to this!'

CHAPTER XVII.
A SHORT ACCOUNT OF A HIGHWAYMAN.—ARRIVAL OF MR LINTLEY.

The clamor raised by Hardmouth and the watch had had its due effect upon the neighborhood; many of the dwellers thereabout having a most educated organ for the music of justice or rather, of police.—Hence, in a brief time, the house was beset by curious inquirers, anxious to learn the peculiar offence committed, whether it rose to the tragic dignity of murder, or descended to the sneaking littleness of petty larceny. Nor was it wholly curiosity brought many to the door of Mrs Crumpet. There were some, who, very justly indignant at the prying propensities of the watch, knew not where they might step.—Nobody's house is safe! cried one. 'Waking honest people up in the dead of night!' cried others; whilst a few declared, upon the responsibility of their own invention, that one of Mrs Crumpet's lodgers had murdered a bishop on Hounslow Heath, and with a heathenish contempt of religion, had pawned the dead man's canocals. It was however, very creditable to the general sympathy, that every body expressed unbounded satisfaction at Abram's escape.—Much of this I heard where I lay, as it sounded from the street beneath; and I