

# The Day of Judgment

BY EDITH BARNARD.

When Asa Cutler stood in the hallway of the house which sheltered the dead body of his son there was no sign of a father's grief upon his face. He stood awkwardly with his black felt hat in his hand, awaiting the summons which would lead him into the presence of the dead, and he looked with disapproval at the cheaply furnished hall and long flight of shabby carpeted steps, as if resentful at having been forced to find himself in such a place.

The house was not less dingy than the street outside, and through its aged walls there penetrated various noises never heard in better neighborhoods—calls of children at play, of vendors of fruits and the disheartened jangling of a bell. Asa Cutler had come from the country within the hour, and the city noises and odors smote upon his senses with the full force of unaccustomedness. The journey had been trying to the old man, but not for a moment did he waver in the intention which brought him to the city.

"He was always quick in reaching a decision, and it was seldom that he reversed one. When news came of the death of Ralph he had not a moment to lose, and he lost no time in uselessly discussing details; he would go to New York and rescue the child, rescue and carry it home with him, away from the contamination of the evil surroundings in which it had lived since its birth. For the child was his, all that was left of his flesh and blood; no part of Asa Cutler should remain away from the ungodly so long as he had strength and authority to remove it. The woman, the child's mother, might protest, probably would do so; but the old man had not a moment to lose, and he would not be defeated by her. Ralph's death seemed to Asa Cutler rather a cause for congratulation than for grief. When his younger son, Joseph, died, he honestly mourned; but Joseph had been a child after his own heart, the one with mind and character like his own; to Joseph his father's business, the management of the farm, the looking after the many undertakings the old man held, the affairs of the church in which Asa Cutler had been deacon for many years, the moral and material circumstances of the neighborhood, all were of importance; to Ralph none of these things had mattered. His father's keen aversion was as repulsive to him as his hard morality and uncompromising bigotry. Ralph never had been proud of his father's mental ability, and had given him such schooling as the neighborhood afforded, and a promise of more; later, when Ralph seemed to be outgrowing his authority, he took the most cruel means of enforcing it, insisting that the boy should stay at home and farm, doing the work that had been good enough for his father and that should, therefore, be good enough for him. Ralph responded with his first exhibition of recklessness, and Deacon Cutler before long had to bear the ignominy of his son's being taken in the neighborhood as wild, fast, and finally as a drunkard.

To the standards of the countryside Ralph's escapades loomed as horrors; you might as well be searching the peeping gape through village windows, and everything poor Ralph did became magnified the more through each pair of spectators that beheld it. Asa Cutler had been proud of his son's making head and wagging tongue that discussed it. When the boy begged his father to give him money to go away and study, the father denied him and bitterly declared that a new school could never learn as for penitence, which he had set his heart upon, it was well known that the ways of artists were the ways of the devil, and to no son of his should he have given money to go with which to seek the devil in his own abode. He professed to see the hand of

godlike. She, too, had been tonelessly; sordidness of life crowded upon her, and it was no less sordid with Ralph. It at least possessed an object it lacked before. The girl had some measure of refinement, and an intellectuality which life's friction had considerably sharpened; she took Ralph's vices knowingly when she married him, and it was her understanding of them, as much as her faith in him, which helped him in his effort to overcome them.

To Asa Cutler, therefore, his son's death seemed but a shortening of years. When Ralph was missing Asa Cutler asked no questions. Thereafter his elder son was dead to him, and the fact that he had, in reality, only yesterday breathed his last made him no more lately dead in the old man's heart. During the years which had passed since Ralph's departure he had, indeed, heard of him now and then; he knew that his wife sent the boy money, and if he had been willing to acknowledge that a son of his was living in what he firmly believed to be the haunts of vice, he would have forbidden her holding any communication with him; but rather than admit to himself or to her that Ralph still lived he let her more or less openly send him money. It was not much that she had to send, however; her husband saw to it that nothing was left uninvested. But various small things she sold and her minute savings grew into little sums that all went to Ralph.

Then, a year or two after his departure, there appeared on the parlor mantel a picture which had never been there before; it was unsigned, but Asa Cutler did not ask from whence it came. It was commonplace enough, but even the old man was, in his secret heart, very proud of it, and to his mother it was magnificent. Success, to Asa Cutler, was the criterion of life; if Ralph could really make pictures, pictures that would sell, he might not be utterly lost, after all; but the second picture Ralph sent home dispelled all hopes of his salvation. It was a glaring dabb of a woman's figure, posed in Spanish costume; Asa Cutler had never seen its like, but he had no hesitation in pronouncing it evil, and he forbade its remaining in the house, a spot of contamination. If Ralph, he argued, could look upon indecencies of half-dressed women twirling about in short skirts and laughing enticingly over their bare shoulders, there could be no doubt as to the state of his soul. He had not come to New York for a last look at his son, but for a first look at his son's wife and the boy; and when he was at length taken up to the

of evil living, and his one thought was to rescue his grandchild from its environment, and to bring it up with the fear of the wrath of God in his heart, and without knowledge of its parents. He had not come to New York for a last look at his son, but for a first look at his son's wife and the boy; and when he was at length taken up to the

The fundamental strength derived from his former ancestry was augmented by the inspiration which he drew from his wife, when he heard of his mother's death, a sudden loneliness overtook him and he married. The woman was grateful to her Ralph

top of the house and directed to a large room beneath a skylight, he had so far forgotten Ralph in thinking of the child that he was startled to find himself in the presence of death.

There was no one else in the room, and after a moment of hesitation he drew near and looked upon the face of his son. It was lighted by candles which burned yellow in the glare of daylight from above, and a crucifix lay in the cold hand. Asa Cutler had never before seen candles and crucifix with the dead, and it took a moment of wonder to make him understand that this was the form of a ceremonial which he held in execration. He had not outgrown the bigotry of his ancestors, to whom papistry and witchcraft were equal abominations; to his puritanical mind these signs of a foreign faith were further evidence of poor Ralph's ruin.

and breathed deeply. "You have nothing to do with his boy, thank God," she said, very quietly. "Here is your boy."

The old man's anger flashed out, and he stood before her threateningly. "He was no son of mine. I disowned him. It can't ever be said that any son of mine went to the devil like he did. That's why I want the boy. I'm going to save him from going like his father."

"Ah," said the woman, "he was no son of yours? Then what claim have you to a son of his?"

"He's my grandson," Asa Cutler said; "I come here to get him. Where is he?"

He had been accustomed for a lifetime to overcome his opponents by sheer force of will; only his son Ralph had evaded it, and no one, until he encountered this woman, had met it with fearlessness. His lionlike front seemed

Asa Cutler's head had dropped, and he was looking up at her from beneath his brows, the fingers of one hand moving across his eyes. He was keen enough to realize that much of what she said was true; his own virtue had indeed seemed to him greater by comparison with the vice of his son. The anger her words caused him at first only made him the more vulnerable to the points she afterwards scored. Besides, there had been times, after the death of the younger son, when he had wondered whether he had done right by Ralph; that was partly the reason for his coming to rescue Ralph's son, if he was determined to snatch him as a brand from the vice of his son. The anger her words caused him at first only made him the more vulnerable to the points she afterwards scored. Besides, there had been times, after the death of the younger son, when he had wondered whether he had done right by Ralph; that was partly the reason for his coming to rescue Ralph's son, if he was determined to snatch him as a brand from the vice of his son.

She watched the changes in his face and went on: "What do you know of the things he cared for?" she asked. "Ralph wanted to follow the beautiful, to create beautiful things. Was there anything wicked in that? But you declared, without knowing anything about it, that art and the life of an artist were the evil one and himself. What right have you to say that a thing is bad when many other people say it is good? Who is to judge—you, any more than another? Ralph never did any harm to any one but himself. Will you be able to say as much for yourself when you stand before your maker? Yes, and when Ralph stands before the judgment seat do you think he'll be judged as you judge him? Do you? Do you remember the good things Ralph did? No, you only remember the bad ones! And of the bad ones, do you think of how many would have turned out good if he had had his father back of him, or any one to give him a helping hand, or even a little encouragement? Do you judge him by the beautiful things he did, the kind deeds he did, the struggles he made, the fights he won? No, not you! You judge him by his failures. He had temptations within himself of which you never dreamed, and yet you think you can take him home because you escaped all temptations, that Ralph was because he couldn't overcome every one of his."

Asa Cutler folded his arms upon his breast and turned his back, but her words burned into his brain. Having broken through his armor of lifelong self-satisfaction, it was no difficult matter to appear more brave than she was. Asa Cutler knew humanity in a shrewd way, and he realized that he was face to face with a new force; but he meant to meet and overcome it.

"You say you disowned your son," she said quietly. "Then you have no grandson; this man's child is my child, and now he belongs to me, to me alone, and to no one else in the world."

It was evident that Asa Cutler must for a moment give up the idea of acknowledging the first relationship if he would claim the second. "Well, say he was my son," he said harshly, in a louder tone. "He was my son, he was my son. Now he's dead, ain't he? Then I'm the natural guardian of his child. I didn't come here to talk," he added brutally. "I come here to get that boy, and I want you to produce him. I'm going to take him home with me, and you may as well give him up without any fuss."

The woman was still looking at him unflinchingly. "You are going to take him home with you," she asked mildly. "And what are you going to do with him when you get him home?"

"I'm going to keep him out of the way of the devil. That's what I'm going to do with him. But I didn't come here to talk," he cried.

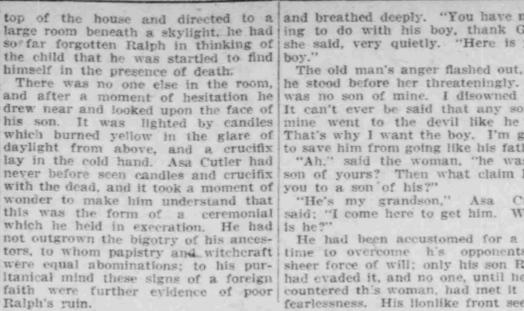
The presence of his dead seemed no reason for lowering his tones. The woman looked down upon the face of her husband and stooped to move a lock of hair from his forehead. When she stood up her face seemed whiter than before and there was a light in her eyes which she had lacked.

She nodded her head a little. "You did not come here to talk," she said. "You did not come here to talk? No, you came here to rob this man's child of the memory he shall have of his father. You did not come here to talk, but you shall hear some talk. I know there, look at him! That man was your son, and he is dead! Why? Because he was your son; because he had you for a father. You gave him life, but you killed him—you killed him!"

"You are crazy," the old man said. "The woman ignored his words. 'I know all about you,' she said. 'I know what sort of a father you were. You began to kill Ralph the day you took him away from school because you wanted him to be under you. You were afraid he might become a man, with a will of his own, and you wanted him to be like your cattle, just belonging to you. Oh, I know what he did then! But who could blame him? You had never taught him a better way, and you would not let him go away to learn one. And you—you, who set yourself up as a model, the deacon, the man of God, the fine example for the neighborhood—you would rather have a chance to become anything else, because if he were to become anything else he would not be a possession of yours. Haven't you known that to be the truth? You have, you have! If there were anybody else, you would be the first to say that he did wrong; but you won't admit that you could do wrong. So you let Ralph become a drunkard, the ruin of his father's name, and you took that give him a chance to get beyond you! Besides, having him near you like that made you seem all the finer. The deacon's son, the drunkard—the scoundrel! The poor deacon—such a model, such a good man, to be afflicted with such a son! That's what you thought, wasn't it? It wasn't so bad being a martyr, was it?"

The old man was glaring at her, too angry and too bewildered to speak. But she did not pause long. She clasped her hands before her and moved a step nearer, her shabby black skirt touching the dead man's couch. "You have come to see the boy, his boy?" he demanded.

The woman lifted her white face,



"Ralph! My son, my boy, Ralph!"

On the white face the flickering shadows could not hide the marks of disipation nor the ravages of disease. Asa Cutler marked them all. He had not known of the disease, but there was a woman, Asa Cutler's nature, the temples were sunken, the face pitifully thin; but the sight of it touched no chord of pity in the old man's heart; instead, he inwardly moralized upon the end to which vice was sure to come, and was shaken with the idea that a son of his, a child of God-fearing parents, should have willfully come to this.

The furnishings of the room, also contributed to the general unkindness of the place; nowhere could the majesty of death have seemed more out of place. Asa Cutler's innate sense of order revolted; he looked upon the cheap casts as upon the candles and crucifix—they were all symbols of heresy, implements of the devil.

But his mind did not long dwell upon them; he had come for the child. He waited in the studio perhaps five minutes, and then crossed the room and knocked upon a door which he thought might lead into a bedroom. He had to repeat his knock more than once, however, before any one replied; then the door opened, and closed quickly behind her. Asa Cutler realized at once that she was his son's wife; her eyes wore the hard dryness of bitter grief, and her face looked tired and wan, as if from long watching and care.

Closing the door behind her, she stood a moment with her hand upon its knob, looking intently into the man's face; Asa Cutler returned her gaze with one no less searching, and as her eyes did not falter before his, his own tightened ominously. The woman seemed to decide from her scrutiny that it was useless to waste time over preliminaries; she need make no show of courtesy to Asa Cutler, and no form of introduction was necessary between them, she had the advantage of knowing something of the old man's character, while he knew nothing whatever of herself, beyond the fact that she was the widow of his son and the mother of his grandson. Her instinct told her what he had come for, and she spoke unflinchingly; her voice was well modulated, and Asa Cutler was immediately aware of a refinement in her which he had not expected—a refinement, indeed, which he himself did not possess. It was one more reason for his dislike; he felt that she would use it as a weapon against his own crudeness of the countryside.

"You have come to see the boy, Mr. Cutler," the woman said. "There is nothing for you to do here."

The old man was keen enough to mark the sarcasm beneath her quiet words, and he felt that all his suspicions against her were confirmed. "I am not too late for what I come to do," he said. "Where is the child?"

The woman looked at him for a moment, then walked toward the place where her dead husband lay, and stood beside him. "There is your child," she said, pointing downward.

Asa Cutler did not move from his place. He had no subtlety with which to meet hers. "Where's the boy, his boy?" he demanded.

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age enough to break away from that. "What did you do? Did you offer him a helping hand?" Did you tell him his father would stand back of him? Did it ever occur to you that he might be going away to try to do better? Only you ever ask him? No, you thought that he was going away from you, when he ought to have stayed and become hired man without pay; you thought he was going away to find larger opportunities to do better; you could wish to go to a place where everybody would not point at him, where he would not be the black shadow of the neighborhood, where he might have some chance of becoming a man. You'd think any father would have given his son a chance for that; but what did you do? You said he was dead to you. Every time you heard of him you said, 'He's dead,' you feel yourself that much better because you thought him that much worse? That was your idea of being a father, wasn't it? You wouldn't help him when he wanted to try—you only said he was dead."

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is my son. Do you think it likely I would give him to you that you might make him what you made your son?"

Asa Cutler looked at her without moving, and she came closer. "Do you think I would trust this baby to your judgment?"

For a moment they looked into each other's eyes as unflinchingly as earlier in their meeting; then a change passed over the man's face, softening it, breaking up its hardness as the sun breaks the skin of ice on a river, revealing the depths below. The baby leaned forward again, with a smile which gained always before procured what he wanted, and again called imperatively:

"Dada! Dada!"

The old man reached out as if to take him, then his hands faltered, and with a groan, he turned away. He raised his arms above his head and cried aloud:

"Ralph! My son, my boy, Ralph!"

He stumbled into a chair, and with his face between his palms he wept, with racking, straining sobs.

The child began to wail in sympathy, but his mother did not heed him. She watched Asa Cutler's agony. At last he arose, still weeping, and made his way toward the door. Then the woman looked once upon her husband's face and went quickly to his father. The woman thought she was giving him that he had been crying for, and when they stood beside the old man he grasped his arm, laughing out in glee. Asa Cutler turned his face away and would have opened the door, but the mother lifted the "wild toward him."

Still the old man shrank back from them and his eyes sought hers. He shook his head, and she saw how pitifully aged his face had become within the hour; his lips quivered as if he were carrying a great burden. "I ain't fit," he said, looking at her.

She smiled wistfully and lifted the baby higher, so that he could reach his grandfather's face. "Kiss dada," she said again. "Kiss dada, baby." She said, "Must both be good to dada."

With the child's soft, moist lips upon his cheeks and the strong little arms around his neck, the old man looked at the mother. "Both?" he asked huskily.

She nodded, and the tears began to stream down his face. She left the child in his arms and went and knelt at the couch.

When the candles were burning low Asa Cutler touched her on the shoulder. Through her prayers she had heard him talking and playing with the boy. At his touch she looked up.

"Daughter," he said, timidly, "come away with me now, you and the little fellow. I—I don't want to let either of you out of my sight again. Tomorrow we'll all go home together—I want my son Ralph to rest beside his mother, if you're willing."

The next day, when they reached the house where Ralph was born, Asa Cutler carried his grandson over the threshold, and when he had closed the door behind them, he turned to his daughter-in-law, and took one of her hands between his own.

"I ain't fit to have you here," he said, "but I couldn't a' come home without you."

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