

Seven-Up

IN A PLEASANT FARM HOUSE, one wintry eve after supper and a hard day's work at thrashing, Samuel Grey rose from his chair with a sad, weary look, and stood before the drawer of an old bureau.

"Samuel, what is thee doing?" asked his mother, following him. "Thee is not going out tonight, when so tired?"

"Yes, mother," he replied, taking up with a sigh, a small calico bag, which seemed well filled.

"Why, that is the mortgage money, Samuel; what does thee want with that? It is not due till next spring."

"I know it, mother, but I must have this money this night," he answered in a determined tone.

"For what, my son? Thee has always told me everything. We earned the money together."

"I know it, mother. All these years we have toiled to pay off that mortgage left on the farm at my father's death, and now it has all come to nothing. Sit down in your chair, mother, and I will tell you the truth, as I trust I have ever done. I do not fear your blame, as I have always loved your praise. This one egregious error has taught me great lessons already. They say women can bear troubles better than men."

Samuel's mother trembled very much, but she sat quietly down. Her face was pleasant to look at—healthy and fresh, with a clean Quaker cap crimped about it. She could not believe her son had done anything so very wrong; but all was a mystery.

"Last evening you know how late I staid away, and I presume you thought I was with Ellen at the farm; but I was not; more is the pity. I went on an errand to the tavern to get some oil for our lame horse's leg. The bar-room was a blaze of light, and all the boys there, and I stepped in to warm. There were two finely dressed gentlemen from Boston sitting around the table, calling for the best of port wine, and treating the company. They called me to join so cordially that I consented, and felt rested with good fire and exhilarating glass. Soon one of the strangers brought out a pack of cards, and played with Joe Lampson and Jim White. I sat and smoked in one corner, and did not take much notice of the game. They played for cigars and wine, and then for money, and the game was 'Seven Up.' Now, when I was a boy, I used to have an excellent run of luck at cards, and beat everybody; and I suppose I was elated with my reputation; for when Joe Lampson said, 'I have won two hundred dollars,' I was astonished, especially when the strangers paid it over as quick and as easy as they would brush off a fly. I thought, if dull Joe has won so quickly a sum, why may not I, who am so lucky at cards? They urged me to take a hand, and the sight of the new bills on the 'Merchants' Exchange Bank' so won upon my better understanding, that I drew right up to the table. I thought only of winning; I never thought of losing. We played and won, and played and lost, and lost, and lost. O, mother, I lost all this money as quick as a flash; and they taunted me that I could not pay; but I must pay it, or have my

honor lost before the whole village. I know how wrong it was, but if hard work will make it up to you, you shall never want.” Here Sam broke down, and cried like a child.

“Thee is welcome to take the money, Sam,” said his mother, quietly. “I wish thee would promise me never to touch a card again.”

“Dear mother, I solemnly—”

“No, Sam! no oaths. Remember thee will be tempted this very night to try and win back this very money.”

“No, I have seen too many winks pass between those two men. They are gamblers, who have come down to impose upon us ‘greenhorns’ in the country. When I think of how many hard days’ work I have performed, and how many chickens and eggs you have raised to sell, all for one good object, and that my cursed folly has ruined all, I am ready to despair.”

“I shall not live long to want money, Sam; I only thought of thee and Ellen, who is soon to become thy wife.” Samuel groaned, and left the house with a heavy heart. He knew by the twinkling light across the fields that Ellen sat watching for his visit, but he sped on towards the village, till, stamping the snow from his shoes, he entered once more the tavern.

Again, in a private parlor, he found the companions of a previous night. He went firmly up to the table and deposited his money. “I have come,” he said, in a bold voice, “to pay you what you won from me last night.” The man merely waved his hand, on which shone a jewel, toward him. “O, a mere trifle,” he said: “time enough by-and-by.”

Sam turned toward the fire, with a groan. Evil thoughts took possession of his mind. “Can some men make money [this] easily by the toss of a card or the turn of a die? and yet, after all my honest labor, must I be turned from my humble home, and my happy prospects broken up for life by two desperate gamblers?” Fierce passions seemed at war within him, as the sweet visions of former hopes passed away. He did not notice that there were mutterings of wrath at the table, as one after another was fleeced in his turn. Cries of “unfair play,” were met by contemptuous sneers from the successful men who pocketed the gains.

Samuel’s little roll of bills still lay upon the table, and he could not bear to leave it there. It seemed sacred money. “How little my father thought, when he left me the farm, with only this mortgage as an [encumbrance,] that I should prove so recreant to my solemn engagement to take care of my dear mother. Oh God, forgive me, and spare me, that I may do better in the future.” And at that moment a softer emotion sprung up in his heart. He felt a loathing for sin of all kinds that he had never felt before, and a determination to shun even the smallest deviation from duty, if its retribution was so dreadful. This was a more desirable state of mind; and a humble spirit breathed its blessings over him, as he rose up and buttoned his thin coat over his breast, again to face the cutting of the wintry night.

About this time a handsome sleigh had driven up to the door of the tavern. The horses were flecked with foam, and the frost hung about their trappings, showing how swiftly they had

traveled. Two strong men had leaped from it, and hastily entered the house. The host came obsequiously to the door. They drew him aside.

“We have tracked two notorious blacklegs from Boston here, and thinking they might be making a little mischief, have come down. Indicate, I say, the room where they now are, or we shall arrest you as an accomplice! Quickly!” as the gleam of a revolver shone in the cold moonlight. “In there, in there!” stammered the landlord, trembling with alarm. The detectives came very softly, but not so gently that the gamblers did not listen intently. One said, “Throw the cards in the fire! raise the window! hark!” Just then the door was violently thrown open. “Ah, my hearties, well met! We have had quite a drive for you;” adjusting handcuffs all the time, as though they were used to the business, in spite of the desperate struggles of the two men. “Now, we will see what you have caged!” said the minions of the law, and forthwith began to pick their pockets, having laid them at length on the floor.

“Counterfeit bills in plenty, some golden eagles, silver! Get pen and paper, landlord, and state the amount! Now, young men,” the sheriff said, addressing Samuel Grey and his friends, who stood in silent awe beholding the scene, “we might consider you under arrest for gambling, but presume you were just green enough to be entrapped by these Boston youths. Didn’t understand the ways of our wicked city. However, we will just advise you to beware of bad company for the future; it does not lead to pleasant results.”

“How much have you been robbed of this night?”

“There is my money,” said Samuel, as each one stated the amount, and pointed to the roll upon the table.

“Well, take it, and go instantly,” said the men.

Samuel obeyed; and when once more in the silent fields, and within sight of his mother’s cottage, he fell on his knees and wept aloud, giving thanks to God as he had never done. He was not yet twenty-one; life was before him; hope again dawned; let us trust that the sad lesson was not in vain. The old mother could not knit the long, blue woolen sock that evening. She paced the low room with prayers and tears. Never, in her lonely widowhood, had sorrow come so heavily upon her heart; and when the door opened, and Ellen stole gently in to inquire what was the matter, missing her lover, Aunt Rachel threw her arms about her neck, and gave way to grief. So Samuel found them when he returned, most unexpectedly, to change their tears to joy.

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