

CHARLES M. SHELDON

ROBERT HARDY'S SEVEN
DAYS: A DREAM AND ITS
CONSEQUENCES

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PREFACE

This story was first read by the author to his Sunday evening congregation in the spring of 1892. The chapters were given one at a time on consecutive Sundays, and the way in which the story was received encouraged the pastor in his attempt to solve the problem of the Sunday evening service in this manner.

CHARLES M. SHELDON.
Central Church, TOPEKA, Kansas.

THE DREAM

It was Sunday night, and Robert Hardy had just come home from the evening service in the church at Barton. He was not in the habit of attending the evening service, but something said by his minister in the morning had impelled him to go out. The evening had been a little unpleasant, and a light snow was falling, and his wife had excused herself from going to church on that account. Mr. Hardy came home cross and fault-finding.

"Catch me going to evening service again! Only fifty people out, and it was a sheer waste of fuel and light. The sermon was one of the dullest I ever heard. I believe Mr. Jones is growing too old for our church. We need a young man, more up with the times. He is everlastingly harping on the necessity of doing what we can in the present to save souls. To hear him talk you would think every man who wasn't running round to save souls every winter was a robber and an enemy of society. He is getting off, too, on this new-fangled Christian Sociology, and thinks the rich men are oppressing the poor, and that church members ought to study and follow more closely the teachings of Christ, and be more brotherly and neighbourly to their fellow men. Bah! I am sick of the whole subject of humanity. I shall withdraw my pledge to the salary if the present style of preaching continues."

"What was the text of the sermon tonight?" asked Mrs. Hardy.

"Oh, I don't remember exactly! Something about 'This night thy soul shall be demanded,' or words like that. I don't believe in this attempt to scare folks into heaven."

"It would take a good many sermons to scare you, Robert."

"Yes, more than two a week," replied Mr. Hardy, with a dry laugh. He drew off his overcoat and threw himself down on the lounge in front of the open fire. "Where are the girls?"

"Alice is upstairs reading the morning paper; Clara and Bess went over to call on the Caxtons."

"How did they happen to go over there?"

Mrs. Hardy hesitated. Finally she said, "James came over and invited them."

"And they know I have forbidden them to have anything to do with the Caxtons! When they come in I will let them know I mean what I say. It is very strange the girls do not appear to understand that."

Mr. Hardy rose from the lounge and walked across the room, then came back and lay down again, and from his recumbent position poked the fire savagely with the shovel.

Mrs. Hardy bit her lips and seemed on the point of replying, but said nothing.

At last Mr. Hardy asked, "Where are the boys?"

"Will is getting out his lessons for to-morrow up in his room. George went out about eight o'clock. He didn't say where he was going."

"It's a nice family. Is there one night in the year, Mary, when all our children are at home?"

"Almost as many as there are when you are at home!" retorted Mrs. Hardy. "What with your club and your lodge and your scientific society and your reading circle and your directors' meeting, the children see about as much of you as you do of them. How many nights in a week do you give to us, Robert? Do you think it is strange that the children go outside for their amusements? Our home"—Mrs. Hardy paused and looked around at the costly interior of the room where the two were—"our home is well furnished with everything but our own children."

The man on the lounge was silent. He felt the sharpness of the thrust made by his wife, and knew it was too true to be denied. But Mr. Hardy was, above all things else, selfish. He had not the remotest intention of giving up his club or his scientific society or his frequent cosy dinners with business men down town because his wife spent so many lonely deserted evenings at home, and because his children were almost strangers to him. But it annoyed him, as a respectable citizen, to have his children making acquaintances that he did not approve, and it grated on his old-fashioned, inherited New England ideas that his boys and girls should be away from home so often in the evening, and especially on

Sunday evening. The maxim of Robert Hardy's life was "Self-interest first." As long as he was not thwarted in his own pleasures he was as good-natured as the average man. He provided liberally for the household expenses, and his wife and children were supplied with money and the means to travel as they requested it. But the minute he was crossed in his own plans, or anyone demanded of him a service that compelled some self-denial, he became hard, ill-natured, and haughty.

He had been a member of the church at Barton for twenty-five years, one of the trustees, and a liberal giver. He prided himself on that fact. But so far as giving any of his time or personal service was concerned, he would as soon have thought of giving all his property away to the first poor man he met. His minister had this last week written him an earnest, warm-hearted letter, expressing much pleasure at the service he had rendered so many years as a trustee, and asking him if he would not come to the Wednesday evening meeting that week and take some part, whatever he chose, to help along. It was a season of anxious interest among many in the church, and the pastor earnestly desired the presence and help of all the members.

Robert had read the letter through hastily and smiled a little scornfully. What! *he* take part in a prayer meeting! He couldn't remember when he had attended one—they were too dull for him. He wondered at Mr. Jones for writing such a letter, and almost felt as though he had been impertinent. He threw the letter in the waste basket and did not even answer it. He would not have been guilty of such a lack of courtesy in regard to a business letter, but a letter from his minister was another thing. The idea of replying to a letter from him never occurred to Mr. Hardy. And when Thursday night came he went down to a meeting of the chess club and had a good time with his favourite game: for he was a fine player, and was engaged in a series of games which were being played for the State championship.

The superintendent of the Sunday-school had lately timidly approached Mr. Hardy and asked him if he would not take a class of boys in the Sunday-school. What! *he* take a class of boys! He, the influential, wealthy manager of one of the largest railroad shops in the world—*he* give his time to the teaching of a Sunday-school class! He excused himself on the score of lack of time, and the very same evening of his interview with the superintendent he went to the theatre to hear a roaring farce, and after he reached home spent an hour in his favourite study of chemistry in his laboratory at the top of his house: for Mr. Hardy was a man of considerable power as a student, and he had an admirable physical constitution, capable of the most terrible strain. Anything that gave him pleasure he was willing to work for. He was not lazy; but the idea of giving his personal time and service and talents to bless the world had no place in his mind.

And so, as he lay on the lounge that evening and listened to his wife's plain statement concerning his selfishness, he had no intention of giving up a single thing that gratified his tastes and fed his pride.

After a silence just about long enough for someone to make the explanation just given, Mrs. Hardy said, speaking coldly, as if it were a matter of indifference to her:

"Mr. Burns, the foreman, called while you were out."

"He did? What did he want?"

"He said four of the men in the casting room were severely injured this afternoon by the bursting of one of the retorts, and the entire force had quit work and gone home."

"Couldn't Burns supply the place of the injured men? He knows where the extras are."

"That was what he came to see you about. He said he needed further directions. The men flatly refused to work another minute, and went out in a body. I don't blame them much. Robert, don't you believe God will punish you for keeping the shops open on Sunday?"

"Nonsense, Mary," replied Mr. Hardy; yet there was a shadow of uneasiness in his tone. "The work has got to go on. It is a work of necessity. Railroads are public servants; they can't rest Sundays."

"Then when God tells the world that it must not work on Sundays, He does not mean railroad men? The Fourth Commandment ought to read, 'Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy, except all ye men who work for railroads. Ye haven't any Sunday.'"

"Mary, I didn't come from one sermon to listen to another. You're worse than Mr. Jones."

Mr. Hardy half rose on the lounge and leaned on his elbow, looking at his wife with every mark of displeasure on his face. Yet as he looked, somehow there stole into his thought the memory of the old New England home back in the Vermont Hills, and the vision of that quiet little country village where Mary and he had been brought up together. He seemed to see the old meeting-house on the hill, at the end of a long, elm-shaded street that straggled through the village, and he saw himself again as he began to fall in love with Mary, the beauty of the village; and he had a vision of one Sunday when, walking back from church by Mary's side, he had asked her to be his wife. It seemed to him that a breath of the meadow just beyond Squire Hazen's place came into the room, just as it was wafted up to him when Mary turned and said the happy word that made that day the gladdest, proudest day he had ever known. What, memories of the old times! What!

He seemed to come to himself, and stared around into the fire as if wondering where he was, and he did not see the tear that rolled down his wife's cheek and fell upon her two hands clasped in her lap. She arose and went over to the piano, which stood in the shadow, and sitting down, with her back to her husband, she played fragments of music nervously. Mr. Hardy lay down on the lounge again. After a while Mrs. Hardy wheeled about on the piano stool and said:

"Robert, don't you think you had better go over and see Mr. Burns about the men who were hurt?"

"Why, what can I do about it? The company's doctor will see to them. I should only be in the way. Did Burns say they were badly hurt?"

"One of them had his eyes put out, and another will have to lose both feet. I think he said his name was Scoville."

"What, not Ward Scoville?"

"I think Burns said that was the name."

Mr. Hardy rose from the lounge, then lay down again. "Oh, well, I can go there the first thing in the morning. I can't do anything now," he muttered.

But there came to his memory a picture of one day when he was walking through the machine shops. A heavy piece of casting had broken from the end of a large hoisting derrick and would have fallen upon him and probably killed him if this man, Scoville, at the time a workman in the machine department, had not pulled him to one side, at the risk of his own life. As it was, in saving the life of the manager, Scoville was struck on the shoulder, and rendered useless for work for four weeks. Mr. Hardy had raised his wages and advanced him to a responsible position in the casting room. Mr. Hardy was not a man without generosity and humane feeling; but as he lay on the lounge that evening and thought of the cold snow outside and the distance to the shop tenements, he readily excused himself from going out to see the man who had once saved him, and who now lay maimed for life. If anyone thinks it impossible that one man calling himself a Christian could be thus indifferent to another, then he does not know the power that selfishness can exercise over the actions of men. Mr. Hardy had one supreme law which he obeyed, and that law was self.

Again Mrs. Hardy, who rarely ventured to oppose her husband's wishes, turned to the piano and struck a few chords aimlessly. Then she wheeled about and said abruptly:

"Robert, the cook gave warning tonight that she must go home at once."

Mr. Hardy had begun to doze a little, but at this sudden statement he sat up and exclaimed:

"Well, you *are* the bearer of bad news to-night, Mary! What's the matter with everybody? I suppose the cook wants more pay."

Mrs. Hardy replied quietly: "Her sister is dying. And do you know, I believe I have never given the girl credit for much feeling. She always seemed to me to lack there, though she is certainly the most faithful and efficient servant we ever had in the house. She came in just after Mr. Burns left, and broke down, crying bitterly. It seems her sister is married to one of the railroad men here in town, and has been ailing with consumption for some months. She is very poor, and a large family

has kept her struggling for mere existence. The cook was almost beside herself with grief as she told the story, and said she must leave us and care for her sister, who could not live more than a week at the longest. I pitied the poor girl. Robert, don't you think we could do something for the family? We have so much ourselves. We could easily help them and not miss a single luxury."

"And where would such help end? If we give to every needy person who comes along we shall be beggars ourselves. Besides, I can't afford it. The boys are a heavy expense to me while they are in college, and the company has been cutting down salaries lately. If the cook's sister is married to a railroad man, he is probably getting good wages and can support her all right."

"What if that railroad man were injured and made a cripple for life?" inquired Mrs. Hardy quietly.

"Then the insurance companies or the societies can help them out. I don't see how we can make every case that comes along our care. There would be no end of it if we once began."

"As nearly as I can find out," continued Mrs. Hardy, without replying to her husband's remarks, "cook's sister is married to one of the men who was hurt this afternoon. She talks so brokenly in our language that I could not make out exactly how it is; and she was much excited. Suppose it was Scoville: couldn't you do something for them then, Robert?"

"I might," replied Mr. Hardy briefly. "But I can tell you, I have more calls for my money now than I can meet. Take the church expenses for example. Why, we are called upon to give to some cause or other every week, besides our regular pledges for current expenses. It's a constant drain. I shall have to cut down on my pledge. We can't be giving to everything all the time, and have anything ourselves."

Mr. Hardy spoke with a touch of indignation. His wife glanced around the almost palatial room and smiled; then her face grew a little stern and almost forbidding, as she remembered that only last week her husband had spent \$150 for a new electrical apparatus to experiment with in his laboratory. And now he was talking hard times, and grudging the small sums he gave to religious objects in connection with his church, and thinking he could not afford to help the family of a man who had once saved his life.

Again she turned to the piano and played a while, but she could not be rested by the music as sometimes she had been. When she finally arose and walked over by the table near the end of the lounge, Mr. Hardy was asleep, and she sat down by the table gazing into the open fire drearily, a look of sorrow and unrest on the face still beautiful but worn by years of disappointment and the loss of that respect and admiration she once held for the man who had vowed at the altar to make her 'happy.' She had not wholly lost her love for him, but she was fast losing the best part of it, the love which has its daily source in an inborn respect. When respect is gone, love is not long in following after.

She sat thus for half an hour, and was at last aroused by the two girls, Clara and Bess, coming in. They were laughing and talking together, and had evidently parted with someone at the door. Mrs. Hardy went out into the hallway.

"Hush, girls, your father is asleep! You know how he feels to be awakened suddenly by noise. But he has been waiting up for you."

"Then I guess we'll go upstairs without bidding him good-night," said Clara abruptly. "I don't want to be lectured about going over to the Caxtons'."

"No; I want to see you both and have a little talk with you. Come in here." Mrs. Hardy drew the two girls into the front room and pulled the curtains together over the arch opening into the room where Mr. Hardy lay. "Now tell me, girls, why did your father forbid your going over to the Caxtons'? I did not know of it until to-night. Has it something to do with James?"

Neither of the girls said anything for a minute. Then, Bess, who was the younger of the two and famous for startling the family with very sensational remarks, replied, "James and Clara are engaged; and they are going to be married tomorrow."

Mrs. Hardy looked at Clara, who grew very red in the face, and then, to the surprise of her mother and Bess, the girl burst out into a violent fit of crying. Mrs. Hardy gathered her into her arms as in the olden times when she was a little child and soothed her into quietness.

"Tell me all about it, dear. I did not know you cared for James in that way."

"But I do," sobbed Clara. "And father guessed something and forbade us going there any more. But I didn't think he would mind it if Bess and I went just this one night. I couldn't help it, anyway. Mother, isn't it right for people to love each other?"

"Tisn't proper to talk about such things on Sunday," said Bess, solemnly.

"Clara," said Mrs. Hardy, "why, you're only a child yet! Is it true that James is—why, he is only a boy!"

"He is twenty-one and I am eighteen, and he's earning forty dollars a month in the office and is one of the best stenographers in the State. We've talked it over, and I wish we could be married tomorrow, so!" Clara burst out with it all at once, while Bess remarked quietly:—

"Yes, they're real sensible, and I think James is nice; but when I marry I want more than forty dollars a month for candy alone. And then he isn't particularly handsome."

"He is too!" cried Clara. "And he's good and brave and splendid, and I'd rather have him than a thousand such men as Lancey Cummings! Mother, I don't want money. It hasn't made you happy!"

"Hush, dear!" Mrs. Hardy felt as if a blow had smitten her in the face. She was silent then.

Clara put her arms around her mother and whispered: "Forgive me, mother! I didn't mean to hurt you. But I am so unhappy."

Unhappy! And yet the girl was just beginning to blossom out towards the face of God under the influence of that most divine and tender and true feeling that ever comes to a girl who knows that a true, brave man loves her with all his soul. And some people would have us leave this subject to the flippant novelist instead of treating it as Christ did when He said, "For this cause [that is, for love] shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife."

Mrs. Hardy was on the point of saying something when the sound of peculiar steps on the stairs was heard, and shortly after Alice pushed the curtains aside and came in. Alice was the oldest girl in the family. She was a cripple, the result of an accident when a child, and she carried a crutch, using it with much skill and even grace. The minute she entered the room she saw something was happening, but she simply said:—

"Mother, isn't it a little strange father sleeps so soundly? I went up to him and spoke to him just now, thinking he was just lying there, and he didn't answer, and then I saw he was asleep. But I never knew him to sleep so Sunday night. He usually reads up in the study."

"Perhaps he is sick; I will go and see."

Mrs. Hardy rose and went into the other room; and just then the younger boy, Will, came downstairs. He said something to his mother as he passed through the room, carrying one of his books in his hand and then came in where the girls were.

"Say, Alice, translate this passage for me, will you? Confound the old Romans anyway! What do I care about the way they fought their old battles and built their old one-horse bridges! What makes me angry is the way Caesar has of telling a thing. Why can't he drive right straight ahead instead of beating about the bush so? If I couldn't get up a better language than those old duffers used to write their books in, I'd lie down and die. I can't find the old verb to that sentence anyway. Maybe it's around on the other page somewhere, or maybe Caesar left it out just on purpose to plague us boys."

And Will shied the book over to Alice, who good-naturedly began to read, while that much suffering youth sat down by Bess and began to tease her and Clara.

"What are you and Clara doing at this time of day? Time you youngsters were going up stairs. Play us a little tune, Bessie, will you? What you been crying for, Clara Vere de Vere?"

"I should think you would be ashamed of yourself, Will, studying on Sundays," said Bess reprovingly and with dignity.

"No worse than sparking Sunday nights," retorted the incorrigible Will.

"I haven't been," replied Bess, indignantly. "I've been with Clara."

"She doesn't need any help, does she?" inquired Will, innocently. And going over where Clara lay with her face hid in the pillow of a large couch, Will tried to pull the pillow out from under her head.

"Let me alone, Will. I don't feel well," said a muffled voice from the pillow.

"Pshaw! you're fooling."

"No, I'm not. Let me alone."

"Come here, or I won't read your sentence for you," called Alice. And Will reluctantly withdrew, for he knew from experience that Alice would keep her word.

"All right. Now go ahead; not too fast. Here! Wait a minute! Let me write her down. I don't intend to miss to-morrow if I can help it. And old Romulus will call me up on this very passage, I know. Be just like him, though, to strike me on the review."

At that minute the door opened and in came George, the elder boy, and the oldest of the group of children. He hung up hat and coat, and strolled into the room.

"Where's mother?"

"She's in the other room," answered Bess. "Father's been asleep, and mother was afraid he was going to have a fever."

"That's one of your stories," said George, who seemed in a good-natured mood. He sat down and drew his little sister towards him and whispered to her:

"Say, Bess, I want some money again."

"Awfully?" whispered Bess.

"Yes, for a special reason. Do you think you could let me have a little?"

"Why, of course! you can have all my month's allowance. But why don't you ask father?"

"No; I've asked him too much lately. He refused point blank last time. I didn't like the way he spoke."

"Well, you can have all mine," said Bess, whispering.

George and she were great friends, and there was not a thing that Bessie would not have done for her big brother, who was her hero. What he wanted with so much money she never asked.

They were still whispering together, and Clara had just risen to go upstairs, and Alice and Will had finished the translation, and Will was just on the point of seeing how near he could come to throwing the Commentaries of Caesar into an ornamental Japanese jar across the room, when Mrs. Hardy parted the curtains at the arch and beckoned her children to come into the next room. Her face was exceedingly pale, and she was trembling as if with some great terror.

The children all cried out in surprise and hurried into the next room. But before relating what happened there, we will follow Mr. Hardy into the experience he had, just after falling asleep upon the lounge by the open fire.

It seemed to him that he stepped at once from the room where he lay into a place such as he had never seen before, where the one great idea that filled his entire thought was that of the Present Moment. Spread out before him as if reproduced by a phonograph and a magic lantern combined was the moving panorama of the entire world. He thought he saw into every home, every public place of business, every saloon and place of amusement, every shop and every farm, every place of industry, pleasure, and vice upon the face of the globe. And he thought he could hear the world's conversation, catch its sobs of suffering—nay, even catch the meaning of unspoken thoughts of the heart. With that absurd rapidity peculiar to certain dreams, he fancied that over every city on the globe was placed a glass cover through which he could look, and through which the sounds of the city's industry came to him. But he thought that he ascertained that by lifting off one of these covers he could hear with greater distinctness the thoughts of the inhabitants, and see all they were doing and suffering, with the most minute exactness. He looked for the place of his own town—Barton. There it lay in its

geographical spot on the globe, and he thought that, moved by an impulse he could not resist, he lifted off the cover and bent down to see and hear.

The first thing he saw was his minister's home. It was just after the Sunday evening service, the one which Mr. Hardy had thought so dull. Mr. Jones was talking over the evening with his wife.

"My dear," he said, "I feel about discouraged. Of what use is all our praying and longing for the Holy Spirit, when our own church members are so cold and unspiritual that all His influence is destroyed? You know I made a special plea to all the members to come out to-night, yet only a handful were there. I feel like giving up the struggle. You know I could make a better living in literary work, and the children could be better cared for then."

"But, John, it was a bad night to get out: you must remember that."

"But only fifty out of a church membership of four hundred, most of them living near by! It doesn't seem just right to me."

"Mr. Hardy was there. Did you see him?"

"Yes; after service I went and spoke to him, and he treated me very coldly. And yet he is the most wealthy, and in some ways the most gifted, church member we have. He could do great things for the good of this community, if"—

Suddenly Mr. Hardy thought the minister changed into the Sunday-school superintendent, and he was walking down the street thinking about his classes in the school, and Mr. Hardy thought he could hear the superintendent's thoughts, as if his ear were at a phonograph.

"It's too bad! That class of boys I wanted Mr. Hardy to take left the school because no one could be found to teach them. And now Bob Wilson has got into trouble and been arrested for petty thieving. It will be a terrible blow to his poor mother. Oh, why is it that men like Mr. Hardy cannot be made to see the importance of work in the Sunday School? With his knowledge of chemistry and geology, he could have reached that class of boys and invited them to his home, up into his laboratory, and exercised an influence over them they would never outgrow. Oh! it's a strange thing to me that men of such possibilities do not realize their power!"

The superintendent passed along shaking his head sorrowfully, and Mr. Hardy, who seemed guided by some power he could not resist, and compelled to listen whether he liked it or not, next found himself looking into one of the railroad-shop tenements; where the man Scoville was lying, awaiting amputation of both feet after the terrible accident. Scoville's wife lay upon a ragged lounge, while Mrs. Hardy's cook knelt by her side and in her native Swedish tongue tried to comfort the poor woman. So it was true that these two were sisters. The man was still conscious, and suffering unspeakably. The railroad surgeon had been sent for, but had not arrived. Three or four men and their wives had come in to do what they could. Mr. Burns, the foreman, was among them. One of the men spoke in a whisper to him:

"Have you been to see Mr. Hardy?"

"Yes; but he was at church. I left word about the accident."

"At church! So even the devil sometimes goes to church. What for, I wonder? Will he be here, think?"

"Don't know!" replied Mr. Burns curtly.

"Do you mind when he [pointing to Scoville] saved Mr. Hardy's life?"

"Remember it well enough; was standing close by."

"What'll be done with the children when Scoville goes, eh?"

"Don't know."

Just then the surgeon came in and preparations were rapidly made for the operation. The last that Mr. Hardy heard was the shriek of the poor wife as she struggled to her feet and fell in a fit across the floor where two of the youngest children clung terrified to her dress, and the father cried out, tears of agony and despair running down his face. "My God, what a hell this world is!"

The next scene was a room where everything appeared confused at first, but finally grew more distinct and terrible in its significance. The first person Mr. Hardy recognised was his own oldest boy, George, in company with a group of young men engaged in—what! He rubbed his eyes and stared, painfully. Yes: they were gambling. So here was where George spent all his money, and Bessie's too! Nothing that the miserable father had seen so far cut him to the quick quite so sharply as this. He had prided himself on his own freedom from vices, and had an honest horror of them: for Mr. Hardy was not a monster of iniquity, only an intensely selfish man. Gambling, drinking, impurity—all the physical vices—were to Mr. Hardy the lowest degradation.

The thought that his own son had fallen into this pit was terrible to him. But he was compelled to look and listen. All the young men were smoking, and beer and wine, which stood on a buffet at one side of the room, were plentifully partaken of.

"I say, George," said a very flashily-dressed youth, who was smoking that invention of the devil, a cigarette, "your old man would rub his eyes to see you here, eh?"

"Well, I should remark he would," replied George, as he shuffled the cards and then helped himself to a drink.

"I say, George," said the first speaker, "your sister Bess is getting to be a beauty. Introduce me, will you?"

"No, I won't," said George shortly. He had been losing all the evening, and he felt nervous and irritable.

"Ah! We are too bad, eh?"

George made some fierce reply, and the other fellow struck him. Instantly George sprang to his feet and a fight took place. Mr. Hardy could not bear it any longer. He thought he broke away from the scene by the exercise of a great determination.

Next he found himself looking into his own home. It seemed to him it was an evening when he and all the children had gone out and Mrs. Hardy sat alone, looking into the fire as she had been looking before he fell asleep. She was thinking, and her thoughts were like burning coals as they fell into Mr. Hardy's heart and scorched him, as no other scene, not even the last, had done.

"My husband!" Mrs. Hardy was saying to herself, "how long it is since he gave me a caress, kissed me when he went to his work, or laid his hand lovingly on my cheek as he used to do! How brave, and handsome, and good I used to think him in the old Vermont days when we were struggling for our little home, and his best thought was of the home and of the wife! But the years have changed him; oh, yes! they have changed him bitterly. I wonder if he realises my hunger for his affection? Of what value to me are all these baubles wealth brings compared with a loving look, a tender smile, an affectionate caress! O Robert! Robert! come back to me! for I am so lonely, so lonely! Would to God all our riches might be taken from us and our position in Society be lost to us! for I am fast losing my love for him who is my husband. Great and long-suffering and forgiving God, help me! I feel wicked sometimes. I cannot bear this kind of a life. It is killing me! It is robbing me of all that life contains that is sweet and true. O Father of mercies, for Jesus' sake do not let me grow insane or without belief! O Robert, Robert! my lover, my husband; I will, I will love you!" And Mrs. Hardy fell on her knees by the side of the couch and buried her face in its cushions and sobbed and prayed.

Suddenly the whole scene changed, and Mr. Hardy, who had stretched out his arms to comfort his wife as in the old days when love was young, felt himself carried by an irresistible power up away from the earth, past the stars and planets and suns and satellites that blazed like gems in space; on, on for what seemed to him like ages of time, until even the thought of time grew indistinct; on and up and into the presence of the most mighty Face he had ever looked into. It was the Face of Eternity. On its brow was written in words of blazing light the one word "Now." And as he looked into that calm, awful Face and read that word, Mr. Hardy felt his soul crumble within him. When the Face spoke it was the speech of a thousand oceans heaved by a million tempests, yet through the terror

of it ran a thread of music—a still, sweet sound like everlasting love—as if angels sang somewhere a divine accompaniment. And the Face said:

"Child of humanity, you have neglected and despised me for fifty years. You have lived for yourself. You have been careless and thoughtless of the world's great needs. The time of your redemption is short. It has been appointed you by Him who rules the world that you should have but seven more days to live upon the earth—seven days to help redeem your soul from everlasting shame and death. Mortal, see to it that thou use the precious time like those who toil for jewels in the mine beneath the sea. I who speak unto thee am Eternity."

Then Robert Hardy thought he fell prostrate before that awful face and begged in bitterest terror for a longer lease of life.

"Seven days! Why it will be but seven swift seconds to redeem my past! Seven days! It will be a nothing in the marking of time! O mighty Power, grant me longer! Seven weeks! Seven years! And I will live for Thee as never mortal yet lived!"

And Robert Hardy sobbed and held his arms beseechingly up toward that most resplendent Face. And as he thus stretched out his arms, the Face bent down, toward his, and he thought a smile of pity gleamed upon it and he hoped that more time would be granted him; and then, as it came nearer, he suddenly awoke, and there was his own wife bending over him, and a tear from her face fell upon his own, as she said:

"Robert! Robert!"

Mr. Hardy sat up confused and trembling. Then he clasped his wife to him and kissed her as he used to do. And then, to her great amazement, he related to her in a low tone the dream he had just had. Mrs. Hardy listened in the most undisguised astonishment. But what followed filled her heart with fear.

"Mary," said her husband, with the utmost solemnity, "I cannot regard this as a dream alone. I have awakened with the firm conviction that I have only seven days left to live. I feel that God has spoken to me; and I have only seven days more to do my work in this world."

"O Robert! it was only a dream."

"No; it was more, Mary. You know I am not imaginative or superstitious in the least. You know I never dream. And this was something else. I shall die out of this world a week from to-night. Are the children here? Call them in."

Mr. Hardy spoke in a tone of such calm conviction, that Mrs. Hardy was filled with wonder and fear. She went to the curtain, and, as we have already recorded, she called the children into the other room.

Mr. Hardy gazed upon his children with a look they had not seen upon his face for years. Briefly but calmly he related his experience, omitting the details of the vision and all mention of the scene where George had appeared, and then declared with a solemnity and impressiveness that could not be resisted:

"My dear children, I have not lived as I should. I have not been to you the father I ought to have been. I have lived a very selfish, useless life. I have only seven more days to live. God has spoken to me. I am—"

He broke off suddenly, and, sobbing as only a strong man can, he drew his wife toward him and caressed her, while Bess crept up and put her arms about her father's neck.

The terrible suspicion shot into Mrs. Hardy's mind that her husband was insane. The children were terrified; only Alice seemed to catch the reflection of her mother's thought. At the same time, Mr. Hardy seemed to feel the suspicion held by them.

"No," he said, as if in answer to a spoken charge, "I am not insane. I never was more calm. I am in possession of all my faculties. But I have looked into the Face of Eternity this night and I know, I know that in seven days God will require my soul. Mary," he turned to his wife with the most beseeching cry, "Mary, do you believe me?"

She looked into her husband's face and saw there the old look. Reason, the noblest of all gifts, shone out of that noble face now lighted up with the old love, and standing on the brink of the other world. And Mrs. Hardy, looking her husband in the face, replied:

"Yes, Robert, I believe you. You may be mistaken in this impression about the time left you to live, but you are not insane."

"O God, I thank Thee for that!" cried Mr. Hardy.

Often during the most remarkable week he ever lived Mr. Hardy reposed in that implicit belief of his wife in his sanity.

There was a pause. Then Mr. Hardy asked George to bring the Bible. He read from John's Gospel that matchless prayer of Christ in the seventeenth chapter; then kneeling down, he prayed as he had never prayed before, that in the week allotted him to live he might know how to bless the world and serve his Master best. And when he arose and looked about upon his wife and children, it was with the look of one who has been into the very presence chamber of the only living God. At the same moment, so fast had the time gone in the excitement, the clock upon the mantel struck the hour of midnight—and the first of Robert Hardy's seven days had begun!

MONDAY—THE FIRST DAY

When Mr. Hardy woke on the morning of the first of the seven days left him to live, he was on the point of getting ready for his day's business, as usual, when the memory of his dream flashed upon him, and he was appalled to decide what he should do first. Breakfast was generally a hurried and silent meal with him. The children usually came straggling down at irregular intervals, and it was very seldom that the family all sat down together. This morning Mr. Hardy waited until all had appeared, and while they were eating he held a family council.

His wife was evidently in great excitement and anxiety, and yet the love and tenderness she felt coming back to her from her husband gave her face a look of beauty that had been a stranger to it for years.

The children were affected in various ways by their father's remarkable change. George was sullen and silent. Will looked thoughtful and troubled. Alice, a girl of very strong and decided opinions and character, greeted her father with a kiss and seemed to understand the new relations he now sustained to them all. Clara appeared terrified, as if death had already come into the house, and several times she broke down crying at the table, and finally went away into the sitting room. Bess sat next to her father, as she always did, and was the most cheerful of all, taking a very calm and philosophical view of the situation, so that Mr. Hardy smiled once or twice as she gave her advice.

Mr. Hardy was pale but calm. The impression of the night before was evidently deepening with him. It would have been absurd to call him insane. His wife was obliged to confess to herself that he had never appeared more sound in judgment and calm in speech. He was naturally a man of very strong will. His passions, as we have already seen, were under control. Never in all his life had he felt so self-contained, so free from nervousness, so capable of sustained effort. But the one great thought that filled his mind was that of the shortness of the time.

"Almighty God," was his prayer, "show me how to use these seven days in the wisest and best manner."

"Robert, what will you do to-day?" asked Mrs. Hardy.

"I have been thinking, dear, and I believe my first duty is to God. We have not had morning worship together for a long time. After we have knelt as a family in prayer to Him, I believe He will give me wisdom to know what I ought to do."

"I think father ought to stay at home with us all the time," said Bess.

"Robert," said Mrs. Hardy, who could not comprehend the full meaning of the situation much better than little Bess, "will you give up your business? How can you attend to it? Will you have the strength and the patience while labouring under this impression?"

"I have already thought over that. Yes; I believe I ought to go right on. I don't see what would be gained by severing my connection with the company."

"Will you tell the company you have only"—Mrs. Hardy could not say the words. They choked her.

"What would you do, Alice?" asked her father, turning to his oldest daughter, who, although a cripple, had more than once revealed to the family great powers of judgment and decision.

"I would not say anything to the company about it," replied Alice finally.

"That is the way I feel," said Mr. Hardy with a nod of approval. "They would not understand it. My successor in the office will be young Wellman, in all probability, and he is perfectly competent to carry on the work. I feel as if this matter were one that belonged to the family. I shall of course arrange my business affairs with reference to the situation, and George can give me half a day for the details. But you know, Mary, I have always kept my business in such shape that in any case of accident or sudden death matters could easily be arranged. Thank God! I shall not have to take time for those matters that I ought to give to more serious and important duties."

It was true that Mr. Hardy, who was a man of very methodical habits in a business way, had always arranged his affairs with reference to accidental removal. His business as manager necessitated his being on the road a great deal, and he realized, as many railroad men do realize, the liability of sudden death.

But such a thought had not had any influence on his actions to make him less selfish. He had thought, as all men do, that he should probably live right along after all; that death might take the engineer or conductor or fireman, but would pass him by.

Suddenly Will spoke up: "Father, do you want George and me to leave college?"

"Certainly not, my boy. What would be gained by that? I want you to keep right on just as if I were going to live fifty years more."

George did not say anything. He looked at his father as if he doubted his sanity.

His father noticed the look, and a terrible wave of anguish swept over him as he recalled the part of his vision in which he had seen his oldest son in the gambling room.

Again the prayer he had been silently praying all the morning went up out of his heart: "Almighty God, show me how to use the seven days most wisely."

"Father," said Bess suddenly, "what will you do about Jim and Clara? Did you know they were engaged?"

"Bess!" said Clara passionately. Then she stopped suddenly, and, seeing her father's brow grow dark, she cowered, afraid of what was coming.

But Mr. Hardy looked at the world differently this morning. Twenty-four hours before he would have treated Bessie's remark as he usually treated her surprising revelations of the secrets of the family. He would have laughed at it a little, and sternly commanded Clara to break the engagement, if there was one, at once: for James Caxton was not at all the sort of man Mr. Hardy wanted to have come into the family. He was poor, to begin with. More than all, his father had been the means of defeating Mr. Hardy in a municipal election where a place of influence and honour was in dispute. Mr. Hardy had never forgotten or forgiven it. When he began to see his children intimate with the Caxtons, he forbade their going to the house, with the result already described.

Mr. Hardy looked at Clara and said very tenderly: "Clara, we must have a good talk about this. You know your father loves you and wants you to be happy and—" Mr. Hardy stopped in his emotion, and Clara burst into tears and left the table.

"Come," cried Mr. Hardy after a moment, during which no one seemed inclined to speak; "let us ask God to give us all wisdom at this time."

George made a motion as if to go out.

"My son," called Mr. Hardy after him gently, "won't you stay with the rest of us?"

George sat down with a shamefaced look, Alice and Clara came back, and Mr. Hardy read that famous sixth chapter of Ephesians, beginning, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord." Then in a brief but earnest prayer he asked God's help and blessing on all the day, and rose to face it, the great burden of his responsibility beginning to rest upon him for the first time. He sat down for a moment by his wife and kissed her, putting his arm about her, while Bess climbed up on the side of the couch and the boys stood irresolute and wondering. Any outward mark of affection was so unusual on the part of their father that they felt awkward in the presence of it. Mrs. Hardy was almost overcome.

"O Robert, I cannot bear it! Surely it was nothing more than a dream! It couldn't have been anything more. You are not going to be called away from us so soon."

"Mary, I would God that I had seven years to atone for my neglect and selfishness towards you alone. But I am certain that God has granted me but seven days. I must act. God help me! Boys, you will be late. We will all be at home this evening. Alice, care for your mother and cheer her up. You are a good girl, and—"

Again Mr. Hardy broke down as he thought of the many years he had practically ignored this brave, strong, uncomplaining nature in his own house, and remorse tore him fiercely as he recalled

how he had persistently discouraged all the poor girl's ambitious efforts to make her way as an artist, not on account of the expense—for Mr. Hardy was not a niggard in that respect—but because he had a false idea concerning the profession. He looked at the girl now as she limped across the floor to her mother, her pale, intellectual face brightened by her love, and her eyes shining with tears at her father's unusual praise. "O God," was the inner cry of Mr. Hardy's heart, "what have I not neglected when I had it in my power to create so much happiness!"

The thought almost unnerved him; and for a moment he felt like sitting down to do nothing. But only for a moment. He rose briskly, went out into the hall and put on his overcoat, and, coming back a moment, said, "I am going down to see poor Scoville the first thing. I shall be so busy you must not look for me at lunch. But I will be back to six o'clock dinner. Good-bye!" He kissed his wife tenderly, and she clung to him sobbing. Then he kissed his daughters, a thing he had not done since they were babies, and shook hands with the boys, and marched out like one going to execution, something bright glistening in his own eyes.

Ah! ye fathers and husbands, you who are toiling for the dear ones at home, how many of you have grown so unaccustomed to the tender affections of home that your own wife would almost faint and think something was going to happen to you if you kissed her good-bye when you went away to your work in the morning! How do you know that she who has been your faithful friend and lover all these years, and nursed you through peevish sickness and done a thousand things every day for you without so much as a word of thanks or praise on your part—how do you know she does not care for these demonstrations of affection? And if she does not, how does it happen except through neglect? Call it not a little thing. It is of such little things that heaven is made, and it is of the home where such little things are found that it can truly be said, "Love is master, and the Evil One cannot find an entrance to blot with his foul tread the sweetest thing on earth."

Mr. Hardy hurried down towards the tenement where Ward Scoville lived, revolving in his mind as he went along plans for his future happiness and comfort.

"I'll deed him the place where he lives, and arrange it in some way so that he won't have to go to the hospital, or come on the county when his poor wife is gone. It will be the best I can do for him. Poor fellow! What a shame I did not come down last night! And his wife a hopeless invalid and the oldest child only four years old, Mary said!"

He was surprised, as he drew near the house, to see a group of men standing there outside and talking together earnestly. As Mr. Hardy came up they stood aside to let him pass, but were barely civil.

"Well, Stevens," Mr. Hardy inquired of one of the men, recognising him as one of the employés in the casting room, "how is Scoville this morning?"

"Dead!"

Mr. Hardy reeled as if struck in the breast with a heavy blow.

"Dead, did you say?"

"He died about an hour ago," said one of the other men. "The surgeon was late in getting around, and after the amputation it was ascertained that Scoville had received severe internal injuries."

"Was he conscious?" Mr. Hardy asked the question mechanically, but all the while his mind was in a whirl of remorse.

"Yes; up to the last moment."

Mr. Hardy went to the door and knocked. A woman, one of the neighbours, opened it and he went in. The sight stunned him. The dead man had been removed to a rear room, but his wife lay upon the very same ragged lounge Mr. Hardy had seen in his dream. The surgeon was bending over her. The room was full of neighbours.

The surgeon suddenly arose and, turning about, spoke in a quiet but decided tone:

"Now then, good people, just go home, will you, for a while? And suppose some of you take these children along with you. You can't do anything more now, and your presence disturbs the

woman! Ah, Mr. Hardy," he exclaimed, seeing the manager, "you here? This is a sad business. Come, now, ladies, I must ask you to retire."

Everybody went out except the surgeon, the poor woman's sister, and Mr. Hardy. He drew the surgeon over to the window and inquired concerning the particulars. Mr. Hardy had received a shock at the very first, and he trembled violently.

"Well, you see," explained the surgeon, "Scoville was a dead man from the minute of the accident. Nothing could have saved him When the accident happened I was down at Bayville attending the men who were injured in the wreck last Saturday. I telegraphed that I would come at once. But there was a delay on the road, and I did not get here until three o'clock in the morning. Meanwhile everything had been done that was possible. But nothing could save the poor fellow. This shock will kill his wife. I doubt if she lives through the day."

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