

*Hasty  
Words*

**CHARACTER BUILDING STORIES**



"MOTHER, please look here and see my pretty block-house. When I'm a man we'll have one just like it."

I glanced at four year old Harry, who had constructed a most wonderful **edifice\*** in the

middle of my sitting room.

"I am afraid it would not keep out much of the snow," said I.

"But it would be so nice in summer," said Harry, laughing merrily, and springing to my side, he threw his little arms around-my neck, saying, "Oh, mamma! I love you so!"

"Harry," said I, kissing him, "will you run and tell Bridget to have warm biscuit for tea?" He started quickly, and as he started his foot caught in a light stand upon which I had placed a rare **Parisian** vase, with a rose bud just unfolding its crimson petals in it. The stand fell over, and the vase (a gift from my dead mother) was shattered.



"You naughty boy," I cried angrily; "you deserve to be whipped. Pick up those pieces instantly, and put them in the **coal-hod**." He stooped, carefully picked up the fragments, cutting his little fingers as he did so against the sharp edges. He carried them away and was gone some time. When he returned it was with something clasped tightly in his hand.

Coming to me he placed a five cent piece in my lap, saying timidly, "Will that buy you a new vase, mamma?"

What evil demon possessed me to take the coin, his sacredly cherished treasure, (a kind neighbor had given him for some little office) and throw it from me, I know not.

Harry picked it up with tears running down his face, and sat down upon his stool with his hands folded so meekly. Presently he said: "May I go and play with Eddie Potter?"



"I don't care where you go," said I, crossly, "so you keep out of my sight."

Harry went to the closet where his coat and hat hung, put them on, and came and stood by my side.

"Mamma, will you please forgive me? I'm so sorry;" and he turned up his face for a kiss. I pushed the little fellow away. He stood by the door a moment, looking pitifully at me; it is twenty-five years ago to-day since he stood there, but I can see him with his blue coat and red and gray worsted skating cap, and the little red mittens, as if it were but yesterday. But I looked coldly at him, the door opened and shut, the little feet went slowly down the stairs. I heard him go out; unfasten the gate. Looking out of the window, I saw the little fellow lift his face with a smile as he saw me, which gave place to a pitiful quiver of the lips as he saw I took no notice of him. I watched the darling down the



street with a strange undefined feeling, till the little coat and red mittens were no longer visible. Twice a sudden impulse moved me to call him back, but I crushed it down. Oh, would to God I had!



Well, I sewed all through the afternoon. At four o'clock I put away my work, and sat by the window. Conscience" began to reproach me for my conduct. "I don't care," said I, "my beautiful vase is a ruin."

"What is the value of all the vases in the world compared with your child? Have you not spoken crossly to that dear little Harry, who is always so cheerful and obedient? And this is not the first time either, and you calling yourself a Christian mother, too? Suppose Harry should be taken suddenly from you. Wouldn't your cruel words **haunt** you forever?" I could bear this no longer. I rose, and picked up the stray litter about the room to give it a more tidy appearance.

Then I went to the window, peering anxiously through the gloom, but seeing nothing of my boy. My heart became terribly heavy this suspense was unbearable. Hastily throwing a shawl over my head, I ran into Mrs. Potters'.

"Have you seen Eddie?" was the question before I entered the room.

"Have you seen Harry?" "He was over here at half past two; he and Eddie went over to Josie Gray's. I think—"

What she thought I never knew, for at that moment Eddie rushed in breathless, screaming, "Mother, Mother! Harry Loring is drowned! We were sliding on the millpond and there was a hole in the ice with snow on it, and Harry didn't see it, and—"



"Hush, Eddie!" said his mother; looking at me fearfully. "Here is Mrs. Loring."

There was a great silence in the room,

broken only by the **blithe**, sweet voice of a canary, and the purr of a Maltese cat. Presently Mrs. Potter came toward me, and placed her hand softly upon my shoulder saying, "Ella, my poor child!"

I never moved, but sat with wide open eyes upon an awful picture. A cold, gray afternoon, a pond, little boys playing upon it, one little figure well known to me, suddenly disappearing through the **treacherous** ice, down, down, the little hands grasping at cruel weeds, the sweet mouth full of water. And those wicked, sinful words ringing through my ears, "I don't care where you go, so long as you keep out of my sight."

There was a mist before my eyes, a ringing in my ears, I remember leaving the house with a blind feeling of going where my Harry was.



Then came a horrible sense of the earth giving way under my feet, and I knew no more.

A pleasant feeling of warmth, a **languid** sense pervading my system. I opened my eyes and glanced around the room. A strange woman by the fire; at the foot of the bed, my husband with his hand over his eyes.

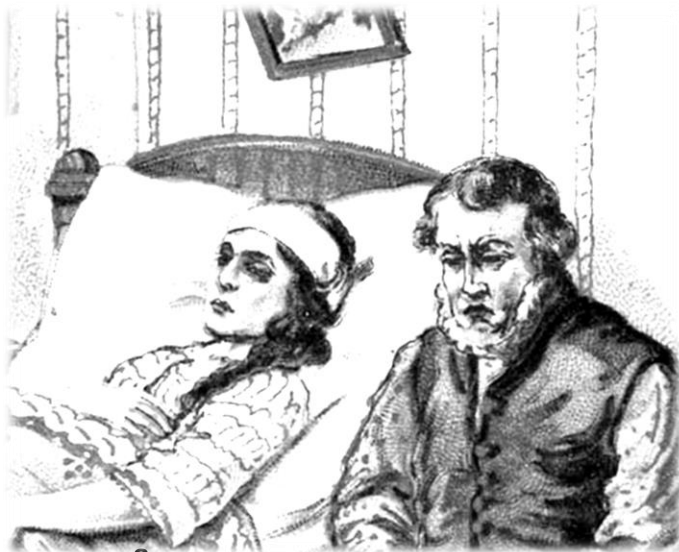
I tried to think where I was, and what had happened, but in vain. Then my attention was arrested by a little figure in a red flannel night dress, cuddled up in a big chair— my Harry!

Then it all flashed across my mind. I sat up straight in bed with a faint "Why!"

"What is it?" said I, feebly.

"You must not talk; lie down. Oh, darling, darling?" and

the strong man wept like a child. And the little figure came and jumped on my bed, and putting his arms around my neck, cried, too. And I,





puzzled to know what it all meant, cried also. The strange figure came forward and took Harry away, saying, "Be careful, Mr. Loring, everything now depends upon quiet."

"Tell me now," said I. "I must know; I had such a horrible feeling. Oh, Harold! I dreamed that Harry was drowned!"

His face grew white. "He was near death; George Gray got him out of the pond; Gray sent down to the office for me; I went after Dr. Hooper, and came right up. There was but a spark of life left, but we succeeded at last."

"How many days ago was it, Harold?" I said.

"Seven weeks ago yesterday," said he smiling.

"Seven weeks!" said I. "Impossible!"

"You have been very sick with brain fever, Ella. You were very near death; for days we despaired of ever seeing you conscious again. You would say, 'Harry is drowned; and I made him drown himself.' Last night Dr. Hooper said

the crisis was at hand; if you lived through the night you would get well. Oh, Ella! I am so thankful you are spared to me!"

"I have been so weak and sinful, Harold," said I, and then told him all, not keeping back anything.

He heard me through, stroking my hair in a gentle fashion. When I finished he said :—"It has taught you a lesson, Ella dear." And that was all.

I soon recovered. For a long time I could not bear Harry out of my sight. It seemed as if I could not do enough to atone for my wicked conduct. The thought makes me shudder now—if it had been that Harry never came back to me, and that the last words he heard from his mother's lips were so unkind. I have had three children since then, and not one of them has heard a cross or



hasty word from me. Oftentimes my patience is sorely tried, but one thought of that horrible death to which Harry came so near, drives the demon away.

Mothers, bear patiently with these innocent little ones. Are there not many whose eyes resting on this simple story fill with bitter tears at the recollection of the unkind words, and even blows, to little children laid away forever, who would give all their worldly possessions, yes, years of their lives, to recall those hasty words that made their child's lips quiver pitifully and the clear eyes dim with tears? Ah! you cannot have them back even for a moment. They are gone, and your sin remains.

### **Word Glossary**

**Blithe**--having or showing a good mood  
**Coal-hod**--ash bucket  
**Crimson**-- any of several deep purplish reds  
**Edifice**--a large or massive structure  
**Haunt**-- to stay around  
**Languid**--drooping as if from exhaustion, weak  
**Parisian**--from Paris  
**Treacherous**--unreliable, unforeseen or hidden hazards  
**Worsted**--firm textured

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