

# The Footprints

by Harriet Lummis Smith + Illustrated by Charlotte Harding Brown

**S**HE had remained sleepless until late into the night, falling, at last, into the stupor of exhaustion, so that the dawn came upon her unawares. She started awake to find the room brilliant with sunshine, fresh with the beneficent fragrances of morning. It was inconceivable that the Day had come like other days—soft-footed, scintillating—and had found her sleeping.

The second surprise was greater. As she rose and dressed she realized that her mood was apathetic, almost indifferent. After the fever of the past weeks, their hope and dread, their ecstasy and torment, after shame that scorched, and joys so poignant as to be almost pain, and doubt that kept her wide-eyed through long, wearisome nights, decision had brought with it a profound calm. She seemed to have passed beyond the storms of love and suffering and rapture, into a tranquil harbor.

Her husband was reading his paper as she came down-stairs, and he did not raise his eyes at once. That gave her a chance to look at him. The imminence of the crisis had sharpened her senses. She saw him with that clear-sightedness impossible under normal conditions between two closely associated. It is only strangers whom we see as they are. As if this had been the dawn of doomsday, the real man was revealed, and even if she had not gone beyond the turning-point, the fatuous egotism of the unconscious face would have convinced her that she had chosen wisely. His armor was proof against any hurt she could give him. It was a relief to feel that in taking the irrevocable step she would leave no wretchedness behind her, nothing but the incredulous protest of injured vanity.

At the rustle of her dress her husband looked up. "Mrs. Elmslie!"

"Yes!" she said, turning. In their twelve years of married life they had never passed beyond that formal

address. The joy their child had brought with him and the anguish of his going had neither been sufficient to bring to the man's lips a term of endearment. He had been glad in his way. He had suffered over the knowledge that there was no longer a son to hand down his name, but neither grief nor gladness had bridged the chasm between these two souls.

The woman remembered as she stood waiting, when the other man had first spoken her name. "Margaret," he had said, his deep voice touching the syllables ever so lightly, as one touches the cheek of a sleeping child. The word had been a caress and a song, both in one. Its music had kept her wakeful many a night. Nothing that he could say again would ever stir the depths like her name upon his lips for the first time.

"Mrs. Elmslie!" The paper rustled crisply as the reader thrust it aside. "I was surprised to learn last evening that you had not called on Mrs. Warren."

"No!" she acknowledged, and stood looking down, like a child taken to task. Her husband frowned. "Most inconsiderate, amazingly so. The Warrens have been our neighbors for three months. Warren and I are closely associated in business, and it is desirable from every standpoint that our families should be on friendly terms. What excuse have you to offer?"

"None at all." Her voice was wearily indifferent.

A little perplexity showed under the frowning attention with which her husband was regarding her. He found her attitude puzzling. He looked for humility, penitence, timid excuses. As the latter were not forthcoming, he angled for them.

"You can hardly say you have no time for social courtesies. A woman with three servants and no children to require her attention."

"I have time enough," she said, with bloodless lips. For the instant her calm was gone and she hated him, all the more that his cruelty was unconscious. He did not know how his taunt would wound her. He had lived with her twelve years, and did not know. The worst was less than his desert.

Mr. Elmslie consulted his watch. "Are we going to have any breakfast?" he asked, in a tone of forced self-control. "This is the third time this week that I have waited from five to fifteen minutes for my meals. If you used your leisure in disciplining your servants, there would not be such frequent occasion for criticizing your household management. In my office punctuality is insisted upon. No employee is allowed to feel—"

The summons to breakfast cut short Mr. Elmslie's eulogy of his business methods. Ensnared behind his paper, he did not notice that his wife ate nothing. She sat back of the coffee urn, gazing about with a closeness of attention that gave the effect of novelty to the most familiar object. This was her last meal at the round table where she had sat a bride, looking across timidly at the man she had chosen. The high chair had stood at her right, when the boy had been big enough to come down to the dining-room. A mist that came just short of tears clouded her vision at the thought. She had broken herself of weeping because it annoyed her husband.

It had not taken the boy long to discard a high chair. All her fond clinging had not availed to keep him a baby, and his rapid growth had brought her ecstasy as well as pain. He was every inch a boy—heedless, daring, mischievous, a manly boy who told the truth without fear, even when it meant punishment, a boy with candid eyes and lips that were always smiling. To the mother, disillusioned before his birth, his inexhaustible joyousness was a miracle of divine goodness, for which she daily thanked God.

She came back from her memories with the realization that her husband was rising from the table, that he was coming toward her for the formal, meaningless kiss which was the outward sign of the beautiful perfection of their marital relations. She turned faint at his approach. The impulse to beg him to spare her was so strong that it almost overmastered her prudence. Her lips were icy like those of a dead woman, as his brushed them. He noticed neither that



Charlotte Harding Brown

nor her pallor, nor the hands which gripped each other till the finger-tips left purple prints. "Good-by," he said.

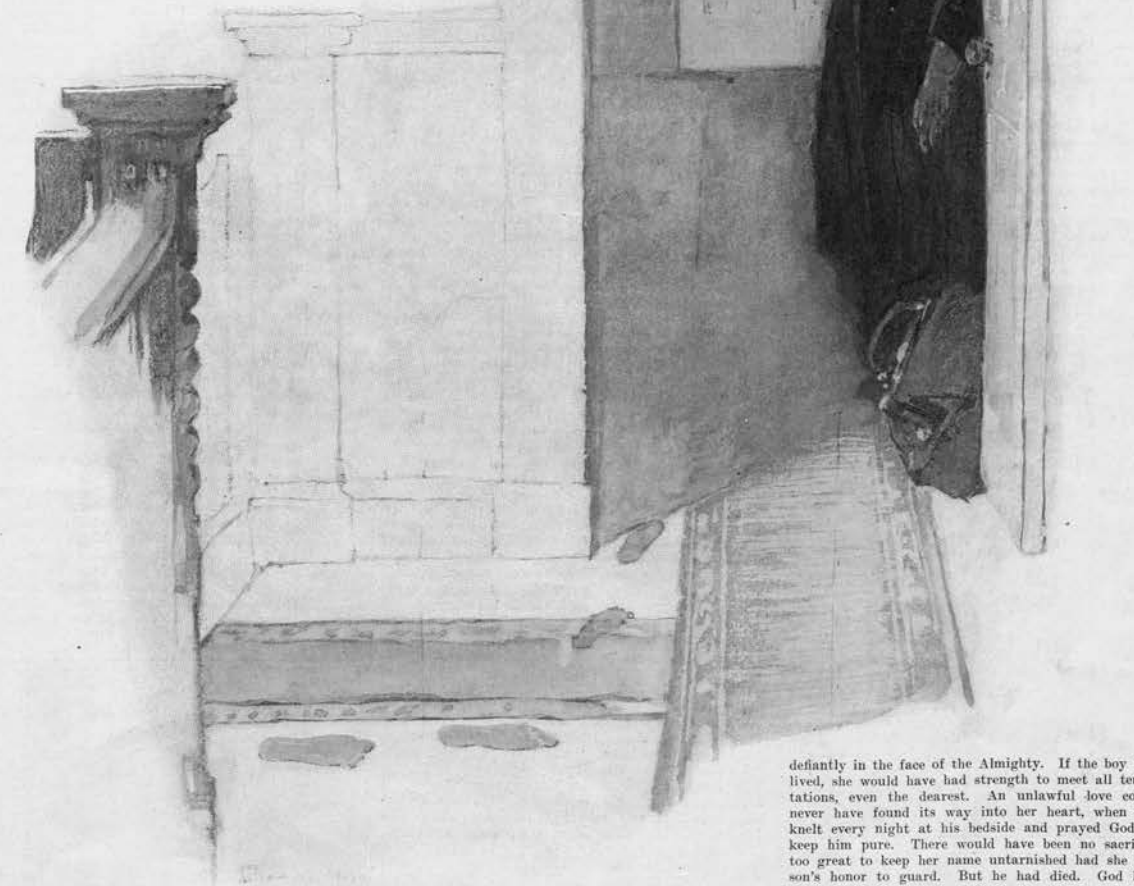
"Good-by!" she repeated, mechanically, and wondered at herself that she could feel nothing but relief. It was over, the long lie, the insufferable humiliation, the weary monotony of dragging days and endless nights. Youth was still hers. Love waited for her. Freedom was to be had for the taking. The door that shut upon her husband was the closing of one life. Now she would begin to live again.

Her preparations were already made. There was no sense of flurry to sound its discordant note. She gave her directions for the day, making out the dinner menu with unusual care, cautioning Letty about the roast. The last had been overdone, and Elmslie had sulked.

"I shall not be here, Letty," Mrs. Elmslie said. "I am going into the city by the morning train, and shall not come back for dinner." Her voice was steady but her heart-beats quickened with the realization that she was committed.

The woman's broad, kindly face broke into a smile. "I'm glad to hear it, Mrs. Elmslie," she said, heartily. "I often say to Ella, that it's a shame for you to live the way you do. Good gracious! You're a young woman yet, and young folks need good times same as babies need milk. You just go to some funny show in the city and enjoy yourself. Don't spend all your time shopping."

"No, Letty. I mean to enjoy myself." Mrs. Elmslie spoke gently, touched by the woman's sympathy. Letty had been with her when they had brought the boy home, his eyes open, his little body dripping. She could see now that wet, zigzag trail along the rug and up the stairs. Letty had sat beside the mother as the doctors had worked over the drowned boy in the room overhead. They had worked on doggedly, though hope-



#### THEN SHE HALTED AND SWAYED

lessly, because of the mother who waited below. It was she who, at last, had given the word to cease the torturing of the helpless body, from which the spirit had fled hours before, and then she had turned and hidden her face on Letty's broad bosom, and Letty had sobbed over her, calling her her poor lamb and her darling.

Mrs. Elmslie suddenly took the work-hardened hand in both her own. "You've been very good to me, Letty. If anything should happen to me I want you to know that I shall never forget."

"Happen to you?" cried Letty, touched and half tearful. "And what should happen? You're little more than a girl. I'm old enough to be your ma. You'll live to scatter peas over my grave like your

heart," added Letty, with determined cheerfulness. "When you come home from the city to-day you won't feel like such thoughts. You need a little change to chirk you up."

She left her good-by to the boy's room for the last. The other ties had snapped like tow. Her farewells had been the turning of the key that opened her prison door. But the room up-stairs was different. The little white bed stood as when the boy had knelt beside it every night for his evening prayer. She had knelt with him often, as pure in heart as he. It came over her with a sense of awe, that, after to-day, her presence in that still white room would be a sacrilege.

Oh, if the boy were there! She flung the thought

defiantly in the face of the Almighty. If the boy had lived, she would have had strength to meet all temptations, even the dearest. An unlawful love could never have found its way into her heart, when she knelt every night at his bedside and prayed God to keep him pure. There would have been no sacrifice too great to keep her name untarnished had she her son's honor to guard. But he had died. God had taken him, and left her defenseless.

She looked her last about the silent room—a long, tearless scrutiny. The striking of a clock warned her that it was time to go. As she stepped into the hall the breeze blew the door to, and she wondered dully if perhaps an angel with a flaming sword kept guard on the other side. She could never open it again. Whatever joys life had for her, whatever compensation she might find in a man's devotion for the good she had missed, she would never again have the right to enter the room where her boy had lain dead.

She put on her hat hastily, took her traveling-bag, and turned to go down the stairs. Then she halted and swayed. She tore off her veil, and fell upon her knees, peering with dilated eyes, her shoulders heaving. Her shriek died in her throat, as if a hand had clutched it. White and quivering, she bent nearer the polished oak. Was she going mad? It was that, or

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## THE BAZAR'S NEW EMBROIDERY CONTEST

**L**AST year HARPER'S BAZAR announced a Prize Embroidery Contest. Prizes to the value of about one thousand dollars were given for work in silks only. The response was even greater than had been anticipated. Seven thousand persons entered their names. About three thousand women and a few men sent

finished work, beautiful in coloring and workmanship. More than a thousand women visited the exhibition of the finished work. So much interest was shown that we promised to start another contest soon.

That Contest is Now Open

### OUR GREAT PRIZE LIST

CLASS A White Work on White EMBROIDERED IN COTTON	
First Prize.....	\$50.00
Second Prize.....	40.00
Third Prize.....	25.00
Fourth Prize.....	10.00
Fifth Prize.....	10.00
Sixth Prize.....	10.00
Seventh Prize.....	5.00
Eighth Prize.....	5.00
Ninth Prize.....	5.00
Tenth Prize.....	5.00
Eleventh Prize.....	5.00
Thirty Prizes of Subscriptions to "Harper's Magazine."	
Ten Prizes of Books.	
Fifty Prizes of Subscriptions to "Harper's Bazar."	

In this class the designs will be: A Nightgown or Chemise; A Blouse; A Round Table-center; A Towel-end; A Washable Pillow Slip-cover.

CLASS B Household Articles EMBROIDERED IN SILKS	
First Prize.....	\$50.00
Second Prize.....	40.00
Third Prize.....	25.00
Fourth Prize.....	10.00
Fifth Prize.....	10.00
Sixth Prize.....	10.00
Seventh Prize.....	5.00
Eighth Prize.....	5.00
Ninth Prize.....	5.00
Tenth Prize.....	5.00
Eleventh Prize.....	5.00
Thirty Prizes of Subscriptions to "Harper's Magazine."	
Ten Prizes of Books.	
Fifty Prizes of Subscriptions to "Harper's Bazar."	

In this class the designs will be: A Square Table-center; A Round Table-center; An Oval Table-center; A Square Pillow-cover; An Oblong Pillow-cover.

It is to be on broader lines than the first one. The prize list amounts to nearly twelve hundred dollars, including over five hundred dollars in cash.

The work will be divided into three classes, in each of which there will be one hundred and one prizes.

Read this list below:

CLASS C Dress Accessories EMBROIDERED IN FANCY FLOSSES	
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Thirty Prizes of Subscriptions to "Harper's Magazine."	
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In this class the designs will be: A Woman's Blouse; An Embroidered Kimono; A Hand-bag; A Collar; A Child's Frock with yoke and panel.

### READ THE CONDITIONS OF THE CONTEST

1. Each piece submitted must be entirely the hand-work of the person submitting it. No machine-work can be entered.
2. Each contestant must choose the pattern she prefers to embroider from the fifteen designs offered by the "Bazar." No outside designs will be accepted. The design will be sent free by the "Bazar," to any person wishing to enter the contest. Later, if another design is desired, either in the same class or in another class, it will be sent on request.
3. All pieces of work must be received at the office of Harper & Brothers before noon on March 1, 1912. They must be addressed "Harper's Bazar," Embroidery Contest, care of Harper & Brothers, Franklin Square, New York City, and sent by registered mail or by express, charges prepaid.

From the earlier contest we learned some definite lessons. Chief among these is the fact that there are many varieties of embroidery. The woman who is bold in handling her silks and stitches gets a very different result from that obtained by the painstaking worker in fine, close stitchery.

4. At the close of the contest all work will be returned to the owners by express, charges collect, unless postage for registered mail is enclosed when the package is sent. All possible care will be used in the handling, but we cannot guarantee prompt delivery by the express companies.
5. The names of the prize-winners will be announced in the "Bazar," for May, 1912.
6. Entries from outside the United States, on which customs duties may be assessed, must be sent with the understanding that such charges will be paid by the sender, not by the "Bazar." When notified that a package is held for duty the "Bazar" will write immediately to the sender and the amount of the charge must be sent to us that we may obtain the package.

blouses, work-bags, dress trimmings, etc., which, with fashion's quick changes, are not worth too much labor.

Send a stamped envelope to the BAZAR for an application blank and a page showing the designs for the contest. Enter your name at once.

### THE FOOTPRINTS

(Continued from page 487)  
else a miracle had been wrought for her deliverance.

The maid coming from the room where she had been dusting caught sight of the crouching form of her mistress. "Mrs. Elmslie—for the love of heaven, Letty, Letty!" She ran forward, but the other woman's uplifted hand checked her.

"See, Ella!" The shaking finger pointed to the floor, and the girl's rosy cheeks paled as her eyes followed its direction. Against the oak, mercilessly distinct in the clear light, was the print of a child's wet foot.

"They come up the stairs, ma'am." Ella was trembling, frightened at her own incomprehensible terror. "I must have left the front door on the latch, and some child strayed in."

Letty's voice sounded bold, reassuring in its suggestion of matter-of-fact common sense. "Did you call me, Ella? Is anything wrong?"

"See if the door is locked, will you?" They heard her cross the hall and try the door. "Yes, it's locked, Ella," she answered, but a stifled cry followed hard on the words. The girl up-stairs, carried away by a mysterious panic, screamed shrilly, "What's the matter, Letty?"

The answer was unsteady. "It's nothing—only tracks. They come up the outside steps, and go on up the stairs. They're the prints of feet. Little bare feet. Oh!" They heard the sharp intake of her breath. "They're wet."

Ella did not answer. The sturdy common sense of the farmer's daughter was in revolt against intangible fears. After all, the intruder was only a child. "I could handle six of that size," thought the girl, clutching her broom. She pushed by Mrs. Elmslie's kneeling figure, and followed the zigzag line of footprints down the hall to a closed door. There she hesitated. Mrs. Elmslie allowed no one but herself and Letty to enter that room, yet this emergency was no time for nice distinctions. "He's in there, fast enough," Ella thought, triumphantly; "the footprints lead in, and there's none coming out."

Tentatively she turned the knob. The breeze from the west held the door against her doubtful pressure; and spurred to energetic measures by this mild resistance, she flung it wide. No intruder was in sight, though the rocking-chair by the window stirred lightly in the breeze, and gave to the empty room an air of occupancy. As Ella crossed the white matting she saw the prints of bare wet feet running on ahead, but the closet was empty except for the garments hanging there—a boy's garments, half worn, with suggestions of vitality still about them.

The emptiness of the room was oppressive. In spite of the bright sunshine she felt like one making his way through the dark, watchful for the figure that at any moment might start from some lurking place. The silence was clamorous, as if some terrifying voice was on the point of speaking. The old foolish alarm was stealing back. She went out hastily.

Letty had come up-stairs, and helped her mistress to her room. Mrs. Elmslie lay back against the pillow, her face white as the linen, but luminous, almost smiling. Ella choked down a sob.

"I've looked about everywhere. I can't find a trace—"

"Hold your tongue," Letty commanded, with asperity. Then her voice changed to crooning tenderness. "I'll take away your hat, my dearie; you are not fit to leave the house this morning. You'll go to the city another day."

"No, Letty. Never!" The answer had the solemnity of a vow, the sorrowful sweetness of a penitential psalm. "Never," she said again softly, like one who whispers a promise into loved ears.

In spite of her pleading it was a long time before they left her, and then they went reluctantly, looking at each other askance, as if each dreaded to read in the other's eyes the confirmation of her own incredible thought. But the woman up-stairs sighed with relief as the sound of their footsteps grew faint.

By the time she had strength enough to drag herself from her bed, the footprints in the hall were no longer moist, but the outline of a child's foot showed plainly against the oak. Her eyes fixed upon them, she moved slowly down the hall to the closed room. The flaming sword was in its sheath. If the angel were still on guard, he waited with a smile. With head bowed like one who prays, she opened the door and went in.

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