

**SATURDAY
NIGHT**

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Saturday night by S. T. Cross

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"HIS WIFE . . . FOUND HIM LYING THERE HELPLESS."

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BY
S. T. CROSS.



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SATURDAY NIGHT.



CHAPTER I.

NO HARM DONE.

IT is on a Sunday afternoon that we first make William Webb's acquaintance. He is walking rather fast on the road from Acton to London. That pleasant suburb lies behind him, with its fields and trees, and old red houses and large walled gardens, hardly altered from what it was fifty years ago. Before him a smoky cloud hangs over the outskirts of London; Notting Hill and Kensington are stretching themselves out into the country, and William Webb thinks that in the course of a few years his dear Acton will be swallowed up by the horrid monster London.

"Well, be it so," says Webb to himself; "perhaps by that time I shall not be living at Acton, or I may no longer care for it. Places often lose their charm for us. Acton lost one of its charms when Anna Summers left it. There's an old song that says, 'Tis home where'er the heart is;' if that is the case, my home is not at Eastcote, Acton, but at Holland Road, Kensington!" He laughed to himself and walked on.

He came to a corner, and turned into another street. At the corner was an iron post, on which were stuck various notices, one of them telling of a temperance meeting to be held in a schoolroom at Kensington. The corner house was a public-house. William looked from the words *Temperance Meeting* on the post to the word *Bar* on the swing-door. He laughed again. "Here are two of different trades that don't agree! Well, if there were no publics, there would be no temperance meetings, I suppose. They make a deal too much fuss now about temperance."

Having thus settled the matter in his own mind, he again went on. Another turn brought him into Holland Road, and to the door which he knew well. It was one of some twenty doors all alike, belonging to houses all alike; yet not one of the other nineteen had any charm for William Webb. He ran down the steps to the kitchen door, and before he could rap on it, the door was opened.

Anna Summers stood there in her bonnet; she was like any other nice young English girl, just as William Webb was like any other nice young English man. But though all the roses on a bush are alike, no two are exactly alike; and though all the peas in a pod are alike, no two are precisely alike. And Anna was not quite the same as any other girl: William thought that no other girl could come near her for looks, manners, and goodness.

"So there you are!" said Anna, her rosy cheeks growing a little rosier, and a little rosier still when William's whiskers went close to them.

"Yes, here I am; are you ready?"

"Come in and rest a bit," said Anna; "cook has something to say to you, and mistress told me to give you your tea if I liked."

"No," replied William, walking into the kitchen; "I promised to take you to your mother's to tea. Well, cook, how are you?"

Cook was a stout, middle-aged widow; she had a lover now, an elderly man, a greengrocer, and she said that when William Webb and Anna were married and could supply the vegetables, she would go and take charge of Mr. Hopson and his shop.

"Pretty well, thank you, William Webb; how are you? Will you take a cup of tea?"

"No, thank you; we are due at Mrs. Summers's at five o'clock, and we have no time to spare."

"I wanted to see you," returned cook, going to a drawer of the dresser, "to show you this." And she drew out a patchwork quilt, nearly finished. "How do you like it?"

"It is beautiful!" exclaimed William. "Is it made of velvet?"

Cook and Anna burst out laughing.

"Velvet, indeed! How could I afford velvet? And how would velvet wash? And how could you bear the heat of sleeping under velvet?"

"I don't know," answered William, meekly. "Perhaps, then, it is crape."

The two women laughed louder than before.

"What stupid men are, to be sure!" cried cook; "it is made of good washing prints, and it is a wedding present for you and Anna."

William thanked cook very heartily, and then he hurried Anna off, saying that they had a long walk before them, and her mother would be waiting tea.

"But what cook says," remarked Webb, as soon as he and Anna were out in the street, "makes me think that it is time to ask you to fix the day."

Anna did not reply, and William presently said, "When shall I put up the banns?"

"Oh, William!" and she glanced up at him with her deep grey eyes, "don't you think we had better wait until we have laid by a little more money?"

William now thought before he answered.

"What could we save by waiting three months, or even six months?"

"A few pounds, I should think."

"You might, perhaps; girls can save money. But I can't. You get yours once in three months. I get mine every Saturday. It is easy to save up your sovereigns, but uncommon hard to save up your shillings."

"Why so?" asked Anna.

"Oh, one thinks before breaking into a sovereign, but a shilling runs away like water."

"Does it? Where does it run to?"

William did not answer.

"Where does your shilling run to, Will, dear?"

"Among my friends," replied William, with a short laugh. "When one sees a friend in want of a shilling, what can one do but help him?"

Anna's hand was on Will's arm; the hand gave the arm a loving squeeze.

"I like you for being kind to your neighbours. One ought to give to those who need. I try to do the same. Whenever there is a collection in church, I put something into the bag."

"Bah! tut!" said Will, and grew rather red.

"What is the matter?" cried Anna.

"The dust," said Will, "or something. Let us turn off across the fields. We can go this way."

The fields were much pleasanter than the dusty road; and as they walked, William did not say anything more about the banns, but he did talk about his prospects. He was now under-gardener at Eastcote, but he thought he might soon take a