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Danger Or, Wounded in the House of a Friend

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Imprint

This book is part of TREDITION CLASSICS

Author: T. S. (Timothy Shay) Arthur
Cover design: Buchgut, Berlin - Germany

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg - Germany
ISBN: 978-3-8424-5620-4

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DANGER
OR
WOUNDED IN THE HOUSE OF A FRIEND

BY
T. S. ARTHUR

**PHILADELPHIA, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO,
ST. LOUIS AND SAN FRANCISCO.**

1875

PREFACE.

ALL efforts at eradicating evil must, to be successful, begin as near the beginning as possible. It is easier to destroy a weed when but an inch above the ground than after it has attained a rank growth and set its hundred rootlets in the soil. Better if the evil seed were not sown at all; better if the ground received only good seed into its fertile bosom. How much richer and sweeter the harvest!

Bars and drinking-saloons are, in reality, not so much the causes as the effects of intemperance. The chief causes lie back of these, and are to be found in our homes. Bars and drinking-saloons minister to, stimulate and increase the appetite already formed, and give accelerated speed to those whose feet have begun to move along the road to ruin.

In "THREE YEARS IN A MAN-TRAP" the author of this volume uncovered the terrible evils of the liquor traffic; in this, he goes deeper, and unveils the more hidden sources of that widespread ruin which is cursing our land. From the public licensed saloon, where liquor is sold to men—not to boys, except in violation of law—he turns to the private home saloon, where it is given away in unstinted measure to guests of both sexes and of all ages, and seeks to show in a series of swiftly-moving panoramic scenes the dreadful consequences that flow therefrom.

This book is meant by the author to be a startling cry of "DANGER!" Different from "THE MAN-TRAP," as dealing with another aspect of the temperance question, its pictures are wholly unlike those presented in that book, but none the less vivid or intense. It is given as an argument against what is called the temperate use of liquor, and as an exhibition of the fearful disasters that flow from our social drinking customs. In making this argument and exhibition the author has given his best effort to the work.

WOUNDED IN THE HOUSE OF A FRIEND.

CHAPTER I.

SNOW had been falling for more than three hours, the large flakes dropping silently through the still air until the earth was covered with an even carpet many inches in depth.

It was past midnight. The air, which had been so still, was growing restless and beginning to whirl the snow into eddies and drive it about in an angry kind of way, whistling around sharp corners and rattling every loose sign and shutter upon which it could lay its invisible hands.

In front of an elegant residence stood half a dozen carriages. The glare of light from hall and windows and the sound of music and dancing told of a festival within. The door opened, and a group of young girls, wrapped in shawls and waterproofs, came out and ran, merrily laughing, across the snow-covered pavement, and crowding into one of the carriages, were driven off at a rapid speed. Following them came a young man on whose lip and cheeks the downy beard had scarcely thrown a shadow. The strong light of the vestibule lamp fell upon a handsome face, but it wore an unnatural flush.

There was an unsteadiness about his movements as he descended the marble steps, and he grasped the iron railing like one in danger of falling. A waiter who had followed him to the door stood looking at him with a half-pitying, half-amused expression on his face as he went off, staggering through the blinding drift.

The storm was one of the fiercest of the season, and the air since midnight had become intensely cold. The snow fell no longer in soft and filmy flakes, but in small hard pellets that cut like sand and sifted in through every crack and crevice against which the wild winds drove it.

The young man—boy, we might better say, for, he was only nineteen—moved off in the very teeth of this storm, the small granules of ice smiting him in the face and taking his breath. The wind set itself against him with wide obstructing arms, and he reeled, stag-

gered and plunged forward or from side to side, in a sort of blind desperation.

"Ugh!" he ejaculated, catching his breath and standing still as a fierce blast struck him. Then, shaking himself like one trying to cast aside an impediment, he moved forward with quicker steps, and kept onward, for a distance of two or three blocks. Here, in crossing a street, his foot struck against some obstruction which the snow had concealed, and he fell with his face downward. It took some time for him to struggle to his feet again, and then he seemed to be in a state of complete bewilderment, for he started along one street, going for a short distance, and then crossing back and going in an opposite direction. He was in no condition to get right after once going wrong. With every few steps he would stop and look up and down the street and at the houses on each side vainly trying to make out his locality.

"Police!" he cried two or three times; but the faint, alarmed call reached no ear of nightly guardian. Then, with a shiver as the storm swept down upon him more angrily, he started forward again, going he knew not whither.

The cold benumbed him; the snow choked and blinded him; fear and anxiety, so far as he was capable of feeling them, bewildered and oppressed him. A helmless ship in storm and darkness was in no more pitiable condition than this poor lad.

On, on he went, falling sometimes, but struggling to his feet again and blindly moving forward. All at once he came out from the narrow rows of houses and stood on the edge of what seemed a great white field that stretched away level as a floor. Onward a few paces, and then—Alas for the waiting mother at home! She did not hear the cry of terror that cut the stormy air and lost itself in the louder shriek of the tempest as her son went over the treacherous line of snow and dropped, with a quick plunge, into the river, sinking instantly out of sight, for the tide was up and the ice broken and drifting close to the water's edge.

CHAPTER II.

"COME, Fanny," said Mr. Wilmer Voss, speaking to his wife, "you must get to bed. It is past twelve o'clock, and you cannot bear this loss of rest and sleep. It may throw you all back again."

The woman addressed was sitting in a large easychair with a shawl drawn closely about her person. She had the pale, shrunken face and large, bright eyes of a confirmed invalid. Once very beautiful, she yet retained a sweetness of expression which gave a tenderness and charm to every wasted feature. You saw at a glance the cultured woman and the patient sufferer.

As her husband spoke a fierce blast of wind drove the fine sand-like snow against the windows, and then went shrieking and roaring away over housetops, gables and chimneys.

"Oh what a dreadful night!" said the lady, leaning forward in her chair and listening to the wild wail of the storm, while a look of anxiety, mingled with dread, swept across her face. "If Archie were only at home!"

"Don't trouble yourself about Archie. He'll be here soon. You are not yourself to-night, Fanny."

"Perhaps not; but I can't help it. I feel such an awful weight here;" and Mrs. Voss drew her hands against her bosom.

"All nervous," said her husband. "Come! You must go to bed."

"It will be of no use, Wilmer," returned the lady. "I will be worse in bed than sitting up. You don't know what a strange feeling has come over me. Oh, Archie, if you were only at home! Hark! What was that?"

The pale face grew paler as Mrs. Voss bent forward in a listening attitude.

"Only the wind," answered her husband, betraying some impatience. "A thousand strange sounds are on the air in a night like this. You must compose yourself, Fanny, or the worst consequences may follow."

"It's impossible, husband. I cannot rest until I have my son safe and sound at home again. Dear, dear boy!"

Mr. Voss urged no further. The shadow of fear which had come down upon his wife began to creep over his heart and fill it with a vague concern. And now a thought flashed into his mind that he would not have uttered for the world; but from that moment peace fled, and anxiety for his son grew into alarm as the time wore on and the boy did not come home.

"Oh, my husband," cried Mrs. Voss, starting from her chair, and clasping her hands as she threw them upward, "I cannot bear this much longer. Hark! That was his voice! '*Mother!*' '*Mother!*' Don't you hear it?"

Her face was white as the snow without, her eyes wild and eager, her lips apart, her head bent forward.

A shuddering chill crept along the nerves of Mr. Voss.

"Go, go quickly! Run! He may have fallen at the door!"

Ere the last sentence was finished Mr. Voss was halfway down stairs. A blinding dash of snow came swirling into his face as he opened the street door. It was some moments before he could see with any distinctness. No human form was visible, and the lamp just in front of his house shone down upon a trackless bed of snow many inches in depth. No, Archie was not there. The cry had come to the mother's inward ear in the moment when her boy went plunging down into the engulfing river and heart and thought turned in his mortal agony to the one nearest and dearest in all the earth.

When Mr. Voss came back into the house after his fruitless errand, he found his wife standing in the hall, only a few feet back from the vestibule, her face whiter, if that were possible, and her eyes wilder than before. Catching her in his arms, he ran with her up stairs, but before he had reached their chamber her light form lay nerveless and unconscious against his breast.

Doctor Hillhouse, the old family physician, called up in the middle of that stormy night, hesitated to obey the summons, and sent his assistant with word that he would be round early in the morning if needed. Doctor Angier, the assistant, was a young physician of fine ability and great promise. Handsome in person, agreeable in manner and thoroughly in love with his profession, he was rapidly

coming into favor with many of the old doctor's patients, the larger portion of whom belonged to wealthy and fashionable circles. Himself a member of one of the older families, and connected, both on his father's and mother's side, with eminent personages as well in his native city as in the State, Doctor Angier was naturally drawn into social life, which, spite of his increasing professional duties, he found time to enjoy.

It was past two o'clock when Doctor Angier made his appearance, his garments white with snow and his dark beard crusted with tiny icicles. He found Mrs. Voss lying in swoon so deep that, but for the faintest perceptible heart-beat, he would have thought her dead. Watching the young physician closely as he stood by the bedside of his wife, Mr. Voss was quick to perceive something unusual in his manner. The professional poise and coolness for which he was noted were gone, and he showed a degree of excitement and uncertainty that alarmed the anxious husband. What was its meaning? Did it indicate apprehension for the condition of his patient, or—something else? A closer look into the young physician's face sent a flash of suspicion through the mind of Mr. Voss, which was more than confirmed a moment afterward as the stale odor of wine floated to his nostrils.

"Were you at Mr. Birtwell's to-night?" There was a thrill of anxious suspense in the tones of Mr. Voss as he grasped the physician's arm and looked keenly at him.

"I was," replied Doctor Angier.

"Did you see my son there?"

"Yes, sir."

"At what time did you leave?"

"Less than an hour ago. I had not retired when your summons came."

"Was Archie there when you left?"

"No, I think not."

"Are you sure about it?"

"Yes, very sure. I remember now, quite distinctly, seeing him come down from the dressing-room with his hat in his hand and go through the hall toward the street door."

"How long ago was that?"

"About an hour and a half; perhaps longer."

A groan that could not be repressed broke from the father's lips.

"Isn't he at home?" asked the young physician, turning round quickly from the bed and betraying a sudden concern.

"No; and I am exceedingly anxious about him." The eyes of Mr. Voss were fixed intently on Doctor Angler, and he was reading every varying expression of his countenance.

"Doctor," he said, laying his hand on the physician's arm and speaking huskily, "I want you to answer me truly. Had he taken much wine?"

It was some moments before Doctor Angler replied:

"On such occasions most people take wine freely. It flows like water, you know. I don't think your son indulged more than any one else; indeed, not half so much as some young men I saw there."

Mr. Voss felt that there was evasion in the answer.

"Archie is young, and not used to wine. A single glass would be more to him than half a dozen to older men who drink habitually. Did you see him take wine often?"

"He was in the supper-room for a considerable time. When I left it, I saw him in the midst of a group of young men and girls, all with glasses of champagne in their hands."

"How long was this before you saw him go away?"

"Half an hour, perhaps," replied the doctor.

"Did he go out alone?"

"I believe so."

Mr. Voss questioned no further, and Doctor Angler, who now understood better the meaning of his patient's condition, set himself to the work of restoring her to consciousness. He did not find the

task easy. It was many hours before the almost stilled pulses began beating again with a perceptible stroke, and the quiet chest to give signs of normal respiration. Happily for the poor mother, thought and feeling were yet bound.

Long before this the police had been aroused and every effort made to discover a trace of the young man after he left the house of Mr. Birtwell, but without effect. The snow had continued falling until after five o'clock, when the storm ceased and the sky cleared, the wind blowing from the north and the temperature falling to within a few degrees of zero.

A faint hope lingered with Mr. Voss—the hope that Archie had gone home with some friend. But as the morning wore on and he did not make his appearance this hope began to fade away, and died before many hours. Nearly every male guest at Mrs. Birtwell's party was seen and questioned during the day, but not one of them had seen Archie after he left the house. A waiter who was questioned said that he remembered seeing him:

"I watched him go down the steps and go off alone, and the wind seemed as if it would blow him away. He wasn't just himself, sir, I'm afraid."

If a knife had cut down into the father's quivering flesh, the pain would have been as nothing to that inflicted by this last sentence. It only confirmed his worst fears.

The afternoon papers contained a notice of the fact that a young gentleman who had gone away from a fashionable party at a late hour on the night before had not been heard of by his friends, who were anxious and distressed about him. Foul play was hinted at, as the young man wore a valuable diamond pin and had a costly gold watch in his pocket. On the morning afterward advertisements appeared offering a large reward for any information that would lead to the discovery of the young man, living or dead. They were accompanied by minute descriptions of his person and dress. But there came no response. Days and weeks passed; and though the advertisements were repeated and newspapers called public attention to the matter, not a single clue was found.

A young man, with the kisses of his mother sweet on his pure lips, had left her for an evening's social enjoyment at the house of one of her closest and dearest friends, and she never looked upon his face again. He had entered the house of that friend with a clear head and steady nerves, and he had gone out at midnight bewildered with the wine that had been poured without stint to her hundred guests, young and old. How it had fared with him the reader knows too well.

CHAPTER III.

"HEAVENS and earth! Why doesn't some one go to the door?" exclaimed Mr. Spencer Birtwell, rousing himself from a heavy sleep as the bell was rung for the third time, and now with four or five vigorous and rapid jerks, each of which caused the handle of the bell to strike with the noise of a hammer.

The gray dawn was just breaking.

"There it is again! Good heavens! What does it mean?" and Mr. Birtwell, now fairly awake, started up in bed and sat listening. Scarcely a moment intervened before the bell was pulled again, and this time continuously for a dozen times. Springing from the bed, Mr. Birtwell threw open a window, and looking out, saw two policemen at the door.

"What's wanted?" he called down to them.

"Was there a young man here last night named Voss?" inquired one of the men.

"What about him?" asked Mr. Birtwell.

"He hasn't been home, and his friends are alarmed. Do you know where he is?"

"Wait, returned Mr. Birtwell; and shutting down the window, he dressed himself hurriedly.

"What is it?" asked his wife, who had been awakened from a heavy slumber by the noise at the window.

"Archie Voss didn't get home last night."

"What?" and Mrs. Birtwell started out of bed.

"There are two policemen at the door."

"Policemen!"

"Yes; making a grand row for nothing, as if young men never stayed away from home. I must go down and see them. Go back into bed again, Margaret. You'll take your death o' cold. There's nothing to be alarmed about. He'll come up all right."

But Mrs. Birtwell did not return to her bed. With warm wrapper thrown about her person, she stood at the head of the stairway while her husband went down to admit the policemen. All that could be learned from them was that Archie Voss had not come home from the party, and that his friends were greatly alarmed about him. Mr. Birtwell had no information to give. The young man had been at his house, and had gone away some time during the night, but precisely at what hour he could not tell.

"You noticed him through the evening?" said one of the policemen.

"Oh yes, certainly. We know Archie very well. He's always been intimate at our house."

"Did he take wine freely?"

An indignant denial leaped to Mr. Birtwell's tongue, but the words died unspoken, for the image of Archie, with flushed face and eyes too bright for sober health, holding in his hand a glass of sparkling champagne, came vividly before him.

"Not more freely than other young men," he replied. "Why do you ask?"

"There are two theories of his absence," said the policeman. "One is that he has been set upon in the street, robbed and murdered, and the other that, stupefied and bewildered by drink, he lost himself in the storm, and lies somewhere frozen to death and hidden under the snow."

A cry of pain broke from the lips of Mrs. Birtwell, and she came hurrying down stairs. Too well did she remember the condition of

Archie when she last saw him—Archie, the only son of her oldest and dearest friend, the friend she had known and loved since girlhood. He was not fit to go out alone in that cold and stormy night; and a guilty sense of responsibility smote upon her heart and set aside all excuses.

"What about his mother?" she asked, anxiously. "How is she bearing this dreadful suspense?"

"I can't just say, ma'am," was answered, "but I think they've had the doctor with her all night—that is, all the last part of the night. She's lying in a faint, I believe."

"Oh, it will kill her! Poor Frances! Poor Frances!" wailed out Mrs. Birtwell, wringing her hands and beginning to cry bitterly.

"The police have been on the lookout for the last two or three hours, but can't find any trace of him," said the officer.

"Oh, he'll turn up all right," broke in Mr. Birtwell, with a confident tone. "It's only a scare. Gone home with some young friend, as like as not. Young fellows in their teens don't get lost in the snow, particularly in the streets of a great city, and footpads generally know their game before bringing it down. I'm sorry for poor Mrs. Voss; she isn't strong enough to bear such a shock. But it will all come right; I don't feel a bit concerned."

But for all that he did feel deeply concerned. The policemen went away, and Mr. and Mrs. Birtwell sat down by an open grate in which the fire still burned.

"Don't let it distress you so, Margaret," said the former, trying to comfort his wife. "There's nothing to fear for Archie. Nobody ever heard of a man getting lost in a city snow-storm. If he'd been out on a prairie, the case would have been different, but in the streets of the city! The thing's preposterous, Margaret."

"Oh, if he'd only gone away as he came, I wouldn't feel so awfully about it," returned Mrs. Birtwell. "That's what cuts me to the heart. To think that he came to my house sober and went away—"

She caught back from her tongue the word she would have spoken, and shivered.

"Nothing of the kind, Margaret, nothing of the kind," said her husband, quickly. "A little gay—that was all. Just what is seen at parties every night. Archie hasn't much head, and a single glass of champagne is enough to set it buzzing. But it's soon over. The effervescence goes off in a little while, and the head comes clear again."

Mrs. Birtwell did not reply. Her eyes were cast down and her face deeply distressed.

"If anything has happened to Archie," she said, after a long silence, "I shall never have a moment's peace as long as I live."

"Nonsense, Margaret! Suppose something has happened to him? We are not responsible. It's his own fault if he took away more wine than he was able to carry." Mr. Birtwell spoke with slight irritation.

"If he hadn't found the wine here, he could not have carried it away," replied his wife.

"How wildly you talk, Margaret!" exclaimed Mr. Birtwell, with increased irritation.

"We won't discuss the matter," said his wife. "It would be useless, agreement being, I fear, out of the question; but it is very certain that we cannot escape responsibility in this or anything else we may do, and so long as these words of Holy Writ stand, '*Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink, that putteth the bottle to him and maketh him drunken*', we may well have serious doubts in regard to the right and wrong of these fashionable entertainments, at which wine and spirits are made free to all of both sexes, young and old."

Mr. Birtwell started to his feet and walked the floor with considerable excitement.

"If *we* had a son just coming to manhood—and I sometimes thank God that we have not—would you feel wholly at ease about him, wholly satisfied that he was in no danger in the houses of your friends? May not a young man as readily acquire a taste for liquors in a gentleman's dining-room as in a drinking-saloon—nay, more readily, if in the former the wine is free and bright eyes and laughing lips press him with invitations?"

Mrs. Birtwell's voice had gained a steadiness and force that made it very impressive. Her husband continued to walk the floor but with slower steps.

"I saw things last night that troubled me," she went on. "There is no disguising the fact that most of the young men who come to these large parties spend a great deal too much time in the supper-room, and drink a great deal more than is good for them. Archie Voss was not the only one who did this last evening. I watched another young man very closely, and am sorry to say that he left our house in a condition in which no mother waiting at home could receive her son without sorrow and shame."

"Who was that?" asked Mr. Birtwell, turning quickly upon his wife. He had detected more than a common concern in her voice.

"Ellis," she replied. Her manner was very grave.

"You must be mistaken about that," said Mr. Birtwell, evidently disturbed at this communication.

"I wish to Heaven that I were! But the fact was too apparent. Blanche saw it, and tried to get him out of the supper-room. He acted in the silliest kind of a way, and mortified her dreadfully, poor child!"

"Such things will happen sometimes," said Mr. Birtwell. "Young men like Ellis don't always know how much they can bear." His voice was in a lower key and a little husky.

"It happens too often with Ellis," replied his wife, "and I'm beginning to feel greatly troubled about it."

"Has it happened before?"

"Yes; at Mrs. Gleason's, only last week. He was loud and boisterous in the supper-room — so much so that I heard a lady speak of his conduct as disgraceful."

"That will never do," exclaimed Mr. Birtwell, betraying much excitement. "He will have to change all this or give up Blanche. I don't care what his family is if he isn't all right himself."

"It is easier to get into trouble than out of it," was replied. "Things have gone too far between them."