

The Widow's Lodger.

CHAPTER I.
NUMBER TWENTY-SEVEN.

It was a room in the most house in the square, and that is saying very much, for this square had a reputation for a fitness unsurpassed by any of its kind in central London. The time had been when Cranmore Square could hold its own in the way of good old houses and fashionable people against many or most at the West-end, but that time was gone, and Cranmore Square had to be content with retired citizens of solid wealth, high-class journalists, men of science, painters, respectable solicitors, and others whose attentions kept them in the heart of the metropolis, or who liked to live there. Number twenty-seven, however, was a lodger-house.

Not a boarding-house, Mary Allenby, whose passive face, seen so often at the drawing-room window, would haunt the passer-by like some fair vision, was not equal to that. She was only five-and-twenty, and had worn her crape nearly twelve months now, and her baby Arthur—a fine little fellow nearly three years old—absorbed all the time she could spare. Not quite twelve months ago there had been a brass plate on the door, bearing the inscription, "Mr. Arthur Allenby, Surgeon, &c.," not quite twelve months ago there had been a small silver plate on a coffin-lid, bearing the same name and his age, twenty-seven. A handsome pillar of white marble bore the same inscription in Highgate cemetery. Mary took her baby there once a week at least, and wished, as many others have done, that a day could be set apart for mourners, when the gates would be closed against the idle and curious, and the friends of the dead might look at the graves of their own undisturbed.

When Arthur Allenby first started on his own account people predicted a brilliant career for him. He had every thing in his favor—an earnest love for his profession, a singular success owing to his delicate skill and rare insight of character; and his friends had means enough to keep him supplied with money until his practice should make him independent. The first blow to the ambition they had entered in him was his marriage; he had not been in practice a single year before he made Mary Lennard his wife, and his mother and sisters declined to receive her or visit her. This so stung his pride that he would receive no further help from them, but preferred to live on love and his own resources. He gave up his brougham—their money had paid for it—and went to his patients on foot. He was a rising man, full of energy and hope and genius; but one long, trying winter, that brought him new patients by the score and fees in plenty, killed him. He went into a rapid consumption, and was dead in six months.

Arthur Allenby had no craven fear of death; he had nothing to repent with a repentance like despair at the eleventh hour; he had, from the first, studied his responsibilities with care and prudence not often seen in so young a man. When he married Mary he insured his life for three hundred pounds, intending to increase the sum when his means permitted, and he had taken the house in Cranmore Square on a seven years' lease, furnished it thoroughly and well, and he had contrived to keep a slender banking account—a very slender one, for it scarcely lasted through his illness, and when he died, the house, the furniture, and the insurance money was all Mary had.

Even when he was dying, and he knew it, he asked nothing for his wife from his friends. The young doctor had felt him—deeply injured by their behavior to her. Mary's only fault was that she was poor. He had been called in to attend her father—a broken-down gentleman, who gain a scanty living in the reading-room of the British Museum, translating, compiling, arranging, and collecting matter for business-like literary men, who made a trade of their work, and found a ready-money market for it. The poor old scholar was glad to earn a few shillings a day at a labor he delighted in, and Mary was so accustomed to helping him that when he fell ill she could take his place with the aid of a few notes pencilled down at his bedside.

But this took her away from him, and the time came when she was wanted always. The old man grew like a child for helplessness. It is to the credit of the man who had employed him, that, in their intervals between hard work and thoughtless improvidence, they went to the sick man's room and saw that he did not want for anything; in fact there was rather a surplus of calves-foot jelly, port wine, and cooked chicken, there being a general idea that these were the correct things for an invalid. Their kindness was not the less sincere that it came too late. Years of privation had done their work already.

There was a kindness that he valued as much—perhaps more than this. Arthur Allenby spent many an hour with his patient, listening with sympathetic attention to the old man's talk of early days, and the student dreams that clung to him even now. Arthur became at last quite as much a friend as a physician, and the time which would have been his own for leisure was very willingly given up for the old man and his dingy room, and Mary.

It was no uncommon thing for her to come from the museum and find the doctor there. She was shy at first, but the sympathy soon wore off, and one memorable afternoon she, instigated by her father, mustered up the cour-

age to ask him to take a cup of tea. How gladly he accepted the invitation she was not aware, nor did she know how he admired the pretty, quiet bend with which she gave him the shell-like cup and saucer; the hint of her glance had won upon him from the outset, and then she had Cordelia's charm—a low, sweet voice, of all things perhaps the most excellent in woman.

So far as mere beauty was concerned, Miss Lennard would not have borne comparison with many whom the young doctor saw every day. A life of privation had left the perfect outline of her figure slender to thinness, and her face was careworn, but she had soft gray eyes that matched her voice in the sympathy of their expression, and the polished whiteness of the even teeth in her tender mouth was worth a second look when she spoke or smiled. As Arthur watched the graceful precision of her movements while attending to the tea, he took to wondering how she would appear if she could afford to wear becoming attire instead of the small silk mantle and scanty dress of faded black which seemed her only costume for out of doors and indoors.

He took to wondering, too, what would become of her when her father was gone; they had not a friend in the world. Mr. Lennard was one of those shiftless men who have a way of getting lost in the side currents of humanity; drifting beyond the knowledge or care of their kith and kin. He told Arthur, with the unconscious, pathetic resignation belonging to him, that he could not remember when he last saw his friends or heard from them.

"You see," he said, "not many days before he died. I got poor and sabby, and I always wanted help, and I think at last they looked upon me as a kind of nuisance, so I stayed away. If I knew where to find them I would write for Mary's sake. I am really going to eternity, you know; I do not mind, but I want to know how long?"

The doctor inclined his head regretfully. This was no new subject between them. Mr. Lennard could speak quite calmly of the approaching day that would bring an endless night of rest. The only thing that lay heavy at his heart was what would become of Mary when he was gone? "Mary" was his own pet name for her.

"You may make your mind easy on that score," the young doctor said simply; "for I love your daughter, Mr. Lennard, and I think you could trust her to me."

"As I would to Heaven!" said the dying man, with grateful solemnity. "I will not ask you if you are sure of this; I know you love her. I have seen it; but you have your friends—your prospects to consider, these are very early days for you."

"I am sure of everything, even of winning her," Arthur had smiled; "but not without some trouble, for Mary is very proud, and might take it into her head to consider my prospects and my friends. This is, however, a compact between you and me; will you give her to me?"

"Gladly, Arthur—you cannot tell how gladly to have lived for such a day is more than enough."

When Arthur spoke to Mary he met with just the opposition he expected, for the girl, as he had already found out, was very proud.

"You have been wondering what I shall do when I am left alone!" she said to him. "You are very sorry for me, and pity me, and in your generous nature would burden yourself with me. Honestly, Mr. Allenby, is it not so?"

"I daresay it is," he answered, smiling gravely; "but I have not asked myself the question. I am very sorry for you, and I pity you, and I love you, and you love me, my darling, in spite of all the pride in that sweet face; and Mary, if I must urge anything, beyond my own poor merits, your father has given you to me."

It did not require that to make her nestle down in his arms. Arthur Allenby had been the hero of many a girl's day dream, and he was of hers; but she had never ventured to think the consummation would come so soon, if ever. After this Arthur took upon himself the kindly office that would have been his by right had Mr. Lennard lived long enough to be his second father. It was too late to remove him from his dingy room, but not too late to make that dinginess less palpable. He sent in a comfortable couch and an easy chair, and brought the old man his favorite books for the pleasure they gave him to look at, even when he was too weak to read them. And he delicately insisted on supplying Mary with the means to make some necessary changes in her wardrobe, and he spent more time with them as the end drew nearer.

Books were the old man's children; to the very last he kept a pile of them by his bedside, and he would turn the covers to look at a favorite page when he had grown too weak to lift a volume. Study had been his passion, he had gathered in a rich store of learning and had found it a very poor stock-in-trade. It was hard for him to realize that the age of intellectual publishing and intellectual publishers had departed—leaving a convenient market in the hands of commercial men more or less illiterate. The poor scholarly gentleman, to whom the grand old classics were as familiar as a twice-told tale, might have been a fossil for all the value they set upon him. He was a useful hack when they wanted one—nothing more.

So he died and was buried, and the most genuine compassion was felt for him and his orphan child by a score or so of those chivalric persons—improvident literary light horsemen of Fleet

street and the Temple. They were in the country bareheaded when the solitary coach drove in, and Dr. Allenby led Miss Lennard out to hear the farewell sermon and look her last at the open grave. Next day two of them waited upon Arthur with a cheque for seven hundred pounds and a few odd shillings.

"We subscribed it amongst ourselves quite privately," the spokesman said. "No one else knows anything about it—just for a token of respect for the poor old gentleman, and sympathy with Miss Lennard. We know, of course, that there are expenses she will have to bear, and so if you will kindly tender this, with our kindest regards and best wishes, we shall be infinitely obliged. The landlord of our rendezvous was good enough to give us a cheque for our little subscriptions, and so you will see it is payable to bearer."

"I thank you, from my heart—in Miss Lennard's name and my own—" Arthur said, "for a rare and generous thoughtfulness, that is no less prompt than kind; and it is a pleasant duty to be perfectly frank with you. The expenses are already arranged, and Miss Lennard is provided for."

"Has she found her friends, then?" "One, I trust, of whom you will approve. Miss Lennard will be my wife within a month."

"We are delighted, my dear sir, I am sure; and there will be festivities at the rendezvous when that day comes. But, still, there is that cheque."

"What would you suggest? I should be sorry to refuse the outcome of so much kindly feeling, if we can find a way of utilizing it."

"We can put a stone over his grave," the journalist said—"a handsome one. Something to remind Miss Lennard that her father's careless friends did not forget him."

So it was arranged. The journalist and his companions took their leave, and it is to be feared that the festivities began and lasted throughout the month; for there were long days and late nights at the rendezvous, and not much work was done; but they were a very sober and gentlemanly set of fellows when they went to the church on the marriage day, having by some occult means heard exactly when it was to be. Mary answered their cheers with a grateful smile and brimming eyes; for every face there was associated with a kindness done to him who was gone.

Mrs. Allenby was not there, nor either of her daughters. Arthur had to the last cherished a vague hope that his youngest sister would put in an appearance as an act of grace; but they had steadily refused to receive the dead scholar's orphan child, or countenance his marriage. He had to find a home for her with a stranger, in the interval between the day of the funeral and the wedding. He said nothing, but he was deeply hurt. They would have made him welcome, and that touched him the more keenly. He had no hope of breaking his mother's iron pride; and so, after a struggle with himself, he decided to live for his wife alone.

He did not send for them even when he was ill and knew he was dying, but he did not deny himself to them; they came and would have taken possession of him and put his wife aside, but that he gave them to understand, was not to be permitted. He had a faithful friend on whom he could rely, an old companion of his boyhood, and fellow student in the hospital. He left her in perfect confidence to this gentleman,—Doctor George Hyde,—and he accepted the trust. Mary was not quite friendless. She had, besides George Hyde, an old lady whose fancy it was that she required constant medical attendance, and number twenty-seven had been her home for the past two years.

Dr. Hyde accepted his trust with the full intention of being true to it, and he was. It was rather against him that he had been for many years on intimate terms with the Allenbys, and had been thought to entertain designs of a tender nature in regard to Arthur's sister, Margaret. She was beautiful enough and had sufficient money to render her desirable, but Dr. Hyde, if he contemplated marriage at all, was not in a hurry. Perhaps he thought of the unwomanly want of feeling displayed by Miss Margaret in common with the others, and she in her turn resented it as a personal injury that he should have undertaken to be the guardian of Mary and her boy.

They sadly wanted the boy; he was a noble little fellow, and they could not bear the idea of leaving him to be brought up by that old literary hack's daughter, which was their amiable way of designating Mary. They offered her, through Dr. Hyde, a pound a week if she would give him up entirely, and when, also through Dr. Hyde, Mary declined, they said in as many words that they had more right to the child than she had, for he was Arthur's boy, and what was she?

"Do you know," asked Mrs. Allenby of George, "what she intends to do with that great house and the money?"

"The money," said George, "is in the Holborn Bank—a deposit account. The house she intends to let out."

"Let out?" replied Mrs. Allenby. "Let out? How do you mean?"

"In lodgings," was the imperturbable reply. "The old lady, Mrs. Little, will retain the second floor; for the dining-room floor she is in treaty with the friends of a young gentleman who is going into St. Bartholomew's; and then she has the drawing-room floor and one other room to spare. Her own room—the one poor Arthur died in—she retains; it is sacred ground to her."

"Sacred ground?" repeated the state-

ly lady, witheringly; "a lodging-house keeper? Was there ever anything so disreputable—so disgraceful. Surely, George, with your influence—Arthur left her to your care, and she has a right to obey you—you could persuade her to something different."

"My dear madam, you do not know the young lady. She is as gentle as a dove, and as determined—for you know the dove is rather a pugnacious bird. The house remains almost exactly as it was, except for the surgery. The ante-room on the ground floor, that she fitted up as her own room—a perfectly business-like arrangement. My own impression is that she will do very well."

"But surely, George, you do not approve of it?"

"If you ask me what I approve of," said George, "I should say I disapprove of the whole business, and your conduct especially." Dr. Hyde was a privileged person, and could say what he pleased. "You know I told you so all along. When you saw that Arthur meant to have her, you should have made a friend of the poor child."

"The poor child with a beggarly old literary man for a father."

"A gentleman, madam, and a scholar, to whom I have often raised my hat in genuine respect. You may say what you please, if you feel relieved by it—but you know you are wrong."

Mrs. Allenby did not always take a rebuke so patiently, but there was nothing to be done with Dr. Hyde. She could overawe most people with the majesty of her presence, and the impressiveness of her double chin. She was a large woman, with a thick, rich contralto voice, which she cultivated to its lowest pitch; altogether rather a formidable person, excepted to a man like Dr. Hyde.

He had found out her weakness long since. Mrs. Allenby was rather inclined to be a bully in a lady-like, well-bred way. For what some timid humorist has called the gentler sex is not without its representatives of that undesirable thing, but she was at heart a coward, and she had an innate consciousness that he knew it, and that he was a man not to be trifled with. Under his imperturbable good temper, that would rise to the surface when least expected, and a single word or glance would pierce through her panoply of flesh and selfish arrogance, when he was in that mood. To the world in general Mrs. Allenby was a very majestic and impressive woman, to Dr. Hyde she was a physiological study. He told her once that she was a living wonder.

"Do you see," he said, with the slowness that was only saved from being a drawl by the deliberate purpose with which he always spoke, "such an amount of adipose matter is not compatible with such a very healthy state of the digestive organs; that must be due to your singularly tranquil and philosophic temperament. It is very fortunate you possess that temperament. It is fortunate, too, that you do not take stimulant. Stimulant induces irritability and excitement. Irritability or excitement would be fatal to you. You have an exceptionally fine constitution, but your mental organization is extremely delicate. That is where the danger lies."

Without quite seeing the connection between an exceptionally fine constitution and an extremely delicate mental organization, Mrs. Allenby felt flattered. It was something also to be told that she did not take stimulant, and was not irritable. It was indirectly a permit to take as much as she had been in the habit of taking, and the largest item in her wine merchant's bill was for spirits.

"I only knew the people as I saw them," she said, "and I may be wrong. I saw them with him quite by accident, and you are aware, George, how bitterly he disappointed me."

"Well, yes; but he pleased himself, and, unhappily, it seems as if a man is sure to disappoint somebody when he does that."

"You are really very provoking when you like, George, but I want to ask you a question. You know that just before poor Arthur died he was writing a letter—a long letter; was it ever finished or sent?"

"It was never finished—and never sent!" said George, gravely. "Mary!"

"Mary!" Mrs. Allenby repeated.

"Oh, yes, I always call her 'Mary'; Arthur told me so! I was his chosen brother, and he left her to his brother when he confided her to me. The poor girl put it away with her most sacred mementoes, and I do not suppose it will ever see the light again."

"I never could find out about that letter," said Mrs. Allenby. "I saw it several times, but he never got far with it at a sitting. I often wondered whether it was intended for his Uncle Michael."

"On that point I can set your mind at rest," said George. "It was intended for his Uncle Michael. Arthur was not a good correspondent; it was a fault for which he often reproached himself. I do not think more than one exchange of letters passed between his uncle and himself from the time he married till he died; he had not heard of his Uncle Michael for more than two years."

"Do you know," asked Mrs. Allenby, keenly interested, "where he was then?"

"At Barbadoes."

"And I heard of him from Jamaica quite a year ago. He talked then of coming home. He told me not to expect to hear from him frequently, and not to be surprised at any moment if we saw him; and I should not, for he is very eccentric—immensely rich, though. That is why I should like to have Arthur's boy here, but never with that girl, that woman, never!"

(Continued on Last Page.)

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