

# The Widow's Lodger.

CHAPTER III.

## A MUTINY DOWNSTAIRS.

For some time after the advent of the eccentric lodger, number twenty-seven was rather unsettled, but the inmates grew accustomed to him gradually. There was, in fact, no alternative, he gave very little trouble and he had no intention of going. The cook gave warning, the housemaid would not wait upon him, and M. P. Parker stole in and out of the louse on tiptoe; he was dreadfully afraid of that eminently disagreeable old gentleman upstairs. When he walked about the house the ceilings shook, and when he called his man it was in a roar that made everybody tremble. Up to this time Mary Allenby had not much to thank the friendly lawyer for, but she did not tell his so.

"He is odd, and irritable, and in pain," she said, when Mr. Joyce inquired how she liked her new lodger, "and perhaps the climate does not agree with him. He will be better by-and-by."

"Nothing ever did suit him or agree with him except having his own way," said Mr. Joyce; "he is rich and eccentric, and most people let him do as he likes for the sake of what may be got out of him. By the way, I forgot to mention that he hates the sight or sound of children. They drive him mad, so I told him you had none."

"Mr. Joyce, how could you?"

"A little evasion, my dear lady, nothing more, quite legal. He asked me if you had—no, I am wrong—he did not ask anything about you in that respect, he wanted to know if there were children in the house; now, one child is not children, so I could answer him fearlessly, and then yours is such a quiet little angel."

"He certainly is very quiet," said Mary. "And I keep him out of the way." "Quite right, too, most children are a nuisance, except to the people they belong to; how does the little chap get along with the nigger, for of course he has seen it?"

"I was never so surprised in my life. Arthur took to him from the first; he understands children wonderfully; but you should not call him a nigger, Mr. Joyce."

"He would not mind. Why should he? The negro is a man and a brother, and I have told him not to mention the child to his master."

"I was about to ask you that."

"I would not have him know it for the world. It would aggravate the gout; inflammation might set in, and then I should lose my best client. Keep that child out of his way, Mrs. Allenby, whatever you do."

It was difficult to tell whether Mr. Joyce was serious or jesting, but he said that so solemnly that Mary was frightened; there was no knowing what such a singular gentleman might do if he came suddenly upon one of the innocent race that he hated with the ferocity of Herod.

Had Mr. Barker's irritability not been a natural infirmity intensified by pain, it might have been thought that he was trying to see how thoroughly disagreeable he could make himself. He grumbled whenever he had a chance, and the way he went on at the poor man of his, was, as the cook said, something dreadful; not that she understood a word, for Mr. Barker roared at him in an unknown tongue, and Cenci replied in the same, with his quiet, mellow voice and irresistible smile; and then she wanted to know why he did not have his game, and fish, and poultry from the proper tradesmen, and his meat from the butcher, instead of eating those tinned things like a cannibal. Evidently the cook had curious associations of ideas, or else her impressions as to what those tins contained were decidedly erroneous.

With a cook who gave warning twice a week on the average, and a housemaid in a perpetual state of mutiny, Mrs. Allenby was in a sad condition of perplexity, and she did not like having to smuggle her pretty baby out of the way if she chanced to hear her lodger's voice or footstep on the landing. The little widow had a very independent spirit of her own, and in her inmost heart she wished Mr. Barker would go.

"I would tell him to go," she said to Dr. Hyde, "but I am sure no one else would take him in; he is so disagreeable."

"You have the true spirit of a Christian, Mary," he said, with a smile. "You endure the infliction rather than let your neighbors suffer; but it seems to me that so long as you keep a lodg-

ing house you will be liable to these things. People who live in lodgings imagine that they have the right to do as they please; people who let lodgings imagine that those who live in them should do as they, the people who let them, please. Now here we have the two brought into conflict. You have a self-willed old gentleman for a lodger, he has a dignified little landlady. Now, the thing is, do you really wish to get rid of him?"

Mary hesitated.

"I have to keep baby out of his way, George?"

"Well, that is no particular hardship, and is to be met by keeping baby out of his way. Now what comes next?"

"The cook will not stay. She gives me warning every other day or so, and the housemaid is always complaining."

"These things are to be remedied. Good cooks and good housemaids, the very best, are to be had by the score. Always treat them with kindness and consideration, but never submit to what they term their 'ways.' Those 'ways' of theirs are a source of discomfort in

any house, and one of two courses must be adopted; if the servants cannot get rid of their 'ways,' you must get rid of the servants. It is a mistake to set too much value on some special quality in a servant. You want them good-tempered, willing, and obedient; treat them, as I have said, with every kindness and consideration, give them as much liberty as you can, and let them have their own time when their work is done. When you find them sullen, discontented, and complaining, they are better out of the house. Ring for the cook, please, and we can tell her to send the housemaid up when we have done with her."

Mary rang, and was answered by the housemaid. Being told to send the cook upstairs, she went down and told her fellow-servant that she did not know what the matter was, but Dr. Hyde and misses was looking very serious.

"And what if they are?" said the cook, indignantly, though with inward trepidation. "I don't care; I am worth my money anywhere."

But she did not like and could not conquer the mysterious dread of "being sent for;" and her manner, half defiant and half nervous, changed to one of most respectful attention under the calm eyes of the grave young doctor.

"You have given your mistress notice of your intention to leave her service," he began; "and you have done this on several occasions, Mrs. Coombes. Is it really your wish to go?"

"Well, sir,"—and Mrs. Coombes began to study the pattern of her apron intently,— "not that I have anything to say—a kinder mistress no one could desire; but then, sir, although only a cook, I have my feelings, and I do like my kitchen to myself. And if I am engaged as cook, I do like to do the cooking like a Christian—not have a lot of foreign messes dished up under my very nose."

"But if Mr. Barker prefers those 'foreign messes,' Mrs. Coombes, and instructs his servant to prepare them, surely you can have no objection. Does the man interfere with you?"

"On no, sir, quite the contrary."

"Am I to understand, then, that you interfere with him?"

"Good gracious me, sir! I let him do just what he likes. He rolls his eyes at me if I say a word; and he is so civil and good-natured, that I have not the heart to be angry with him. But then, sir, it's not what I've been used to. A cook's a cook and a kitchen's a kitchen, and I like mine to myself."

"Then I am afraid, Mrs. Coombes, we must accept your notice," said the doctor, taking out his pocket-book; "so we will say from this day month, Mrs. Allenby is very sorry—so am I. You are an excellent servant, but you share, with many of your class, the stupid idea that the kitchen is entirely your own, and anyone else who enters does so on sufferance. You should understand that the kitchen is that part of the house in which you do your work as you may be ordered, and so that you are not unduly interfered with, you have no right to object to anyone who may be sent there or permitted there by your mistress. You may go, Mrs. Coombes," and he touched the bell. "We want the housemaid now."

Mrs. Coombes descended, crestfallen but more indignant than ever, half inclined to pack up her box and go there and then, just to let them see how they would get along without her.

"If it had been a real master," she told the housemaid, "I would not have stood it; but then doctors have got a way of speaking you can't answer. A pretty pass things have come to, when a respectable married cook cannot call her kitchen her own. It's your turn now, Martha—that bell was for you—and I hope you'll speak your mind, as I did—at least, I meant to," she added to herself—"but there's no saying anything to them doctors. I hate doctors. Look at Mr. Parker—there's a pretty doctor for you, with his bread and milk for breakfast and gruel of a night, which he said would be better than my beer for me. I should like to see him breeding and m'king and gr'ling me; and then getting a little too much every now and then, and being ill, as he is. I can tell him."

Miss Martha Brown, the housemaid, with much less to say, had more determination, and perhaps more to complain of, than Mrs. Coombes. Honestly, she did not like the eccentric lodger; she did not like his man; and she objected entirely to their outlandish ways. "I once lived in a house where there was a black woman," she told the cook; "they told me she was a hare or a yah!—I don't know which; but the first time I saw her I nearly had a fit, and she was like Sin-sauce here, creeping about the kitchen and the nursery, waking and rousing the children; it made me sick. I told them if they would let me go, they might give my wages to the hare. I had a young man then, and I've got the same young man now—one that means me true and honorable, and would marry me to-morrow if I liked, so I'm independent."

In this frame of mind Miss Brown went upstairs, very indignant at being "sent for," and in no disposition to be "carpeted." She was a nice-looking, well-built girl, with a pair of bright black eyes which suggested more sauciness than she ever indulged in. "I know my place," she had said, "and I keep it, and I don't take no interference from nobody!"

"Your mistress tells me you are not satisfied with your situation?" Dr. Hyde began, feeling that he had a more difficult task here, and not a little amazed by the girl's perfectly respectful and yet independent bearing.

"I never said so, sir."

"Perhaps you will kindly tell me what you did say?" he said, slightly at a loss, for in truth the girl never said so in words.

"I said nothing, sir, that wanted to be repeated in words. If I had not been satisfied, I should have given a month and left properly; and I do not object to Mr. Sinsom, because his skin is not the color I've been accustomed to. We can none of us help our afflictions, and it is not for me to say anything about the old gentleman for grunting, and grumbling, and swearing, though he might do it in proper English like a Christian; but I do like a man to do a man's work. It's the first time in my life I ever was helped to make the beds by a whitey-brown man!"

It was almost impossible not to laugh, quite impossible not to smile; the housemaid's indignation was so honest and sincere.

"I was never before in my life told that I did not know how to make a gentleman's bed properly," she went on; "and to see the way he makes it is

enough to drive any Christian woman out of her senses—punching here and pulling there, building up a little at the foot, and what he calls elevating the head, till I don't know what it looks like. How any Christian can sleep in it bothers me entirely."

"Mr. Barker is an invalid," said Dr. Hyde, quietly, "and the man understands him."

"Man, indeed; a gentleman with plenty of money ought to have a wife to understand him, and I am not even allowed to dust the drawing-rooms now; I may sweep and clean with Mr. Sinsom looking on, but as to touching any of the breakables, it's more than I dare, and to be told to my face that they are gems of the antique and articles of virtue—a few trumpery bits of old-fashioned china,—I am not a fool."

"I have no doubt that, like Mrs. Coombes, you are a very excellent servant," he said, soothingly, "and if your mistress had a house of her own you would be all that could be desired; but you have been here long enough to know how difficult it is to get lodgers who pay. I fully admit Mr. Barker's eccentricities, but it is scarcely fair for you to worry your mistress about them continually."

"I can't help speaking now and then, sir."

"That I grant you very freely. The question is, does it do you any good?"

"I should die if I didn't," said Martha, fervently.

"Pray do not do that. Now, after all, Martha, there is very little in those things you complain of—only they are strange to you. The man is quite right not to let you dust the old china; worthless as they may seem to you—and are, in fact—they are worth more than their weight in gold, and could not be replaced for any money."

"Lor!" said Martha, with her eyes wide open.

Cenci had told her the same, but she did not believe him.

"As for the bed-making, you should not let that trouble you—that is one point on which invalids are most particular. I myself have frequently directed and assisted in the making of my patients' beds, and in our colleges all the beds are made by men, so you see this is not an exceptional case."

"No, sir; not when you explain it. But then he is always making fun of me."

"Good-natured fun, I am sure."

"That may be, sir; but I've got a young man of my own."

"And a very fortunate young man he must be," said Doctor Hyde, quite gravely. "Is there anything else you object to in this poor old gentleman and his attendant?"

"Well, sir, I do like civility when I mean it kind. I happened to answer the drawing-room bell one evening, when Siner was out,—Martha had a variety of name for the handsome mulatto,—and there was Mr. Barker reading without his spectacles, looking quite nice and amiable—quite different, as I may say; but directly I said, 'did you please to ring, sir?' he roars out 'not for you,' and growled, and threw his slipper at me. I was that frightened, it gave me the spasms."

Though the doctor laughed at this, as Mary did, he looked somewhat thoughtful.

"Give that to Mrs. Coombes," he said, taking a sovereign from his waistcoat pocket, "and keep this for yourself, Martha, and try to remember that, wherever you are, it is better to take things cheerfully as they come than fight against them by complaints. You will find the truth of that, even when you are married to the young man of your own."

"You are very kind, sir," the girl answered, "and I will remember, and I hope my mistress will not think anything of what I said, it was only a manner of saying it."

"I should be sorry to part with you, Martha," said Mary, in a gentle voice, and then, much to Dr. Hyde's distress, Martha burst into tears. She went to her room and had a good cry, being too proud to let the cook see her, then when she entered the kitchen a little later, she told the cook that Doctor Hyde was an angel, and they had the best mistress in the world.

"And you mark my words," Martha added, "and see if it don't come to pass. Of course he is only a doctor, but a doctor can't help being a man. He's in love with her."

"Who is?"

"Doctor Hyde and missis."

"I shouldn't wonder, when you come

to think of it," said Mrs. Coombes, solemnly, as she folded up her sovereign in a little bit of flannel, and put it away somewhere in the upper portion of her dress, "and a good thing too, there would be some pleasure in cooking for them; and I say, Martha, do you think they really mean me to go?"

"Lor! bless you, no, she is too tender hearted; half a word would do it. Only no more grumbling, let's take things cheerfully as they come, lother the old gentleman up stairs and his man, too. All we have to got to do is to mind our own business."

CHAPTER IV.

THE CRY OF A CHILD.

When the girl had gone, George Hyde turned with a smile to his companion, and found her looking at him, with her pretty hands folded in her lap and her eyes glimmering with playful triumph.

"What is it?" he asked. "I think I know. You think I came off second best in the encounter, and so I confess I did."

"Still, these things are to be remedied," she said, with an imitation of his own deliberate gravity. "Good cooks and good housemaids. The very best are to be had by the score; and it is quite right—quite—to always treat them with kindness and consideration, but never submit to what they term their ways. Let me see. Servants are a fruitful source of discomfort—"

"Mary, on my word you are too bad!"

"And," she went on, "one of two courses must be adopted—if the servants cannot get rid of their ways, we must get rid of the servants. Oh, George, George, do you see now a little of that which we, without lack of firmness and governing powers, have to endure?"

"It is not their fault, poor things, nor ours," said Dr. Hyde, apologetically; "they are, as we are, the victims of an evil system which has been at work for many generations. So, after all, what can we expect?"

"That it pends. We send for our servants to lecture them. Poor cook is rather middle-aged, and much too plump to please a doctor's critical eye; and so her lesson is given with unmerciful severity, accept her notice, and cleverly turn the tables upon her by entering it in our note-book as from to-day. Then comes the housemaid, a very pretty girl, whose figure any lady might envy. She is, from head to foot, as perfect as any picture ever painted. So we smile at what in poor cook would have been imprudence, and we dismiss her with a fatherly admonition to take things cheerfully as they come, and a sovereign. As we cannot make so strong and palpable a distinction, we send one for the cook as well. Moral: If you must go to service, it is better to be a housemaid, with a fine figure and a pair of bright eyes, than a middle-aged cook very much too plump! Dr. Hyde, I am ashamed of you."

Try as he would, he could not help coloring under her merry laugh at his discomfiture, and yet the ring of that laugh gladdened his heart, it was such an old familiar laugh, and he had not heard it since his friend Felliland died.

"Is it where the whole business is wrong," he said, "keeping a lodging-house is not your forte, Mary, and lecturing servants is not mine. My mother has a very stately household where walk alone would quell a mutiny down stairs. You may depend upon it that housekeepers are born to keep servants in order; we do not understand them. You have not been to see my mother lately, Mary?"

"I have not had time, George."

"Well, you must make it, even if you have to give up this house, and you must do that. I need not tell you what you already know, that my mother would give you a life-long welcome, and you may safely leave the boy to me."

"I know," she said, "and I love you mother dearly, but I must go my own way. Let me try this house, George, just for one more year, and then if it is a failure I will—"

"Well," he said, in her thoughtful pause, "you will what?"

"Try something else."

"Upon my word, Mary," he said, "you are almost enough to vex one. Where is your regard for me if, in this perversity or mistaken sense of independence, you persist in keeping an asylum for eccentric old gentlemen and semi-imbecile students of medicine. I might say, in the same way as the magistrate did when he got part of his speech to the culprit before him, here you are, a young and beautiful woman, with friends who would gladly take care of you and your boy, instead of which you let lodgings to troublesome people."

"Just for one year more," she pleaded. "And then should the house be a failure?"

"We will see."

"You will come to my mother."

"Yes," she said at last, "if I want a home, I will come, there now, are you satisfied?"

"Quite," and he lifted her hands from her lap and kissed them. "That is one comfort, if at the end of a year you find this house a failure, and you want a home, you will come to ours."

"Yes, how is it, George, that you always have your own way with me?"

"Because," he said, with the light of a pure and tender love in his face, "you know it is for the best, will you come and see my mother now?"

"It is so late, almost baby's bed time."

"You may safely leave him to Martha, after those repentant tears and the sovereign."

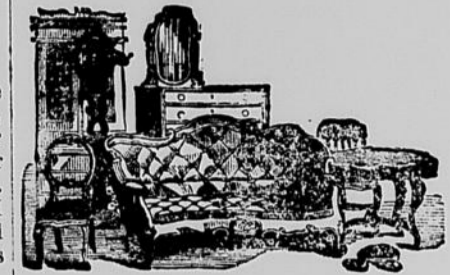
Very probably Mrs. Coombes would have been (Continued on Last Page.)

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