

The Widow's Lodger.

"But if he came to England he would go to Arthur's people, and they would tell him. Then, if he wished to see me, he would come."

"We are not so sure of that. The people do not like you; they might give you a character. What have they done since you were left like this?"

"No. They offered me fifty pounds a year if I would give up my boy. They do not so far even as to say they had more right to him than I have."

And the proud little mother looked quite stately in her insulted dignity.

"Fifty pounds a year; and they would have brought the boy up well, sent him to college, made a gentleman of him, given him a profession and money to go on with"—and he shook his grey head slowly. "I do not know, my dear, whether you were quite right—whether it was not a case in which natural feeling should be set aside in consideration for the boy's welfare. I do not know."

"Pray do not say so," said Mary, passionately—"do not tell me I was wrong! The same thought troubled me at the time, but I could not give him up; I want to keep him all my own while he is young. I will work and save for him while I have strength. I have not touched the money his father left, and when he is old enough he shall choose for himself, but till then—"

"Do not imagine that I think you are wrong," said Mr. Barker. "I merely took the practical view of it, and you naturally resented their injustice."

"Not to me. I did not mind. But they must have known how the hard work told on Arthur; they must have seen him breaking down; they thought he would be glad to go back to them for the sake of the carriage and their money; they wanted him to leave me."

"Poor child!" the old man said again; "don't cry. I am going to read the letter, and your uncle shall know I have seen it. I see it begins in the old-fashioned way."

"DEAR OLD UNCLE MIKE,—I have taken up my pen a dozen times or so to send you a few lines, not knowing whether they may find you in New Zealand or Jamaica; but something in the shape of an interruption has always come in. If I am not wanted to assist an entrance, I am desired most urgently to delay an exit, or else to see what can be done for any of the thousand ills the flesh is heir to; and I, who have a decent reputation in these things, find myself thinking that I have strutted and fretted my hour on the stage, and shall soon be heard no more. I do not know that I should mind for myself,—it is not so difficult to tire of living,—but I have a wife and an infant boy, and I do not know what is to become of them."

"If ever you see my wife, as I hope some day you will, you will not wonder at me, nor be so severely as my friends have been to me, for she is not so much for her beauty, though she is of the gentle, sympathetic order, and is so good, so true, so thorough, so companion and friend. I cannot tell you better how my love grew upon her when I saw what a life of self-devotion she had led with her father, a poor old scholar and gentleman, named Lennard. I think you knew him, for when I mentioned my Uncle Michael he grew rather curious; but he changed the subject, and I could not get him back to it. He was like Lear in two things,—the world had used him badly, and he had a daughter like Cordelia; one who clung to him in all adversity, and her voice was sweet and low,—surely the most excellent thing a woman can have."

"We have been very happy. If my mother had not set herself so bitterly against Mary from the outset, I should not have a care; but she will not see my wife, and so I have only the painful option of not seeing my mother. She forced the chain upon me, and what could I do, except as Holy Writ tells me. I wish it had been otherwise."

"Should the end be as near as I think it is, Mary will want friends, and if you come to England look after her. I could not ask this of anyone but my Uncle Mike, the dear old fellow I so well remember in my boyhood—what friends we were. I wonder if anyone in this world knew you so well as I did."

"Now that I have begun there is so much I have to say; but I am writing slowly, and my faithful friend, George Hyde, tells me to be careful of my strength—my strength, when a journey from one room to the other is a pilgrimage that leaves me without a second breath to spare. Still, when the Summer comes—"

Here it ended. That Summer never came for him.

"Is this all?" Mr. Barker asks. "That is all, sir. He tried to renew it sometimes, but his strength was gone. He was many days over that as you see it. The last words he wrote was 'when the Summer comes.' He used to talk so much of that; but he had seen his last Summer here."

CHAPTER VI.

UNCLE MICHAEL'S VISIT.

It came had come when Mary could scarcely bear the thought of her great sorrow, and it came when she would come to her eyes they ran down. Mr. Barker looked at the feth, through his gold-rimmed glasses for some time after he had finished reading it; he could not trust himself to speak just yet.

"You are very young to have seen so much trouble," he said at last, "and to have lost such a husband. Have they, his friends, ever been to see you since?"

"Never. I hear of them through Mr. Hyde."

"That is the rather good-looking young doctor who comes here every day, or nearly—the faithful friend your husband speaks of?"

"Yes," Mary answered, without a sign of embarrassment. "I have been spending the evening at his mother's house."

"Is she a lady—socially, I mean—the equal of Mrs. Allenby?"

"Quite."

"So I should think. The Allenbys are not much, you know—mere tradesmen of one grade or another. The great-grandfather kept a retail shop on Tower-hill, and dealt largely in smuggled tobacco—so it is said. Arthur was the first gentleman of the family—this little fellow will be the second. As for old Mike, he is what people call a rough diamond, knows a deal more of arithmetic than grammar, and is not ashamed of it. As for Mrs. Allenby, she is a stuck-up nobody; she was companion, or something of the kind, to a lady of title, and got so much in the habit of talking about her mistress's friends, that she talked herself into the belief they were her own. I know her, my child—at least I have heard of her; and Mike used to call her a second-hand duchess. She hates him, but she is very civil to him. He is an old bachelor, you know, and she makes sure of getting his money. I wish," Mr. Barker added, grimly, "I wish she may, but I don't think"—and he touched the baby's cheek fondly with his forefinger—"I don't think she will. My dear, I am glad you have shown me this letter; I take it as a mark of confidence, for I have been a disagreeable old bear."

Mary only smiled quietly. "Perhaps, like baby, my instinct told me otherwise," she said; "and there is so much allowance to be made for pain."

"Now," said Mr. Barker, wincing at the answer, "it is not unlikely Uncle Michael may be in England soon. What shall I say about this letter?"

"Should he wish to see it, I will show it to him; it is his by right, it was intended for him; but I hope he will not think I want him to do anything for me or baby."

"You are quite independent."

"I hope so, sir."

"Saving money, eh?"

"Yes, sir, a little."

"Still it is precarious, very. Lodgers do not always pay rent, and taxes must be paid, servants' wages, too. As for Uncle Michael, my dear," he said, dryly, "you need not fear any act of spontaneous generosity on his part. His liking and dislike as regards yourself will not affect the baby in any way; and now, my dear, since this little fellow has broken the ice between us, let him come up now and then, and you may come with him. I am glad he likes tamarinds and ginger, I have plenty more."

Master Arthur was a frequent visitor after that. The mulatto caught him at odd hours in the day, and rode him up shoulder high, and very often the little gentleman found his way to the drawing-room alone. If he did not find the door open, he hammered at it with his fist, and called out for his *Mis'er Ba'ko* until he was admitted. He dragged his toys up one by one,—his coral and silver rattle, a box of soldiers, half a dozen harlequin-colored balls of various sizes, some india-rubber figures, weighted so as to retain the perpendicular, and a drum. It was not an uncommon thing for him to be found by Mary snugly asleep on Mr. Barker's bed when he was tired, and the old gentleman either reading or writing; and when she went to clear away his toys, she saw them mostly packed in a corner.

"And you can let them remain," Mr. Barker said; "he will want them when he comes again."

Baby had made a change in the old man's life. He no longer roared at people like an old lion; he never replaced the hideous blue spectacles in the house, but he never went out without a pair; he gave Mary the key of the piano,—he had put it in his pocket with a chuckle when he first took possession of the rooms,—and he told her now that she might play occasionally to please the baby. Some extraordinary things were done for baby's sake; and Cinci took him out one day on a mysterious mission. Mary let him go with no misgiving; the mulatto was more trustworthy than nine ordinary nurses out of ten. They were gone for several hours, and when they returned parcels began to arrive, first from Oxford Street and Holborn, then Regent Street and the Strand, the Lowther Arcade and St. Paul's Churchyard. When the parcels were opened in the drawing-room, it looked like a wholesale department of the toy trade.

"But," Mary said, at length, "how- ever did you choose such a variety of things?"

"I took little master into every shop, and let him choose what he liked," was the reply.

"And you appear to have given him everything he chose."

"That's what I did—just," said the mulatto.

Master Arthur was in a fair way of being spoiled, but Mary dared not hint as much. He did exactly as he pleased. He blew a peculiarly piercing trumpet all over the house, beat his drums—about a dozen set in a row—and had his train going in the drawing-room over poor Mr. Parker's head. When he ventured a mild remonstrance, through Mary, Mr. Barker went on the landing and roared at him; asked him to come up stairs and say what he meant.

"Do you think I am going to stop his innocent play so that you may study in peace how to poison people," the wrathful old gentleman growled at him. "Let me hear another word, sir, and my man shall put you on the roof, and keep you there. Study, indeed; if you want to be quiet, there's the coal cellar."

"It is such a blow to the dignity of our profession," Mr. Parker said, plaintively, to Mary. "Not that I mind for myself, you know." But Mr. M. P. Parker never complained again. When he had an extra study to get through, he did it in his bedroom, or tied a towel over his ears to keep the sound out. George Hyde heard of the singular pro-

ceedings, and saying little, wondered much; and when he called, Mary was in Mr. Barker's room. The same thing had happened before, but George did not go away as usual this time; he waited, and sent word that he had something particular to say.

"Then send him up," said Mr. Barker; "you can introduce him, Mrs. Allenby. I will not have the boy disturbed."

Mr. Hyde came up. He took in the whole scene with an amused smile, and gave a very penetrating glance at Mr. Barker.

"Come in," he said, "come in, Mr. Hyde, you are no stranger to me; I have seen you often enough from the window. I am an old friend of Uncle Michael, and you are an old friend of Arthur Allenby's—that is introduction enough, so shake hands and make yourself at home."

And they shook hands heartily. "I have just left Mrs. Allenby, Mary," he said, with a smile; "and the poor lady is in a dreadful state of commotion. Uncle Michael is coming to England; he may have arrived by this time."

"I think it very likely," Mr. Barker observed. "I heard from him myself; but what is the reason of this consternation?"

"It appears that he has been inquiring about Arthur's wife, Mary. They were not aware that he knew of the marriage. I saw the letter. He wrote to know who she was? what she was? how they got along with her? and several other inconvenient questions. You can imagine the situation."

"I should enjoy it," said Mr. Barker, grimly, "and before you go any further, Dr. Hyde, let me ask you not to tell them that I, who lodge here, know anything about Uncle Michael. Do you understand me?"

"Scarcely, sir; but it shall be as you please, nevertheless."

"That's a good lad. I have a reason for it, a sound one. You will be quite satisfied with it when you know. Can you tell me when he is expected?"

"At Southampton to-morrow, by the 'Boomerang.'"

"Then I go to meet the 'Boomerang,' and not a word mind, Dr. Hyde, if you value the friendship of Uncle Michael's friend."

"Not a word," said the doctor, with a smile, "for I want to win the friendship of Uncle Michael's friend. But how will you travel with your foot in that condition? You may have an attack on the way."

"Then come with me," said Mr. Barker. "You may be useful. A medical man is not a bad traveling companion in case of a railway accident. Come with me, and I will make it worth your while."

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE ENEMY'S CAMP.

No one was more surprised than Mary at the sudden friendship which had arisen between her eccentric lodger and Dr. Hyde. The ways of men were not strange to her, but she had never seen anything so strange as this. Two persons more opposite in character it would

have been difficult to find, yet the next morning, when Mr. Barker started for Southampton, George was there waiting for him, and looking after him as if he had known him for years.

Cinci did not go; his master told him to stay and look after the boy, threatening him with dire pains and penalties should anything go wrong.

"And he is to have the run of my rooms as a playground," the old gentleman said. "Let him make as much noise as he likes. Mary, my dear, the next time you see me you will very likely see your Uncle Michael as well. I may not return for two or three days, but do not be afraid; Mr. Hyde will take care of me, for your sake."

"I am sure he will," said Mary, innocently.

For she had no idea of anything but the most pure, frank friendship for her husband's old companion, but the first idea came when she saw the self-conscious change in George's face; and she was not a little troubled. Could she have been mistaken in thinking he was engaged to Miss Allenby? and did he care for her in a way that was more than brotherly? Mary took that possibility into her mind with a sweet sense of surprise and pleasure, not unattended by pain. Their relationship, so far, had been so entirely confidential and unselfish, any change would throw a restraint upon it, however it might end.

Mary had grown very fond of Mr. Barker; of course, her child's love for the singular old gentleman was a direct passport to her heart; but it was not that alone. She found herself hoping that Uncle Michael would be like him—even to his oddities. She knew him so well by this time; his terrific treatment of poor Mr. Parker only amused her now, and she told that young disciple of Galen not to mind him.

"But he has such a dreadful voice," Mr. Barker urged. "I have heard say the human voice will frighten a lion, and I am not a lion, but it frightens me."

"I think he knows that," said Mary, with a smile, "take my advice, Mr. Barker, the next time he roars at you, roar at him!"

"So I will," responded Mr. Parker, inspired with extra courage by the old gentleman's absence, "the very next time. Upon my word, my dear Mrs. Allenby, he nearly frightened me out of an examination."

Mr. Barker did not return within two or three days, but on the morning after his departure for Southampton Mary had a letter from George. Uncle Michael was a man after his own heart, George told her, and not very much unlike Mr.

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