

# The Widow's Lodger

CHAPTER X.

AN UNSPOKEN RECOGNITION.

Mr. M. P. Parker, watching from the window to see his enemy re-enter the cab which had been waiting for him, was electrified by seeing the old gentleman turn and give him quite a friendly, if mischievous grin. He was not mistaken, though he could hardly credit the evidence of his own senses. He was still more surprised, five minutes later, when Mary entered.

"Good morning, Mrs. Allenby," he said, offering her a chair. "Do sit down, if you have a minute to spare. I find it quite impossible to study just yet. Do you know, just now, when that old gentleman went away he smiled at me in quite a friendly manner, as if he thought throwing arm-chairs at people's doors rather an agreeable mode of asking for an introduction?"

"He is very sorry, Mr. Parker," said Mary, with a smile in her softly-brilliant eyes; "he would have come to apologize, but he thought you would not think it the worse if it came through me."

"My dear lady, he might throw the house at me, if he liked, on those conditions," Mr. Parker knew what he meant to convey, and Mary understood him. "Of course if you wish me to forgive him, and not resent it, you know—"

"I do, Mr. Parker. You see, he is sincere in his regret; he requested me to give you these, as a kind of peace-offering—a pipe, I think, and some Latakia tobacco. And he is coming to smoke a pipe with you some day. I was to tell you particularly not to make yourself ill by smoking cigarettes."

"Good gracious me! My dear lady, did you ever see such a magnificent pipe? Quite a work of art! Look at the delicate tracery of those minaret spires, or whatever they are meant for! I should not be disposed to accept this, but since you bring it, and I am not to smoke cigarettes, I dare say he is right; there is a burnt-papery flavor about them, and they may be bad for the nerves—he ought to know. Perhaps it is smoking such pipes as this that have made him so strong; and the Germans smoke big pipes, and they do not know what nerves are. Now, you know, this is very kind of him. Age has its peculiarities—"

"And they should be respected, or at least endured," said Mary, gravely; "but not when they go too far. I am very glad you spoke to him as you did."

"Did he hear me?"

"Not distinctly; but he could tell that you were very angry, and it seemed to make an impression upon him. He rather likes a man who can defend himself."

"Well, really, you know, Mrs. Allenby, it was time to speak, and I should have come upstairs but I knew you were there, and a scene between two such men might have upset you."

"It would indeed, Mr. Parker. You were very kind to think of that. Will you take tea with us this afternoon? I expect Miss Allenby here."

"I shall only be too delighted, if you are quite sure I shall not be in the way."

"Quite sure."

"An angel," he said, when she was gone—two angels. What a magnificent pipe. I will try it now. It may be what I have wanted to soothe my nerves. I never thought the cigarettes might be injurious."

It really was a magnificent pipe: the bowl finely carved, and just colored at the base to a level biscuit-brown; the stem, with an amber mouthpiece of six inches, was nearly thirteen inches long. Mr. Parker removed the wadding, adjusted the plug, and filled it carefully. It held nearly half-an-ounce, and he found it very soothing, so he filled it again.

About the time he got to the end of this he began to think he was on board a channel steamer with a rough sea running; the carpet rose in waves and the couch he took refuge on swayed and swung with him. Putting his pipe safely in its case, with a last expiring effort he felt his way along the wall into the next room, and fell on the bed with an indistinct idea that the end of the world had come for him. That day he smoked no more.

But he slept so long that Miss Allenby had been in the house some time before he awoke, and the pleasant clink of the tea things going past his door was the first sound he heard. He looked at his watch, it was four; he put his head into the basin and emptied the water over it, dressed with an unhappy consciousness of feeling and looking as if he had been very drunk, and waited to be sent for. He had to wait a long time, it seemed, when he was dying for a cup of tea.

Much as they liked him, he would have been in the way, for the two girls had a great deal to say. Mary had already answered the letter from Arthur's mother, but it had not arrived when Margaret left home, and Mary had to tell her the contents.

"It is very curious," Margaret said, "but Uncle Michael, who had been out since quite early this morning—he is a very early riser—came home not long since, and said he should very much like to see the boy this evening as he is going away for a day or two, perhaps for a week or two, and he thought you would not mind letting him go for an hour or so with me."

"I made the same suggestion in the letter I sent a little before twelve," said Mary, with a smile; "and I will see your mother at any time within the next few days."

"Did you say that, too?"

"Dearest Mary, I am so glad. Uncle Michael seemed so much to wish it."

"And you wish it, too," said Mary, wiping the tears from her friend's eyes, and kissing her; "but it must make no difference to us, Margaret. You will come here just the same, for I shall never be at home in your house; my visits must necessarily be purely formal. I can accept the position, and that is all. My home is here, and here you must see me when we want to love each other."

"I know," Margaret said; "and I would rather come here. Still, I shall be glad to see you received on a proper footing at our home."

Mary could have said how little she cared for that, but she would not pain her friend.

"Another curious thing," Margaret said, "is that Uncle Michael asks very few questions about you, though I am often in his room; he likes me to be there and talk to him."

"Perhaps he does not wish to know much about me."

"I am sure it is not that, for he speaks of you in the kindest manner. Sometimes I think he must have some source of information; he did, if you remember, mention a friend who knew Arthur and you."

"Has he mentioned this friend since?"

"Never. Mamma found courage to put the question once as to who this friend could be, and he simply said, in his quiet way, 'simply a very old friend, madam'—he said 'madam' as he does when he is not quite pleased—and one whose word I can depend upon. Have you the least idea?"

"We have known so many people," Mary said—"Arthur as a doctor, and I as a lodging-house keeper. It may have been one of his patients, or my lodger; it does not matter, Uncle Michael will see me for himself, I daresay, after your mother and I have met."

"Another curious thing," Margaret said.

"You seem to deal in curiosities today," Mary interposed.

"Yes, but this is very, very curious. Uncle and George Hyde have become inseparable friends. They sit and talk of Arthur by the hour together."

"There is nothing curious in that, Margaret; George was always Arthur's truest friend."

"Yes, but they are more confidential than that would make them; and now, dear, had we not better have tea and dress baby? I promised to be home with him before six."

The tea was rung for and Mr. Parker sent for in the ten minutes that seemed such an age to him. Baby was having a game on his own account with him in the big room, and was brought in so tumbled and full of glee that dressing him for a reception seemed to involve some time and consideration. He wanted to commence another fracas with Mr. Parker directly he saw him.

"And I really am not equal to it," Mr. Parker pleaded. "I have had too much tobacco, little man. I filled that magnificent pipe twice, you know," and he addressed both ladies apologetically.

"I ought to have remembered that though one would be very soothing, there would be too much nicotine in two—the pipe Mr. Barker so kindly gave me, you know."

"Bako!" said the baby on the alert, instantly, on the sound of his friend's name—"Unky Bako!"

"Yes, my little man—Uncle Bako, as you call him, and a very objectionable Bako I used to think him, though we are the best of friends now."

"Is that your eccentric lodger?" Margaret asked.

"Yes, the dear old gentleman who is so kind to me and baby. Every gentleman is an uncle or unky to baby, and Bako is his attempt at Barker. He was here this morning, but not for long."

Much more might have been said concerning Unky Bako, but the time was going, and Master Arthur had to be dressed. Mr. Parker retired, not quite knowing what to do with himself unless he took a walk round the square. He cast a longing look at the magnificent pipe and was nearly tempted, but the recollection of his channel journey in the morning made him pause, so he went for a walk round the square. He was sure, at least, of seeing Miss Allenby again, and if he judged his time well, touching her hand once more. As it happened, however, he missed them by about a minute; the carriage had called for them. Nothing less than the carriage and pair, with a liveried servant by the coachman's side, was good enough for Arthur Allenby's little son.

Michael Allenby was in a singular state of excitement and expectation for him, while waiting for the carriage; so, in truth, were his brother's widow and Victoria. He paced the whole length of the drawing-room to and fro, with his hands behind him, and did not hear the roll of the carriage wheels, heard nothing till Mrs. Allenby said—

"They are here."

Then he sat down at the end of the room, while the others stood nearer the door. They saw the glorious little fellow, with his beautiful Saxon face and curly hair, and stooped to intercept him, but he broke from them with a glad cry of "Unky Bako!" ran across the room to Michael Allenby, and climbing on the old gentleman's knee, he nestled down to him quite oblivious of the rest.

CHAPTER XI.

A DAUGHTER'S MERCY.

Such an unexpected action on the child's part took his friends by surprise, and for the first few moments there was some embarrassment; but the old gen-

tleman only folded the little fellow closely to him, and looked down very fondly at the winsome face.

"Clearly a case of love at first sight," he said, "or else he mistakes me for someone else. Who or what is Unky Bako?"

"His pet name for Mr. Barker, Mary's lodger," said Margaret, with a keen and quiet glance at him; "and from what I have heard of his appearance, the general points of resemblance would be near enough to account for the mistake on the child's part."

"Permit me to feel flattered. I have heard of him from Mr. Hyde, and almost feel inclined to make his acquaintance. I suppose I ought to be grateful to him for such a favorable introduction to Arthur's boy."

Looking up, he saw Margaret regarding him with a curious light of interrogation in her eyes. He answered her with a smile, and, without a word being spoken, they seemed to understand each other.

When Mr. Hyde came in, half-an-hour later, he found Master Arthur playing on the floor with Uncle Michael's watch-chain and seals, and a handful of gold and silver which he had unceremoniously fished up out of the old gentleman's waistcoat pocket. The little fellow had made friends with his grand-mamma, but did not care much for his Aunt Victoria. Passionately fond of him as Miss Allenby could have been, she had unconsciously a manner that repelled children. She did not like to have a fold of lace tumbled, or a tress of hair set awry; and the boy, finding that he was only expected to sit still and be kissed, declined his share of the bargain, and struggled down. Infant as he was, she resented it. Mrs. Allenby could not satisfy the fierce hunger of her love for Arthur's boy; every time she looked at him she longed to have him all her own. The bitterest thing in her mind at present was that in an hour or two he would have to leave her and go back to that girl who was only his mother. To be only his mother counted very little with the lady of Or-thorpe Square when her own son was the father. No one could have fought more resolutely for her maternal rights, and no one would have been less willing to give them to another.

"I see he makes himself at home," Mr. Hyde said, taking him from the floor upside down, and swinging him as high as the chandelier. "What do you think of him, Uncle Michael?"

"He is Arthur over again, George; everything I would desire. Be careful of him."

"There is no danger," laughed George. "He would make his fortune as an acrobat," and he took the baby round the room astride on his shoulders. "Did he make friends easily?"

"That was very curious," said Mrs. Allenby; "he ran straight past Victoria and me, and went straight to Mr. Allenby. Anyone would have thought they had met before."

"Depend upon it, Master Arthur is wise in his generation," said George. "He has a weakness for elderly gentlemen who carry large gold watches and plenty of sovereigns and silver for him to play with. Mr. Barker has spoiled him for the society of ladies. He associates elderly gentlemen with a cargo of toys and grey hair and eye-glasses with unlimited sweetmeats, including preserved ginger."

"Unky Bako," said the boy, patting Michael's cheek.

"Well," said George, gravely; "if Uncle Michael had the gout very badly, wore blue spectacles, and was generally slovenly and brusque, he might pass at a distance for Unky Bako, as you call him; at present, young man, you are not so complimentary as you intend to be. Unky Bako certainly did not win your love by the beauty of his personal appearance."

"But he must be a nice old gentleman," Margaret said, "or Mary would not be so fond of him."

"He is just as I have described him, Maggie, but I suspect he found his way to her heart through the boy."

"Or being very rich and very old," said Mrs. Allenby; "it may be worth her while to be fond of him, invalid old gentlemen in the hands of designing people have made strange wills before this."

George laughed outright.

"That never occurred to me," he said, "but perhaps you have hit it. After all, why should she not look out for the main chance, and we have to remember that the poor girl has no expectations; she has not a relative in the world except by marriage, and whatever may be done for her boy would scarcely be extended to her."

"Your remark is very sensible," said Mrs. Allenby.

"It is very cruel," said Margaret, warmly, "and I am ashamed of George; how could any of us, or anyone be kind to the child, make him rich if we had the means, and neglect his mother?"

"In legal matters, my dear," observed Uncle Michael, "the mother in such a case as we are supposing, does not enter into the contract; the boy's natural guardians are chosen as the trustees of his money till he is of age, and meantime a small but sufficient allowance is made to her. No other way would do; for instance the mother may be a young widow who might marry, take the money right out of the family, and leave the boy a pauper."

"Mary would not do that," said Margaret.

"We will give her credit for being everything that is good, my dear; but suppose, for instance, I had a quarter of a million to leave this boy instead of a few—ahem—few hundred pounds."

"And I so devised it that she had the interest till he attained his majority. Have you any idea what his income would be, at say from four to five per cent?"

"From ten to thirteen thousand a year," said Victoria, quickly.

"I had not the slightest idea," said Margaret.

"No, my dear," observed the old gentleman, shaking his head. "You are sadly remiss in matters of business. Victoria would be a fortune to a professional man; she would look after his interest and her own; but do you think any man in his senses would leave the control of from ten to thirteen thousand a year to a girl who would be rich twice over on as many shillings?"

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Allenby, promptly.

"I do not know," Margaret said, her heart swelling with indignation. "I do not know what any man in his senses or out of them would do; but I am sure Mary would use her money wisely and well, whether she counted it by thousands of pence, shillings, or pounds. People who have been used to plenty of money are not always the most wise or generous with it."

"You forget yourself, my pet," Mrs. Allenby said sweetly; "we were only supposing a case."

And Margaret said no more; her mother was silent too—she was going far into the possibilities. Her brother-in-law was more likely to be the possessor of a quarter of a million or more than a few hundreds. So far as careful inquiry would go, she knew it to be so. And he was old, hale, and strong, and with an iron constitution; but he was just one of those big, heavy men who, if they are taken ill, die almost suddenly, or do not last long; and then, if "that girl" were not in the way, she herself, as little Arthur's natural guardian, would have control of the child and perhaps his money.

"Although I think with you," she said, turning with unexpected kindness to her younger daughter, "that Mary would use her income well and wisely, whatever it might be, it is as you say about people who have always been used to plenty—they are not the most wise or generous with it. Now Mary appears to have a great deal of common sense, and since the boy has been here I will call upon her."

"When, mamma?"

"To-morrow. You can go early in the day. George shall bring me later on. She must be an excellent mother; we can see that by the child, baby as he is; he has splendid health and his manners are so pretty; I almost begin to think I shall like her at first sight!"

"If not at first, you will very soon," Margaret said; "Mary is not difficult to deal with."

Baby's visit seemed likely to be attended with the happiest results. All the rancor Mrs. Allenby had cherished against her daughter-in-law seemed to have gone. She spoke of the child proudly,—his mother's evident care of him,—his pretty manners,—and her exquisite taste in dress.

"And I must have misjudged her!" she said, with generous candor, when the boy had gone home with Margaret, George Hyde acting as escort. "It is a pity we have not met before."

"A great pity," said Michael; "it would have made things better for one, at least."

"For one?" and she looked an inquiry.

"For Arthur. He was fond of you, and it preyed upon his mind; he was delicate, and the hard work on foot helped to kill him."

"So I told her the day of the funeral, Michael. But we must forgive her now."

The old man shook his head silently, as he left the room.

"You may depend upon it," Victoria said, "he will never leave her a penny."

"We can depend on nothing," Mrs. Allenby replied, "unless we make it as certain as we can for ourselves. Michael has his weak moments, and we do not know what that girl may do with him."

"Well, it does not matter to us," said the girl, "we are rich enough."

"Rich enough," and Mrs. Allenby turned upon her with startling bitterness. "Are you fool enough to believe that? Why, when I paid your father's debts I had scarcely a thousand pounds left, and you know the rate we have lived at since. If I had not made it well-known that my husband's wealthy brother was coming home, we should have been swept into the street before this. The very lease of the house is pledged, there is a bill of sale on the furniture, the horses belong to the corn merchant, and the carriage is a builder's in Long Acre. Our income is just enough from one half-year to the next to pay the laundress and servants' wages and keep off our most pressing tradesmen."

"Mother!"

"Yes; mother. And if your uncle had not come home I should very likely have taken a dose of something from your father's medicine case, and left you to fight through it without me."

"And you have kept this to yourself all these years," Victoria said, slowly, "if anything goes wrong now, I for one shall never forgive you."

CHAPTER XII.

BABY'S ILLNESS.

If Mrs. Allenby had expected her eldest daughter to be surprised or frightened she was disappointed, and she herself was not prepared for the long look of slow resentment Victoria gave her. The words stung her and haunted her when the girl had gone. "If anything goes wrong now, I for one shall never forgive you,"—and that was a daughter's mercy; her reward for keeping me trouble to herself.

When Michael first came home, his sister-in-law had intended to tell him, and it would have been her wisest course, but he was a difficult man to approach. In his behavior to her there had always been an undercurrent of grim, good-humored irony; he was one of the very few who knew exactly what she had been, and her stately imitation—an almost unconscious imitation—of the duchess she had served only amused him. He knew, too, how hard she had driven his brother along the working road of his profession, for the sake of keeping up appearances, till he broke down under the strain, and he did not like her the better for it; but where his brother's children were concerned he would have been more than kind, more than generous.

She had, however, let the chance go by. He had questioned her as to her circumstances, and she answered in a way which led him to infer that they were just as he saw them. If he took the trouble to inquire further, she was not aware of it; but her creditors were quite satisfied; the veritable Michael Allenby, so often spoken of by her, had arrived and was located in her house. They saw him in the carriage with her and her daughters, and they knew that he was nearly a millionaire. They took her orders, and did not trouble her with accounts. They no longer looked upon her as a doctor's widow with a doubtful income and no ready money; she was Michael Allenby's sister-in-law, and to have asked who he was would have been like inquiring as to the monetary status of a Rothschild.

Mrs. Allenby went to Oranmore Square next day, and her horses stepped as if no mercenary consideration had a lien upon them. George Hyde rode with her, curious to see how she would meet her son's neglected widow; he saw that she was making mental preparations for it.

Mary and Margaret were in Mary's own sitting-room when they arrived; it would have been termed an ante-room, being quite at the back of the house; but it was long and large, and would not have let so well as any of the others; that—as George told Mrs. Allenby with quiet mischief—was only why Mary kept it for herself.

"But, good Heavens!" said that lady in dismay, "you never mean to say she will receive her Uncle Michael there?"

"I am afraid she must," said George; "she could not very well ask him to the kitchen or her bedroom, and all the rest are let."

"Oh, this is quite too dreadful. I never thought of it before. That old gentleman must go; I will tell her so."

"You had much better tell him so," said George.

"Oh, I will; I wonder if he is at home. Michael would never forgive me if he saw Arthur's wife and child, in the reality of the case, pushed away in a dull back room such as my butler declined to sleep in. Dear me! the reality never struck me before."

George only smiled. He had spent many pleasant hours in that dull back room, and could very willingly have spent his lifetime there had it been necessary.

And it was in this dull back room Mary received her husband's mother with a calm and quiet grace, and a dignity which took that lady by surprise. Mrs. Allenby, true to the *role* she had set herself to play, put her arms round the girl's neck and kissed her with tearful eyes.

"It is too late now," she said, "to speak of what might have been if we had met before; I only hope it is not too late for us to learn to love each other."

"Not so bad," George said to himself. "I wonder where she got it from, and how will Mary answer it?"

Not even as he expected; but with her sweet voice, low and steady, and no sign of a tear, she answered so far in Mrs. Allenby's own words.

"It is too late to speak of what might have been if we had met before, but it is not too late to let the future speak for itself. I am glad you were pleased with Artie. Margaret tells me Mr. Allenby was delighted with him."

Dr. Hyde said to himself this was well done. She had, in a few words, accepted the reconciliation without losing her own dignity or throwing a shadow of blame on Arthur's mother. In a few words more she had led the conversation into a safe channel, and five minutes later the only one not quite at ease was Mrs. Allenby herself.

She had a smile with every word she spoke—a smile for every word she listened to; went through the events of the preceding evening, from baby's extraordinary instinct in finding out Uncle Michael to the moment of departure, and all the time her heart was full of a deadly, unforgiving rage. She had expected a different reception—a lowly-spoken, grateful humility—a recognition in face, and voice, and drooping figure of the concession she had made, and there was nothing of the kind. The sweet voice was steady, the soft eyes proud and thoughtful; the girl's manner well-bred and self-possessed. Mrs. Allenby acknowledged the charm of these things, and hated her the more bitterly.

"I feel," she thought, "as if I could not rest until that girl is dead."

"Speaking of your Uncle Michael," she said, "reminds me that he may come here at any time, and he must not see you like this."

"In black, do you mean?" asked Mary, innocently.

(To be Continued.)