

intimacy with the Madam, and declared she was "real glad," too, for I discovered that it was I, myself, who was over head and ears in love with the sweet Ada.

Two months later the charming Miss Malvern resigned her name and became Mrs. Thomas Mulkins. She is my own loving wife, and I never knew what happiness was until my bachelorhood vanished in the sunshine of her love.

Poor Jack! He is single yet. He never married Madam DeCourcy. Two days before that first of September—that was to have been his wedding day—that wayward, fickle, heartless woman went off to Europe with a Frenchman, who had a high sounding handle to his name.

That letter of Jack's, which took me to New York, is treasured up by my wife, and that is all she has to remember him by.

THE END.

HER CHILD'S CRY.

The story I have to tell is very slight, the incidents are so very homely, and the people whom it concerns are so ordinary, that more than once I have taken up a pen to begin it and put down the pen again beside the virgin page. If I attempt a mere narration of fact, without adding colour or emotion, the interest of a reader is likely soon to flag, and he may probably resent finding in a publication where he expects subjective fiction in narratives, a simple and literal account of things, people, and events such as he is accustomed to meet in the columns of a newspaper. As I have determined to go on, I hope I over-estimate the danger. And now for what I have to tell:

I live in the south-west district of London, and when I take the train for town, Loughborough Junction is the most convenient station. One dull, heavy day in the October of last year I booked at Loughborough for Ludgate Hill, and took my seat in a third-class carriage of a South-western train. It was neither for economy nor for "the pride that apes humility" that I travelled third-class; but my business obliges me to spend most of my time alone, and when I have an opportunity of getting among people, it is good for my business that I should see and hear as many of my fellow creatures as possible. Hence I prefer the frequently-changing crowd of a third-class carriage to the thinly-masked solitude of a higher class.

On this occasion the carriage in which I found myself had only shoulder-high compartments, so that one could see from end to end. There were in all seven or eight persons present, and I was in the last compartment but one, with my back to the engine, and in the right-hand corner I sat.

For a few minutes I engaged myself in observing the five or six people scattered up and down the major portion in front of me. Then looking over my shoulder I found that the compartment nearest to the engine contained only a woman with a young baby in her arms. She was sitting with her back to mine. Owing to the violence of the wrench I had to give my neck in order to see her, my glance was brief; but while it lasted I caught sight of an expression such as I had never before seen on a human face, an expression which so affected my curiosity and wonder that after allowing a little time to elapse, and just as we reached Walworth road, I shifted myself to the other end of the seat on which I sat, and, throwing my arm carelessly over the shoulder-high partition, looked long at the pair. In the sense that a surprising revelation may fascinate any one, I was fascinated.

There was no need to fear my long stare might disturb the woman. I knew by the way the woman held the baby that it was asleep. I could not see the face of the child. The mother held it close to her bosom and bent her own head low over it. Although I could hear no word of hers, even when the train stopped, her lips moved slowly, paused awhile, and then went over again the very same phrases. At length I learned the unspoken words of the passion-weary lips:

"My darling! My baby son! My own! My own!"

Mother's ordinary words, but what an unutterable accompaniment of pose and look!

Without being deformed or hideous, she was without exception the ugliest woman I ever saw. There was nothing loathsome, repulsive, or malignant in her face, but it was completely ugly. The skin was dark and coarse in texture. The forehead was rugged at the temples, the hair at the right-hand side of the parting grew an inch lower down than at the other and the upper portion of the forehead projected to the line of the hair. The nose was thin at the point, upturned, splay where it met the face, sharply sunken where it joined the forehead at the bridge, and small for the other features. The cheeks were heavy and livid, differing in colour from the rest of the face only by having a few blotches. The mouth was large, with prominent thick lips that never closed neatly and that always remained heavily apart and leaning outward when motionless. The chin was long and feeble. I did not see the eyes; they never for one moment were removed from the sleeping infant.

"My darling! My baby son! My own! My own!"

Did ever any other heart yearn so overwhelmingly over any other thing? Was this a new manner, a higher, more intense form of maternal love? And had all else of that kind

which I had seen been only the prelude to this imperial theme of passion?

Although the chin was weak, the expression of the whole face indicated strength irregular and of uncertain action. The eyes might hold the key to the whole face.

"My darling! My baby son! My own! My own!"

These words, beyond all doubt, were the clew to her whole nature. The child, beyond all doubt, was the acme of her present life. She was as unconscious of the presence of any strangers as though she sat alone with her child under a palm-tree in the oasis of an ocean of sand.

"Ludgate Hill! Ludgate Hill!"

The train stopped and I got up. She, too, rose with a shudder.

"My darling! My baby son! My own! My own!"

I left the carriage, and in doing so noticed that she had some difficulty in opening the door. I turned the handle for her, and assisted her to alight. She looked up:

"Thank you, sir."

Deep-set blue-gray eyes with strange red points of fire in them, like the sparks of glowing charcoal seen through damp glass.

Her left hand and arm swathed the body to her bosom. The hand lay visible and bare; on the third finger was a wedding ring.

Who had wooed and won this woman whose sheer uncomeliness would be enough to shame all tender words, turn away all tender glances? And how was it that she whose appearance scouted the thought that any man could seek love of her for her appearance had nevertheless reached the crown of woman's dreams, motherhood, and yet had room for nothing in her heart but the cry:

"My darling! My own!"

She was not a widow. The child could have been no more than a few months old, and she wore no widow's weeds. And yet her whose coming with words of endearment must have been an apocalypse of delight had already faded into nothing, passed out of her heart, leaving no trace of his image behind, not even in the face of the child, for her eyes did not seek behind the baby for his likeness. It was only,

"My own! My own!"

I confess that all the day I was haunted by the face of this woman. I could not get it out of my mind. When I read, it came between my eyes and the page. In the street I found myself looking for it in the crowd. I kept saying to myself the words indicated by the lips but never breathed by the voice.

I was detained in town until a late hour. In the evening I met a friend, Dr. Robert William Baird, of Brixton. I invited him to supper, and we turned into a restaurant in the Strand.

After supper we lit cigars. I thought I noticed a look of painful preoccupation on his face. "Has anything unpleasant happened?" I asked; "you seem out of sorts."

He shook himself, smiled, and roused up. "Oh, dear, no! Nothing the matter. I did not know I was looking blue. To tell you the truth, I was thinking of a very unpleasant scene I witnessed to-day. You know Langton, the solicitor?"

"No."

"Michael Seymour Langton, you know?"

"His name, no more."

"A good fellow. A great friend of mine; you must know him some day. Well, I looked in at his office to-day. He's always up to his eyes in work; but unless he has a client with him, he's always glad to see a friend. One of those free-and-easy, good-hearted fellows, who, without making you feel a bit uncomfortable, will tell you be off the moment he wants you to go, so that you need never be afraid of doing him grievous bodily harm by staying a while if he'll let you."

"Well?"

"Exactly. But I can't tell you about him, he's such a capital fellow. You and he shall dine with me next Sunday. Eh?"

"All right so far as I'm concerned; but about this incident or scene?"

"Quite so. 'Sit down,' he said, 'sit down, old man.' Then looking at his watch, he said, 'If you've got five or ten minutes to spare, I'll show you the most perfect development of the genus scoundrel that I ever met.'

"I had the five minutes to spare, and more-over I always am open to make a sacrifice, if by so doing I can get a glimpse at anything superlatively good or bad; my liking for you, to illustrate what I say, arises from your superlative badness."

"All right, Baird; but for goodness sake go on," said I—a little petulantly. I fear, for I was not in a very jocular humour, and the exuberant garrulity of the good little doctor jarred against my nerves.

"My dear fellow, you know my motto, 'Slow and sure.' You can never get the real flavour out of a story or port by gulping it down. Taste it curiously, and you fill your whole body from your forehead to your feet with delight, especially in the case of port—when it's good."

I expostulated only by a sigh. I knew him thoroughly. Had I expostulated in words, he would have broken out into further digression.

"Well," he resumed, after a few solemn puffs at his cigar, "I waited. 'Now,' said Langton. A knock sounded at the door, and a man entered. At first I thought Langton had made a false diagnosis of his visitor, for anything less scoundrelly than the appearance of the man I never saw. He was of the medium

height, well made, handsome, with light blue eyes, straight nose, straight mouth, clear complexion, and a most winning and disarming smile. He appeared to be about thirty-eight years of age. His moustache and whiskers were brown, and the well-shaved chin was very firm and clean in outline. Upon the whole an exceedingly proper man, and one, I thought, likely to be very popular among the ladies; in no way like you, my dear Melton.

"Well, he came into the room with a bow and a smile, holding his hat across his waistcoat in a most genteel, humble, and conciliatory manner—thus. For a moment he seemed in doubt as to whether he and Langton were to shake hands or not, and, to tell you the truth, I thought it both rude and painful for Langton to thrust his hands so emphatically into his trousers' pockets and straddle over the hearth-rug as he did.

"Mr. Langton," said the stranger, in a very soft and winning voice, "I have come, as you know, on my wife's and my own business. You remember me? I am Antony Ryland."

"Be assured I remember you," answered Langton in a most impolite tone, and with a most scandalously unprofessional emphasis on the word *you*. Why, that much impolite emphasis on a pronoun in the second person would ruin a first-class medical practice, I tell you. We have strychnine and prussic acid in the pharmacopœia, but impolite emphasis is a thing unknown to the faculty," said Baird, drawing down his waistcoat slowly with his left hand, and solemnly raising his glass with the right, keeping his cigar between the fingers of his left hand the while, and looking into my face with a malicious deliberateness.

"For goodness sake, go on, Baird, and drop your hideous attempts at humour!"

"Impetuous youth," he apostrophized me, "of forty! do we not dilute all good things with something useless or stupid, to-wit: whisky with water, laudanum with aqua, life with sleeping—"

"Health with medicine, and hope with Baird," I cried. "But do go on."

He paused a moment, then spilled a few drops from his glass, held it out from him, and said in a tone of suppressed enthusiasm, "I pour and drink to Walter Melton's precocious smartness. Bless the antique boy!"

"Waiter: two more."

"And to his noble hospitality," cried the little man with a mischievous twinkle, as he emptied his glass.

"Well," resumed Baird with a sigh, as though the duty of narration pressed heavily upon him, Langton increased the base of the isosceles triangle his legs made with hearth-rug and said, "You have come for the purpose of meeting your wife, and trying to induce her to make over on your money which otherwise will go to that child. Is not that so?"

"I thought Langton's manner simply brutal."

"Sir," said Ryland, glancing from Langton to me, "we are not alone." He did not show the least sign of haste or temper, but smiled as gently as though I were his sweetheart, and he was asking me to withdraw in order that papa and he might talk over the business aspect of his successful love-suit.

"I rose to go, but Langton turned sharply upon me and said, 'Neither I nor my client have sought this interview, neither I nor my client desires secrecy. If it does not answer the purpose of this man that you should be present, he can go. I desire, Baird, that you remain.'

"By George, Melton, but I thought there would be blood. Langton's voice was full of threat and command; sit down I must and did."

"At that moment the door opened and a woman carrying a baby in her arms came in. Indeed, she was one of the plainest women I ever saw. She wore a hideous cold green plaid shawl and an old yellow straw bonnet trimmed with faded violet ribbons."

"Eh?"

"Cold green plaid shawl, old yellow straw bonnet with faded blue or violet ribbons. Why did you stop me?"

"Was her complexion bad and her nose sunken much below the forehead at the bridge?"

"Yes; at least, I think so. Give me a moment. It was."

"And she held the child to her bosom as though it were part of her own body that felt cold and needed all the heat of her arms and her bosom."

"All fond mothers hold their babies so. Do you know her?"

"Was the hair on her forehead irregular? Did it grow lower, much lower, at one side than at the other?"

"Yes, it did. Did you ever meet her?"

"She was in the carriage I came by to-day. Go on."

"When the woman saw Ryland she shuddered and drew the child closer to her. I was watching every movement and look most closely. Langton went to her, spoke to her, and taking her by the hand led her to a seat with as much gallantry and deference as though she were the finest woman and the first lady in London. Ryland stood in the middle of the room with one hand on the back of a chair and the other still holding his hat in front of his waistcoat. He bowed and smiled faintly as she crossed the room; beyond that he did not move. After the first look she never glanced toward him again during the whole interview."

After a few words by Langton in a low voice

to the woman, to which she made no reply, he sat down at his writing-table and spoke out.

"Mrs. Ryland, of the money you inherited from your great-uncle from Jamaica, four months after your marriage, you have already assigned away to this man half, or about £2,500, on the condition that he was to keep away from you forever. This money having been left to your use in such a manner that he could have no claim whatever on a penny of it, although he is your—husband—you, against my advice, made over to him the moiety of that fortune. He has been gambling again, and it is all gone—"

"Operating on the Stock Exchange," put in Ryland in a voice, as though more desirous to keep statements accurate than to shield or excuse himself.

"One-half of your fortune has been gambled away, and this—man now wishes to have the opportunity of dissipating—"

"Of operating with—" broke in Ryland.

"Of dissipating more of it. Your decision—a decision which has my full concurrence—is that you retain the money for yourself and your child, and that if he give any further trouble, you seek divorce on the ground of cruelty."

"But I shall get back all I have lost if I can command only another thousand. Only a thousand. There will be some left for her and the boy, and I shall win all back."

"Not with my approval one penny," said Langton, hotly.

"But I have a right—I am her husband."

"We won't discuss law with you. Mrs. Ryland declines to give you the money. The law is open to all. You can appeal to it if you please. That is your answer. You can leave now."

"But I, too, want to secure something for our son," said Ryland. His face was now deadly pale, and I saw his fingers tighten and whiten on the brim of his hat until the brim was crushed flat against the side. The pleasant smiles were all gone now, and a deadly sinister leer covered his handsome features. His blue eyes were glassy and cold, and his lips fell back from his white teeth like a coward's at bay.

"Out at once!" cried Langton, springing to his feet angrily, and I do believe he would have used violence had not Ryland hastily withdrawn, closing the door very softly after himself.

"There was a long silence. Langton remained standing by his table; the woman sat bending over her child and holding it against her with both her arms and both her thin hands, the fingers outspread, that the protecting and cherishing hand might touch the most of the loved surface."

"After a while Langton went across the room and stood over her, like a sentinel lion. Then he said, in a low, kind voice, that made me think more of him than ever I had thought before, 'Did the little fellow feel the cold?'

"I tried not to let him," she answered, looking up for a moment. "I am always afraid to leave him behind, my baby son. I am afraid he, looking fearfully at the door, might come and steal him away from me. My own! my own!"

"She bent and absolutely gloated over the little pale sleeper, until a queer kind of dead pain came into my heart."

"There is no fear of doing that," said Langton. "It is the child's money he wants, and not the boy himself."

"She rose to go. Langton conducted her to the door as though he were the first gentleman in England, she the finest woman in London, the first lady in the land. 'Good day,' said he. 'Good day,' said she, and she was gone."

"Langton came back and stood looking gloomily into the fire. 'What a scoundrel!' he cried; 'what an arrant scoundrel! what an unapproachable scoundrel!' He drove his heel into the coal, and repeated the words."

"Tell me about it," said I.

"Easily enough," he answered. "He was a clerk in a stock-broker's office two years ago, and she earned just enough to live on in some umbrella-manufacture. Her people had been comfortable once, but lost all they had at her father's death; and two years ago, as far as she knew, she was the only survivor of her family. She was then about nine and twenty years of age, and very plain-looking, so that I dare say she had no hope of ever marrying. She lodged in some place off Stamford street, Blackfriars Bridge, and her nearest friend was her landlady, to whom she paid three and sixpence a week for her attic. Two years ago this Ryland came to lodge in the same house. He was 'the gentleman' of the place, and rented two rooms on the first floor; dingy and dismal as the street was, the rooms were large, and, owing to the locality, cheap. From the very first he began paying attentions to this woman, and in the end he made downright love to her."

"You may fancy how this poor creature, no longer young, who had never been anything but ugly, felt flattered by the honourable approaches of 'the gentleman on the first floor.' Well, to cut it short, in a few months they were married; she in the full belief that he loved her for some subtle charm of mind which he told her he had discovered—he was too consummate a liar to say he loved her for her looks; and he in the full consciousness that she had been left, a year before, about £2,500 by a great-uncle who died after coming home from Jamaica, and of whom she had heard little or nothing all her life. The money had been devised to her father and his heirs absolutely, and had been advertised. Thus he got scent of it and hunted her down."