

# THAT WIFE OF MINE

## CHAPTER I.

"I declare to the tocsin!"

"Charlie!" exclaimed my little wife breathlessly, springing to her feet.

"Lissa," said I with equal vehemence, "it must be that the Emperor of all the Russias is dead, and I am summoned to write his obituary in 'The Regulator.'"

"I should think somebody was dead—such a peal as that!" and my wife thrust her sewing into her work-basket, and turned to the door as it opened.

"Why, what is the matter of it, Jo?" "What is it?" and Lissa, subsiding into her pretty broken language, as she always did when startled or nervous, addressing herself to a face that at that moment looked in.

"A baby," said Jo, in an awful voice.

"A what?" cried I, rising up in consternation, as my sister by degrees introduced her whole body, and stood with speculative face inside the door.

"Why, somebody has left one on the doorstep—a sweet and helpless infant," continued Jo, shaking the one pensive ringlet in the middle of her forehead.

"Oh, dear me?" said Lissa, turning to me, "is it not strange? I don't want it: do you, Charlie?"

"Of course not, my dear," was my answer.

"I've no special predilection for any thing that don't belong to me. What is it, Jo? Where was it left? and what have you done with it? Was that the reason of the violent ring that just now sounded through the house?"

"Yes, brother Charlie: Tiddy was busy setting the table for tea, and I was taking out the preserves, when we heard the bell. Tiddy went to the door. 'Vow to my rest!' cried Tiddy. 'Come here, Miss Jo. Ef that ain't an affliction of Providence!' Then I saw the baby. It was fast asleep, a pretty little thing."

"I'll send it to the poorhouse forthwith!" I exclaimed. "Somebody has been playing an infamous trick on me."

Lissa, my little wife, crept closer and closer. She now stood with her slight fingers upon my arm, looking into my eyes.

"Charlie," she whispered, "I have been thinking. Don't send it away. That's just how I was left," she added softly.

"What, at some man's door?"

"No, no, but alone—all alone—fatherless, motherless; who to take care of me but one poor lad? Oh! I feel a pity for the little one; for I was so young, so helpless, when my mother died."

And I pause here to let the reader know something of this little wife of mine.

Sweet Elsa had gone from me. I had mourned her for three long years.

At first, after I laid her head on its cold pillow, I felt that life was no longer endurable. The home so bright held still the charm of her presence; but it was nothing that I could clasp in my arms, and kiss; it was nothing that I could sit beside, and feel the glance of gentle eyes upon me, as I read during the long winter evenings: it only threw a chill over my very soul from its lack of love and life. Consequently I gave up my home. I went abroad as special correspondent of "The Regulator" and other papers. I travelled all over England and Wales on foot. I went to Germany, and was pursuing the same course there.

One day, in an odd little straggling town in the south of Germany, I met with an accident. My horse did not throw me in some picturesque spot with my head on a pile of rocks, for somebody to find after a romantic fashion; for I had no horse. Neither did chaise or diligence or coach break down. I simply jumped carelessly, and hurt my foot.

It was in one of the long gray twilights of that part of the world; and a pale moon had just come out white and clearly defined, throwing the rugged hills, the stony country, the uneven streets, into bright and homely outline. After trying to walk for a few seconds, I found that the jump had rendered my foot quite useless; and I had taken my seat by the roadside, and was proceeding to pull off my shoe, when a tall, handsome-looking student as I thought, came out of a low doorway, and over the loose stones, to me.