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A Woman's Adventure.

IT was Christmas Eve, and bitterly cold. The down train from London, due at Bristol at 5:50, had just come in crowded with passengers, and the arrival platform was a scene of indescribable confusion. Excited passengers rushed hither and thither seeking their own special property amid the piles of luggage that lay scattered around; and wearied and worried ladies sought vainly among the crowd for a disengaged porter to convey their bags and boxes safely to a cab. Active youths and stalwart men who could carry their own impediments were best off; and among those who did so was a tall, bronzed, brown-bearded man, who wore his coat-collar buttoned up closely round his throat, and his deer-stalker pressed down over his eyes. His travel-worn portmanteau was large and heavy, but he seemed to think nothing of its weight, and, swinging it in his hand, strode out of the station.

"Cab, sir?" cried an urchin, eager for a penny.

"No; an omnibus will do for me," returned the gentleman, passing on to where the Redland omnibus was drawn up, and cold though it was, he at once mounted to the box, and took his seat beside the driver.

All this time a lady was waiting patiently at the farther end of the platform. Seeing the bustle and confusion that reigned around she had managed, by dint of a little exertion, to drag her modest tin trunk out of the melee; but having done so she could do no more, and now stood beside it waiting until one of the porters should be able to attend to her. She was a plainly-dressed gentlewoman, with fine gray eyes and a pale, tired face. apparently about thirty years of age. She had been pretty once, but time and trouble had stolen away the bloom of youth; and though her features were good, she could scarcely be described as pretty now.—To-night she was cold and weary, and stood pensively waiting until some one should come to her assistance.

Presently a porter approached.

"Want a cab, Miss?" he asked civilly.

"Yes. Will you please to carry this box?"

The man picked it up and walked off, followed by the lady.

So great had been the demand for cabs that evening that by this time there was but one to be seen outside the station, and that one had just arrived with a fare. The horse was steaming and the driver looked surly.

"Where do you want to go?" he asked the lady gruffly.

"To Stoke Bishop," she replied.

"Where there?"

"I will tell you when we get there," returned Miss Lyon, not very well pleased with the man's manner.

The driver muttered something to himself, banged the tin trunk down on the roof of the cab and drove off in a huff.

"I wish there had been another cab," thought Laurette Lyon, uneasily, as she leaned back in her seat. "I don't like this driver at all. I wonder if he is drunk. I hope Mr. Mansfield will be at home when I reach Tivoli. I will ask him to pay him for me."

In the meantime the cab was progressing as rapidly through the crowded slippery streets as could reasonably be expected, and Laurette began to look about her. Eight years had passed since she had visited Bristol, under circumstances very different from the present. Then her father had been her companion; they had stayed at a fasionable hotel and money had been plentiful. Now she was an orphan; a lonely, hard-working governess, going to spend Christmas with an old school-friend who had been recently married. Laurette did not like Christmas. To her it was a time haunted with sad memories. Every year as Christmas Eve came round the picture of a certain Christmas Eve long ago rose up before her eyes. She could see it all. The pretty drawing-room, lighted only by the flickering fire, in the roomy old house at Blackheath; and Herbert Linday's earnest face as he asked her to be his wife. How happy they were that evening and how eager Herbert had been to ask Dr. Lyon's consent, never dreaming of refusal. They had sat side by side hopefully planning for the future and listening between whiles for her father's step. And when they heard him enter the house and cross the hall to his study Herbert had risen up at once, anxious to get the interview over and return to her.

"Give me one kiss before I go, Laurette," he had said.

But she had laughingly refused.

"I will owe it you," she had said, kissing her hand to him as he had turned to look at her at the door.

She had never seen him since.

The interview proved to be a long, and alas! a stormy one. Dr. Lyon refused Herbert's offer in harsh, almost insulting terms; and the young man, deeply wounded and mortified, had hastily left the house, and shortly afterwards quitted the country for Australia. Before sailing he had written once to Laurette.

"As your father sets such a high value on money, and requires so much," he wrote, "I have resigned my situation, and am going out to Australia to make my fortune. It will be a long process, I fear; but a strong will and a stout heart can do much, and I shall not want for these if I am assured of your faith, Laurette. Will you be true to me, as I shall ever be to you, even though years may pass before you hear from me again, for I shall not write unless I have good news to send. Think well before you answer, and do not promise unless you can do so freely and with your whole heart. It is no light thing that I ask, and it may, and probably will, involve years of weary waiting. If you have any doubt of your own feelings, of your own strength, I beseech you tell me now. Remember, your promise once given, I shall believe in it implicitly, and on the strength of it build all my future happiness."

To this Laurette had answered simply "I love you dearly, and as long as I live I will be true to you."

Two years later, on Christmas Eve, Dr. Lyon died suddenly. His daughter, in common with most persons who knew him, had imagined him to be a wealthy man; but after his death it was discovered that he had lived far beyond his means, and when all claims were satisfied a paltry £20 a year was all that remained for Laurette.

It is a hard thing for any girl brought up in ease and idleness to be suddenly turned out of a luxurious home and compelled to earn her own living as best she may. Fortunately Miss Lyon was a girl of sense and resolution, and she had at once bravely faced the position; and though her heart ached for her father's loss and she keenly felt the change of circumstances, she had nevertheless calmly accepted the inevitable and had taken, without ado, the first situation that offered. Eight years ago to-night Dr. Lyon died, and for eight years Laurette had been working hard as a daily or resident governess. Ten years had rolled away since she and Herbert parted, and all that time no news of him had reached her. How she had thought and dreamed of him and longed with heart-longing for a letter. But no letter had ever come; and year by year hope slowly waned in her breast, and now it was well nigh dead. "I shall never see him again," she thought. "He is dead, I know, or he must have had some good news to send me all these long years." She kept her faith to him inviolate. It is an easy thing to be true to an absent lover if no lover at your side tempts you to break your word. But Laurette's faith had been tried by temptation, and her quiet "no" had been so decided that no aspirant for her hand had ever ventured to repeat his offer.

This visit to Bristol had quickened many old recollections, and her thoughts this Christmas Eve were sadder even than usual. Wrapped in her own reflection s she did not notice how far she had proceeded on her way to Stoke Bishop, or how slowly the cab was progressing.

As before stated, it was a bitterly cold night. Rain had fallen in the afternoon, and before the ground had had time to dry the wind changed and it had begun to freeze and was freezing still, and all the country roads were like glass. In the beaten Bristol thoroughfares and along White Ladies' road progress was fairly easy; but having climbed the step bit of hill at Redland and gained the level of the down that stretched between that and the pretty village of Stoke it became difficult for the horse to stand, and when about half way across the down, to Laurette's great surprise, the cabman suddenly pulled up, and, getting down, opened the cab-door.

"You must get out," he said, roughly.

"Get out?" repeated Miss Lyon, in astonishment. "Why this is not Stoke Bishop! We are not more than half way across the down!"

"I know where I am well enough, but I can't take you a step further. My 'orse can't keep 'is feet, and I'm not a-going to 'ave 'is knees broke, and 'is neck, too, p'r'aps, for anybody."

"Do you mean to say that you intend to leave me with my baggage here, in the middle of the down?" asked Laurette, quietly. "And at this time of the evening, too?"

"Where is it you want to go to?"

"To Tivoli—Mr. Mansfield's."

"Right away down at the bottom of Stoke Hill? No, Miss, I ain't a-going to take you there, not if you were to give me a five-pound note; but I'll tell you what I'll do," with an air of making a great concession—"I'll drive you over to one of them villas," pointing with his whips to lights twinkling in the distance, "and you can leave your box at one of 'em and walk on."

"But I do not know any one living there!" exclaimed Laurette, aghast at the man's impudence; "and I could not think of taking such a liberty."

"Well, please yourself; only you must get out of my cab," was the rough answer.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," said Miss Lyon, decisively. "You will drive me back to Redland; there I may be able to get another cab—or at any rate a man to carry my box."

"And supposing I don't, Miss, what then?" with an ugly leer.

"Then you won't be paid," was the prompt answer. And Laurette looked the rude driver steadily in the face, although in her heart she was getting afraid of him, and very heartily wished herself safe in her friend's house.

The man grumbled a good deal, but finally climbed back to his seat and turned his horse's head toward Redland. He had not gone very far, however, before he again pulled up, and Miss Lyon heard him accost some one on the road. A man's voice answered, and Laurette, hastily letting down the window, heard the driver rejoin:

"There's a young woman inside as wants a hescort down to Stoke. P'r'aps you'll oblige 'er?"

The insolence of the man's tone was more than Laurette could brook. She sprang out of the cab and addressed herself to a tall man, with his coat-collar turned up and his hat pressed down over his eyes, who stood on the path.

"I want some one to carry my box to Mr. Mansfield's at Stoke," she said, in a clear tone. "If you can do so I shall be glad to pay you what you think proper. This cabman can't or won't drive me there."

Her veil was thrown back and the light of a neighboring lamp showed to the stranger a pale, finely-cut face and a pair of flashing gray eyes. She was too flurried and angry to notice his appearance.

Without a word he turned to the driver. "Give me the trunk," he said, in a deep, gruff voice.

"Trunk, indeed," returned the other with a sneer; "'tis but a light bit of a box."

"I have a heavy hand," returned the stranger in the same deep voice. "Do you want to feel the weight of it?"

The man looked up, startled.

"I want my fare," he said, in a more civil tone.

Laurette paid him and then, with her new companion, turned her face towards Stoke.

They walked on in silence. The lady was greatly relieved to escape from the insolent cabman, and felt grateful to the stranger for his opportune arrival and readiness to oblige her; and, taking him to be a respectable artisan, or something of that kind, began presently to talk to him. He, however, did not appear to be disposed to converse, and replied so briefly to her remarks that the conversation soon ceased altogether; and when he did speak his voice was so gruff and deep that it sounded unnatural, and the idea occurred to Laurette that it must be assumed.

The idea was not a pleasant one. What could be the meaning of it? She noticed, also, that he kept looking at her continually. She never lifted her eyes without encountering his gleaming at her from under the shadow of his hat. Brave though she was, she grew nervous and uncomfortable. She knew absolutely nothing of this man, and his manner was suspicious. Had she only been freed from an impudent driver to fall into the hands of a thief or a murderer?

It was between seven and eight o'clock, and very dark. At that hour, on such a bitter night, the road they were pursuing was practically as though there were not a house within a mile of it.

What was there to hinder this fellow from knocking her down with one blow of his strong arm, robbing her at his leisure and then walking off with her box and other property and leaving her there to perish in the cold? If it came to blows she would struggle hard, she was resolved ere she would submit to be robbed of her valuables. But what if he were to slip behind her and in some sudden, treacherous manner deprive her of all power of resistance? She shivered at the thought, and stepped out into the centre of the road; and when her companion followed her example, and placed himself again at her side, she almost screamed aloud with terror.

He saw her start.

"Is there anything the matter?" he asked, and his manner was so kind that Laurette began to be ashamed of her fears.

Ten minutes more brought them to the foot of the hill, and examining the names on the gate-posts by the aid of a few flaming fuses, they quickly found themselves, to Laurette's great relief, in the well-lit hall of the house they sought.

The man put down the box, and the neat housemaid went to inform her mistress of Miss Lyon's arrival.

"I am much obliged to you," said Laurette, drawing out her purse. "How much do I owe you?" And looking at her companion she noticed, for the first time, and with dismay, that he looked much more like a gentleman than an artisan.

"You owe me a kiss, madam," he answered in a different and natural tone.

"Sir!" she ejaculated, in utter surprise, though now his voice sounded strangely familiar.

"Have you forgotten the kiss you promised me ten years ago to-night, Laurette?" and he tossed aside his hat and stepped toward her.

"Herbert! Oh, Herbert!"

And Mrs. Mansfield, coming into the hall a moment later, stood still in mute astonishment to behold Laurette—grave, fastidious Laurette—clasped close in the arms of a tall, fine-looking man.

"Well!" she exclaimed, at length.

At the sound of her voice Laurette released herself, and turned an April face, all tears and smiles, toward her friend.

"You have heard me speak of Herbert Lindsay? He has come home at last—at last!" and she leaned her head on his arm and sobbed outright.

Two hours later Herbert and Laurette sat together in Mrs. Mansfield's cosy little drawing-room. Miss Lyon, looking so young and pretty in her new-found happiness that in Herbert's eyes she seemed the very Laurette of ten years ago, as she sat in a low chair by the fire, with a screen in her hand and her face turned toward her lover.

"And so you were unfortunate the first five years?" she said.

"Yes, so unfortunate and poor that sometimes I hardly knew how or when I should get my next meal. When things were steadily improving with me for rather more than a year, I wrote to you, but received no answer. I waited a few months, and then wrote again with the same result. Then I waited six months, and wrote for the third time, and after awhile my own letter was returned to me with the single word 'Gone' on it. You may imagine how disappointed I was. I made inquiries respecting you of all those likely to be acquainted with your movements, but all that I could learn was that your father was dead and that you had left the neighborhood. So I thought the best thing I could do was to work harder than ever, and return to England at the earliest possible moment and search for you myself; and thank Heaven! I have found you."

"And how strangely it came about," said Laurette, smiling. "Do you know I thought you were going to murder me at one time?" and to his amusement, she told him of the fears that had possessed her.

"I am so glad now that I came to Bristol," returned Herbert. "I was knocking about in London, putting all kinds of machinery in motion with the object of finding you—which, by the way, I must stop now, when I came across an Australian friend, who with his wife returned to England two years ago. He told me he had bought a house at Stoke Bishop and invited me to spend Christmas with them. A lonely old bachelor, staying at a hotel, I was only too glad to accept his invitation. Arrived at Redland, I found there was no cab to be had on account of the slippery state of the roads, and so left my portmanteau at the 'Black Boy,' intending to ask my friend to send his gardner for it. And glad I am that I did so, or I should never have met with this happy Christmas Adventure."

On Christmas morning Herbert Lindsay found out his friend's house, and explained the cause of his non-appearance on the previous evening.

A month later there was a quiet wedding at Stoke Church, and after a few happy weeks on the Continent, Mr. and Mrs. Lindsay sailed for Australia. In due course Herbert showed to his dear wife with infinite pleasure the comfortable, even luxurious home that he had worked so long and so hard to prepare for her.

Good Advice to Married People.

A worthy wife of forty years standing and whose life was not made of sunshine and peace, gave the following and impressive advice to a married pair of her acquaintance. The advice is so good and well suited to all married people as well as those entering that state, that we here publish it for the benefit of such persons:

"Preserve sacredly the privacies of your own house, your married state and your heart! Let no father, mother, sister or brother ever presume to come between you, or share the joys or sorrows, that belong to you two alone. With mutual help build your quiet work, not allowing your dearest friend to be the confidant of aught that becomes your domestic peace. Let moments of alienation, if they occur, be healed at once.—Never, no never, speak of it outside, but to each other confess, and all will come out right. Never let the morrow's sun still find you at variance. Renew and renew your vow; it will do you good, and thereby your minds will grow together, contented in that love which is stronger that death, and you will become truly one.

☞ Bad temper is a crime and like other crimes, is ordained in the course of nature to meet, sooner or later, its merited reward. Other vile passions may have some points of extenuation; the pleasures, for example, which may attend their indulgence, but ill-nature—that is, a fretful fault finding spirit, in its origin, action, and end, has no extenuating qualities.