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The Doctor's Midnight Adventure.

I AM a doctor, a busy, professional man, whose time is money; whenever, therefore, I can save it, I do. Many and many a night have I passed in the train, counting the hours thus gained as a miner does his gold. Upon this point, unfortunately, my little wife and I do not agree; but it is, I think, the only point upon which we do not. Eight hours in a comfortable railroad compartment, wrapped up in your plaid like a snake in its blanket, instead of your comfortable sheet, stretched over a comfortable spring mattress—no, she can not be made to see the propriety of the exchange, nor will she believe that I sleep quite as well, if not disturbed, in the plaid as in the sheets.

The train was just off as I sprang in, and the shock of the start landed me on my seat. Being of a slow, placid nature, I was in no hurry to recover from the shock, and we were fairly off, speeding away as only an English express can speed, before I looked around. I had not the carriage to myself, as I had at first supposed; a lady occupied the further end, and at the first glance, spoke of dim light and the fact of her veil being down, I saw her eyes, unnaturally large and intense in their expression, were fixed upon me. I at all times prefer a carriage to myself, and if a companion I must have, let it be a gentleman, not a lady; but there was no help for it. The lady was there, and, moreover, she was looking at me. "So she may," said I to myself; "that shall not prevent me from making myself as comfortable as circumstances will allow." Slowly and deliberately, therefore, I removed my hat, substituting for it a cloth cap, which I drew well down over my ears; then I folded my arms and composed myself to sleep. But in vain. The eyes of my fellow passenger haunted me. I saw them as distinctly as if my own were open. Was she watching me still? Involuntarily I looked up and around, and my look met hers, full, burning, intense, with far more of meaning in it than I could at all fathom. It was getting decidedly unpleasant, and I was decidedly uncomfortable. Try as I might, I could not keep my eyes closed. Hers were on me, and meet them I must.

In her attitude, too, as well as in her look, there was something strange and mysterious. Huddled up in the corner, she seemed to be holding something close pressed to her beneath the long loose mourning cape, bending low over it in a crouching posture. Once or twice, her eyes closely fixed upon mine, I saw her shiver; but for that slight convulsive movement, she sat perfectly still.

Was she cold? I offered her my plaid, glad of an opportunity to break the opinous silence. If she would but speak, make some commonplace remark, the spell might be broken.

"I am not cold."

A commonplace remark enough; but the spell was not broken. The mystery that lay in her eyes lay also in her voice.

What should I try next? I looked at my watch—11.30; our train speeding on at a furious rate, no chance of a stoppage for some time to come, and the full open-wide gaze of my motionless companion not for one moment removed from my face. It was unpleasant, certainly. If I changed my position, faced the window instead of her, she must remove her eyes from my face at least. But there was a sort of fascination about her and her look, which I preferred

meeting to shirking, knowing it was on me all the time.

There was nothing for it, then, but to give up all hope of sleep, and make the best of my position and companion, whom I now observed more closely. That she was a lady there could be little doubt; there was that in her dress and appearance that was unmistakable. That she was pretty, there could be no doubt, either; those dark, intensely dark eyes, the thick coils of warm burnished hair, the small, pale features, seen dimly beneath the veil; yes, she was young, pretty, a lady and in trouble. So far I got, but no further. How came she to be traveling alone at that time of night, and with that look on her face? What could it be that she was holding pressed so closely to her, and yet so carefully kept out of sight? From the size and uncertain outline, I should have guessed it to be a child; but then, there was not the faintest motion, nor could she have held a sleeping infant long in that position. I think that something of curiosity must have been betrayed in my look, for her own darkened and deepened into a perfect agony of fear and doubt.

Ashamed, I withdrew my gaze at once, and, drawing out my note-book, was about to make a memorandum, when, with a sudden forward movement, she fell at my feet, arresting my hand by the agonizing grasp of her own, its burning contact sending through me a painful thrill.

"Don't betray me! Don't give me up to him! Oh don't! I am so frightened!"

It was but a whisper, breathed out rather than spoken, yet it shuddered through me like a cry.

"I can not always hide it. I can not always bear it about with me; it breaks my heart, and—I am so tired."

And letting the hand which still held, pressed closely to her, the mysterious burden that had raised my curiosity drop heavily to her side, there lay at her feet and mine a little dead baby, a tiny creature evidently not many weeks old.

Then the woman threw up her veil, and, withdrawing her eyes for the first time from mine, clasped her hands before her, her figure thrown slightly back, and looked down upon it. A pretty picture; the poor young mother, with her pale child's face and deep mourning dress; the wee baby, gleaming so white in its death and baby-robe against the heavy crape skirt on which it lay—a pretty picture certainly for a railroad carriage and lightened by its dim midnight lamp.

"Dead!" was my voluntary exclamation.

She stretched her raised hands downward toward it with a despairing gesture, speaking with low, wild, rapid utterance.

"It was not his look that killed it, but my love. He hated it, my baby, my first-born; for all the love I gave him, he hated it, and that his look might not kill it, I held it in my arms, so close, so close, till it was dead. Oh, my baby, my baby!"

The outstretched hands had reached it now, and raised it from the floor to the seat, folding it around until the enclosing arms and the down-bent face hid it once more out of sight.

Was ever luckless traveller more awkwardly placed? the dead child; the prostrate woman; the hour, midnight. I am of a blunt nature. Mrs. Merton often scolds me for my blunt, straightforward speeches; but then she has such a pretty way of beating about the bush, which it would be absurd for me to imitate as it was for the ass to mimic the tricks of his master's lap-dog. I must go straight to the point as soon as I see it. I did so now.

"How came you to be travelling alone, and with a dead child? Are you going home?"

The question seemed to arouse her once more to the perfect frenzy of fear. She turned to me as before, clinging to my hand with small, hot fingers and heart-broken cry:

"Don't betray me, don't give me up to him! His look would have killed my baby; it would kill me if I had to meet it. She is safe, for I killed my baby; and he hates me and I have no home—no home."

I was in a perfect maze of doubt.—

Could the pretty, soft young creature at my feet be indeed a murderess? and could it be her husband of whom she seemed in such atjeet terror? My blood boiled; I felt ready to defend her against a dozen husbands; but how?

It was midnight now; we could not be far from London; the guard might be popping his head in at any moment. I jumped to a sudden conclusion.

"Were you going to any friend in London?"

"I know nobody in London."

"The poor little thing is either mad or husband is a brute," was my mental exclamation.

"Then you must come home with me to my wife; she will see after you."

An upward glance of wild, agonized supplication:

"She won't betray me, or—take baby from me?" And once more the wee dead thing was lifted up into the arms that seemed almost too frail to hold it, and hidden away beneath the long mourning cape.

I took her home. Mary received her with a broad look of amaze that made me smile, but that found no expression in words. When, taking her aside, I told her all I knew, she wrung her hands in sheer sympathizing pity.

"Murdered her own baby—her first-born! Oh, how sad, how dreadful!"—And involuntarily she glanced toward the door that hid from us our little ones, safely cradled and asleep. Then she went back to our strange guest, who sat huddled up in my big easy chair, the dead baby still at her bosom.

"I must get her to bed," said Mary, with a quick, determined nod; and she really did contrive to do so by soft, tender, cooling words, and solemn assurance of safety to herself and baby, whom she kissed and cried over, and considered as she might some living object of solicitude, much to the little mother's comfort.

"And you won't betray me; and he won't come and take her from me, or hurt us with his angry look? Oh, dear, how nice it is to lie down! I am so tired, and baby is cold; but I think I can sleep now a little and—forget."

She was half-asleep already; the heavy lids had dropped together, the small, pale face had dropped downward upon the little downy head that lay against her bosom.

"Her husband must be sent for," I said resolutely, when we found ourselves once more alone; and I glanced at an envelope I had taken from the stranger's pocket:

"MRS. TREMAYNE,
 Grantley Lodge,
 Grantley."

Mary stared at me aghast.

"Her husband, who hates her, and would have killed her baby! Oh, John, you would not be so cruel! She seems so frightened of him, poor little thing! You may be sure he is some horrid, wicked tyrant. And if she really killed her baby—oh, dear, how sad it is!—Whatever will become of her!"

"But, my dear child, if she has a husband or friends we must restore her to them. Why, she is little more than a child! It's very strange, very, and sad; but the mystery must be cleared, and the baby buried."

Mary still pronounced me cruel and unfeeling beyond anything she could have conceived.

"Of course, her husband is a madman, who will murder her as soon as he gets her into his hands. You know, John, that husbands are always murdering their wives."

"Middle-aged wives, dear, or elderly, whose lives are heavily insured. I shall telegraph at once."

"Then her death will be at your door, sir—mind that!" and too indignant to waste upon me more words, away went Mary to take a last peep at our own sleeping babes, at the dead baby about which there was so much mystery, and the poor young mother whom she had doomed to a violent death.

She was still bending over her, and had called me up to the bedside to notice the extraordinary length of the lashes, and the beauty of the face in repose, when we were startled by a knock at the front door.

"It's the husband; I know it is. Oh, John, don't betray her; don't give her up; you wouldn't be so cruel."

"Nonsense, child; watch by her till I

return. If she awakes, say nothing about—"

"Her husband. As if I should!"

Our household having long since retired, long, indeed, before my return, I myself opened the door.

The street lamp dimly lighted two figures; one tall, stout and muffled.

"Mr. Merton?"

I answered in the affirmative.

"You have kindly given sleigher to a lady?"

"Just so."

The speaker nodded to his companion, who touched his hat and vanished.

The other stranger now entered the hall and grasped my hand.

"Mr. Tremayne?" I asked hesitatingly.

"Captain Tremayne. How is she?"

"Asleep, under my wife's care—sleeping as peacefully as a child."

"Thank God! So young—at such an hour—in such a state—"

I saw a long shudder run through the tall, powerful frame.

"And the child?" he added, after a pause, in a horror-stricken whisper—

"She had it with her?"

I hardly knew what to answer; but he had thrown off his heavy ulster and traveling cap, and now stood before me as handsome and pleasant and honest-looking a young fellow as I ever saw, and my heart warmed to him. He was no assassin, or ruffian, or cowardly bully, whatever Mary might say. The shadow of a great horror that lay in the blue, mellow eyes had been laid there by terror, not crime.

"The child is dead," I said softly.

"It died two days ago—died suddenly in convulsions in her arms, and the shock turned her brain. She was doing well, poor little thing; but afterward she grew delirious, and in her ravings she accused herself and me. I could do nothing; she would not have me near her, but bent me off with her hands, as she couldn't bear the sight of me."—Here the man broke down. He walked to the window, then turned and asked, abruptly, "May I go to her?"

I thought of Mary, and hesitated.

"She is sleeping so peacefully just now; and if she was awake suddenly and saw you—"

"She shall not see me," he broke in eagerly. "I will be so quiet. But I must see her. I nursed her through a long illness a year ago, and she would have no one near her but me; and now—"

Under the heavy military mustache I saw his lips quiver; he paused, then added: "I must go to her!" not in command, but yearning appeal, both in voice and eyes.

"Will you wait here a minute? I will see whether she still sleeps."

She still slept, the heavy, peaceful sleep of a tired child, Mary keeping a stern watch and guard over her. I beckoned her out of the room.

"Well!" with fretful, impatient eagerness. "You have seen him? What is he like? Is he horrid?"

"Judge for yourself; he is in the dining-room. He says he must see her—he must come in."

"That he shan't; the cruel wretch; or it shall be over my prostrate body!" tragically.

"Well, go and tell him so."

"I will!" And away, nothing daunted, went Mary.

I smiled. "She will no more resist the pleading of those blue, handsome eyes than could her husband. He will win her over by a look." I was right; she soon returned, and not alone.

"He will be very quiet and she need not see him. I thought it would be better," all this apologetically.

He crossed the room as noiselessly as a woman, stooped over the bed in silence, then sat down beside it. Mary shaded the lamp so that the room was in twilight, and so we all three sat down to wait.

For more than an hour we waited, then Mary stole out. Captain Tremayne looked up as the door opened and closed: then, with a quick sight, laid his brown curly head down upon the pillow as close as possible to that of the poor young wife without touching it, and moved his hand up toward hers where it lay on the coverlet, but without touching that either, for fear of awakening or disturbing her.

It was not until the first gray streaks

of daylight were struggling in through the window, beside which I sat, that there was a slight stir; she had awakened at last.

"Hugh!" she breathed, dreamily at first, then urgently, "Hugh!"

"Yes dear."

She turned her face toward his where it lay beside her. She was only partially awake, as yet, her eyes were still closed; but the hand on the coverlet crept up softly toward him, fluttered over his face, rested one moment caressingly on the brown curls, then, with a long contented sigh, her arm stole round his neck.

"Husband, kiss me!"

"His presence has saved her," was my mental comment. "There is nothing now to fear;" and, unnoticed, I left the room.

Chilled and cramped with the long sitting after the night's journey, I was not sorry to find the sitting-room bright with lamp and fire-light, the kettle singing on the hob, breakfast as comfortably laid out for two as if the hour had been nine instead of six, and Mrs. Merton as neat and fresh and trim as if that midnight tragedy had been all a dream. Let cavilists sneer as they may, there is nothing for a man like a wife, if she is a good one. I myself may have had doubts on the subject—wives are but women after all, and, therefore, be trying at times, even the best of them. But certainly had no doubts whatever, as I stretched out my feet to the blaze and resigned myself cheerfully to being petted and waited on.

"Well?" questioned Mrs. Merton, when my creature comforts had all been duly attended to, and not before. I told her how matters stood; she was delighted.

"And so they are fond of each other, after all; and his being unkind to her and her poor little baby was only a delusion. How dreadful! How delightful, I mean! Poor fellow—so young and handsome and nice! I felt so sorry for him."

"He must have traveled down in the same train as she did."

"Oh, no; he told me all about it. He had been summoned up to town on business, and left home yesterday morning. In the evening the nurse left her, as she thought, asleep, to fetch something from the kitchen."

"Have a gossip there, you mean?"

"John," solemnly, "you don't like nurses, you know you don't."

"My dear, I am a married man, and moreover an M. D. A well-balanced mind must hate somebody or some class of bodies; and, as a rule, medical men hate nurses."

"Nonsense, John! Well, Mrs. Tremayne got away while the nurse was down stairs, and, being traced to the station, where she had taken a ticket to London, Captain Tremayne was telegraphed to, and was stopped as he got into the train on his way home. Some one must have seen you leave the station."

"As he came to look for her here, somebody must have brought him; two came to the door."

"It will be all right now that he has found her; she will get quite well, and he will only have to comfort her for the loss of her poor little baby."

I wipe my pen, blot the MSS., and rise. My story is done, and as it is the first, so will it probably be the last I shall write.

Mrs. Merton looks up from the gloves she is mending. "The story done! Why all you have written is only the beginning of the end! You could not surely have heart to break off in that unsatisfactory manner. Not a word about Captain Tremayne's gratitude, or the hamper they sent up at Christmas, or the birth of their little son last year, and the pretty way in which she coaxed you to be grandfather, though her uncle, the Duke, was only waiting to be asked; or how she insisted upon our bringing baby and Johnny and Freddy, and how baby—"

But I seized my hat and gloves. Mary is, as I have said, the best of wives, if just a little trying at times, and her baby the most wonderful of all created babies—but I have an appointment at twelve.

If a man can be happy and contented in his own company, he will generally be company for others.