

THE EVENING NEWS.

Tuesday, May 5, 1897.

[From Chambers Journal.]
MY LODGER'S WIFE.

[CONTINUED.]

A few nights after this I was surprised, on answering a knock at the door, to find some one inquiring for Mr. Lewis, for he had never had a visitor before. The stranger gave the name of Brown, and was at once invited up stairs. After a visit of about half a hour he left, and then my lodger who had seemed, I fancied, to avoid me of late, came into my little kitchen, and began, in the chatty manner which made him so pleasant, to talk about the gentleman who had just left. He said he was connected with one of the chief hotels, and had called to speak about an appointment. Now, I had lived in Weymouth, maid, wife, and widow, for thirty-two years, and knew by sight every gentleman connected with every hotel there, and this was none of them. And if my judgment was worth anything, his man was a waiter from Portland, and what was more, was the very waiter I had seen Mr. Lewis speaking with on the island. I was quite sure of this, and knew, therefore, that for some purpose my lodger was deceiving me, but I reflected that every family has its secrets, so supposed he had his reasons for trying to mislead me.

Just now a complete change took place in my lodger's habits, for whereas he had previously been the most retiring of creatures, keeping himself so totally within doors that scarcely a soul in the street knew him, he now seemed to be never tired of hanging about the front door. He cleaned my windows twice as often as I had ever cleaned them; he painted my shutters, he painted my flower boxes, and was frequently trimming the flowers in them; while he actually went two or three times to the White Lion, the public house at the corner of our street, and drank his ale at the bar, instead of allowing the policeman to bring it for him, as he had hitherto been the case. I took the liberty of saying,—"Mr. Brown, I hope this last would not grow into a habit which might lead to harm, when, to my surprise, he burst out crying, and cried so bitterly, that I thought he would go into hysterics. I tried to soothe him, and took his hand in mine—he had a soft delicate hand too; but he rose, and mastering himself by a great effort, went up to his room. In the morning, he apologized for disturbing me by his absurd ways; he had had bad news from home, he said. Of course, I told him not to take any notice of such a trifle; but in my own mind I wondered where he got the letters which had so upset him, as I was quite certain the policeman had never seen my house all day. All this time, I had heard no more of the situation he expected; but soon after, the same stranger called again—Mr. Brown, I must go down in a very short time, and left without a word as before. As I had admitted him, I had a fair chance of confirming my opinion; he was a waiter, I was sure. He was a tall, big bearded, big whiskered man, whose face when he spoke to you, was as bright as the sun, and as his words were so kind, and his manner so pleasant, as all the Portland waiters are, and with a certain quick, watchful look of the eye, which they all acquire very soon.

The next morning I brought a heavy fall of rain, with gusts of wind from the sea; and on taking up Mr. Lewis's breakfast, I noticed that he looked excited, if not sad, and I feared he had taken cold. I told him so, but he said: "No. The fact is, Mrs. Gerran, I must now tell you a little secret: I am married, and I expect my wife from town to-day."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed, for I had never dreamed of such a thing.

"Yes," he went on, "she is coming this evening, and I am a little worried to think what an unpleasant ride she will have."

"She certainly will, poor thing," I said; "but I will do my best to make her comfortable, Mr. Lewis."

"I know you will," he replied. "I thank you heartily, Mrs. Gerran. We rely on you very much."

I left him his breakfast, and went down stairs, considerably astonished by what I had heard. The weather grew worse during the day, and by night it was little short of a tempest. I often thought of the poor young woman who was coming all the way from London on such a night; and what made it worse was, that I could not offer to go and meet her, for, strange to say, Mr. Lewis did not know by what train she would come, or whether she would travel by the Great Western or the South-Western line. It blew harder and harder; the furious blast of wind swept through our little street, and drove the rain before it, so almost to blind you, if you tried to face it. There was not a gaslight which was not blown out, and I need not say the sky was pitch dark. On such nights, I always sit and think of my poor husband, and of the many others who are thus left in the dreariest way, and I can hear nothing, attend to nothing, but the howling of the storm. So it was no wonder that the policeman knocked at my door three times when he brought Mr. Lewis's beer, before I heard him; and when I opened the door, it was almost blown out of my hand by the force of the wind.

"It is a terrible night, Robert," I said, for he was a very civil young man, and had been at the White Lion for years.

"It is, indeed, ma'am," he said; "there's a reason tonight that's a flying over the Chert Bank like yest."

They've been firing artillery on the island; but, except now and then in a lull, you couldn't hear the guns."

"Firing!" I said, "firing! What is that for, Robert?"

"To be continued."

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