

[From the Lakeside Monthly.]
SUBSTITUTION.

[CONTINUED.]

The stranger was a strong-featured woman, with a large, portly frame, though her face was almost painfully thin. She had a worn, anxious look, and glanced uneasily at the young lady who was seated with Charlotte.

"Could I speak to you a few minutes alone?" said she to the latter who was about to withdraw, when her friend rose and left the room.

"I hardly know how to begin what I have to say," faltered the woman. "It goes back a long way, and I don't know whether I ought to tell it now, but it's been weighing on me a great while, and I don't dare to keep it to myself any longer."

"If it's anybody else's secret," said Charlotte, gently, "you had better consider before you make it known. Perhaps it is something that ought not to be told."

"It must be told," said the other, gathering up her courage, "and you are the person that must know it, for it concerns you as well as others."

Charlotte, who had been creeping over her from head to foot. She trembled violently, and was unable to utter a syllable, for she felt that the blow she had just received was about to fall. This person was here to reveal some claimant to her boy.

Seeing that there was no answer, the stranger went on, slowly and with effort.

"I have always followed the business of a motherly nurse," Charlotte started, in spite of herself, "and that was the way I came to be employed by Mrs. St. Clair Rainsford, twenty-one years ago last month."

She looked at her auditor, whose hands were clenched, and her cheeks pale as death, but whose white lips uttered no sound.

On the eighth day of the month, my sister, with whom I was living at that time, had a baby born to her; and on the fourth, Mrs. Rainsford's baby was born."

"I saw from the first that my sister's child wouldn't live. It never had the right circulation, and the little feet and hands were always cold, and I knew it would break Mary's heart to lose it."

"I was very fond of Mary. She was a great deal younger than I, and this was her first child. She was a gay creature, too young to have been married when she was, but I couldn't help that. And she had been looking forward with such delight to having this child to love! I couldn't bear to think of the disappointment it would be to her to lose it. I knew that Mrs. Rainsford was a heartless woman of fashion, who would not care much for a child if she had it, and who would give a thousand things to console her for the loss. And poor Mary had so little!

"So when I was called to her, I determined that if her child was strong and healthy, it should be the child of my sister, who was wandering in her mind and would not know the difference if it was done soon enough. I settled with my brother-in-law that when I sent him word about the child, he should bring it, wrapped up, and laid in a basket with some light thing over it, as if it had been clean clothes for me. He was a simple young fellow, and very much under the influence of Mrs. Rainsford, a sort of mother to him. I told him I wanted to put the babies side by side and compare their looks, but that I didn't want to know which was the child of my sister, and who had been given to the kitchen to know anything about it, and I had him under such management that he did not breathe a word to them."

"Little St. Clair Rainsford was born in the morning, and when the exchange was made, in my own bedroom, which opened out of Mrs. Rainsford's. I had kept her room so dark that she should not see the child, and had allowed no one to go in there that day except Mr. Rainsford, and the children looked enough alike for the difference not to be noticed until one had been looking over her shoulder. When the mother had the baby brought to her the next day, she noticed how cold it was; but she was very fond of it, and I made that an excuse for keeping her from talking about it much with it. I didn't show it to the doctor on the third day, and then he said he was afraid it couldn't live, just as I had known all along."

"I had to take the woman who took care of Mary into my confidence, but she was an old friend of mine, and thought I was doing quite a fine thing. She died years ago, without, so far as I know, having told the secret to any living creature."

"I felt rather sorry for Mrs. Rainsford when I saw how she took on at the poor thing's death, but then I thought how much she was always to me; and after all, it wasn't three months before Madam was flourishing round again, as gay as ever."

"Now comes the worst part of my story. When the baby was about three months old, my sister, my dear sister, that I thought so much of and had made such a secret of, came away from her husband with another man, and took the child with her."

"I never thought, and I don't think now, that she was in her right mind when she did it. She was always a little queer after the birth of her baby, and I don't hold her responsible."

"We knew each other, though, and she had gone with, for the neighbors and they went straight on board a ship that was sailing for England, and were out of the harbor before her husband came home that night."

"He never would write after her or do anything about it. Let her go, he said. She could never be a wife to me after that. She was never my sister, or my name was Richard Ellis."

"Then I told him how I had changed the children, and at first he was very angry, and threatened to expose me, but I persuaded him over after a while, and told him I had done it all for love of him and Mary, and he quieted down. But he never was the same man again. He neglected his business and took to drinking, and in less than five years he went to his grave a poor, worthless sot."

"So this was the end of all my fine schemes for the child! After that happened, I began to turn my mind to what I should do for my own future. I had Rainsford to his own again; for he had always treated me like a gentleman, though his wife had the temper of Old Harry, and yet so kind to me that I would never go near her again, but always professed to have an engagement when she wanted me."

To be continued.

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