

Written for *The Flag of our Union*

Our Lodger

by Theodore Arnold

THE year before I was admitted to the bar I spent at Mrs. Martha Sanborn's, on Home street. It was one of the pleasantest houses I ever lived in. In the first place, Mrs. Sanborn was a good, motherly body, a capital housekeeper, and not at all gasping, nor hard, nor suspicious. If any of her boarders or lodgers were behindhand in paying, she would wait a little, as long as it was convenient, then ask for money in a pleasant, kind way, just as if all had the same interests, and she was sure that her family meant to do the right thing by her.

"You see I have my rent to pay to-morrow," she would say; "and you wouldn't want me to be a discredit to you. When a housekeeper doesn't pay her bills, it reflects on her boarders. Don't you see some way to get it?"

Not a cross word, not a hint that couldn't be forgotten, but was left to rankle. And to give her family due credit, she seldom had anything of the kind to say. They all did well by her; and not a New Year's, Christmas or birthday passed but she got a present from each one; and not one left her without a farewell gift. It was really touching to see any one of her boarders go off. I well remember when Tom Kane went. For two days before the good lady could hardly eat a mouthful, and her eyes would fill with tears every time she looked at Tom. He had been with her three years, and was going to California. She looked over and mended his clothes, she helped pack his trunk, and put a little Bible in it. With her name on the fly-leaf, and under it written, "Don't leave God behind you in Boston, but take him to your heart wherever you go. You will always need him."

At last, when Tom started, and we all stood on the step to see him off, she broke down, and putting her arms around his neck, kissed him in sight of everybody. Not one of us laughed. It was no make-believe. She was like a mother to us all.

I like to remember that Tom was grateful to her, and that out of his first pile he sent her a pure gold teaspoon. He made money there hand-over-fist.

Well, I am spending too much time on an episode.

Home street was, and is, as pleasant as its name. It is a short street between two large avenues, and as it does not cross them, it is comparatively quiet. The great stream of passing is in the streets parallel, which are all long. There were several quiet boarding and lodging-houses in the vicinity, and the rest were private families, equally or more quiet. In our house, John Savin and I had the second floor parlor, a large room with a bow window over the front door. There we used to sit evenings, when we had nowhere particular to go, smoking, talking, sometimes by ourselves, sometimes with company, and oftener than not, carrying on a flirtation with the girls in the bow-window across the street.

It was a pretty picture to see them, three Morris girls, Nell, Frances and Anne; and they knew it. The bow-window was large, and they had made it a perfect bower with plants. There they would sit at evening, in summer, ravishingly dressed in prettily contrasting colors, one, perhaps, in white, the other two in pink and blue; and we could hear them chatter and laugh, and see them casting glances our way. The only thing I ever saw Mother Sanborn mad about was those girls. "Brazen minxes," she called them; and used to entreat us young fellows not to take so much notice of them.

"A man who wants a good wife, and to be worthy of her," the good soul would say, "should never pay attention, even in sport, to bold, forward girls. Let him seek out the modest, retiring ones, who wait to be sought."

I must own that the Morris girls were pretty well posted; but they were charming, for all that, and they amused us. We never let the old lady know that we talked across by means of the deaf and dumb alphabet, and that we used to fling kisses over every morning. But she saw them waving their handkerchiefs more than once; and mad enough it made her. I suspect that she sometimes watched a little more than was necessary, and I know that she gave Mrs. Morris a hint that she had better look out how her girls behaved.

You see, Mrs. Sanborn was brought up in the country.

The spring after I went to Home street, there came a new boarder, and about the same time, a little after, a new lodger. The boarder was a gentleman, Mr. Clarence Kavanagh, and somebody. The lodger was a woman, Mrs. Barret, and a nobody.

"I didn't want to take her," Mrs. Sanborn said at the tea-table, the first night this woman came, "But she begged so hard that I hadn't the heart to refuse. I told her that I had given up taking lodgers and wanted only boarders; and she said that she was out a good deal, visiting, and couldn't afford to pay for meals that she didn't eat; and that, besides, she didn't feel like going to the table with a lot of young gentlemen, and no lady but me."

"Is she retiring and modest, Mother Sanborn?" I asked, remembering her lectures. "Is she one whom we must pay attention to, and seek, since she will not be as bold as to seek us?"

"She is one whom you are all to let alone, young men," said Mrs. Sanborn, with decision. "She is a widow who is in deep mourning for her husband; and she is a quiet person in rather straitened circumstances."

We all laughed. We had heard before of widows in deep mourning, and had found them about the gayest persons of our acquaintance.

"What'll you bet, mother," says John Savin, "that before a week is over she will not have contrived to meet every one of us in the entries, and let us see how small her foot is. I'm willing to put up something handsome that she will look over the balusters after us, and that she will fall in love with Dode's golden mustache, and contrive to let him know it. Those inconsolable widows are charming creatures."

“For shame!” cried Mrs. Sanborn, indignantly, holding the teapot suspended long enough to give John a reproachful look. “You know I wouldn’t have one of those miserable creatures in my house. Mrs. Barret is a plain, middle-aged little creature, as timid and shrinking as a child; and she hates men. The only fault I find with her is that she cannot believe that the world ever contained a decent man besides her husband. And I’m sure, my poor dear—”

Mrs. Sanborn put down the teapot, choked a little, and wiped her eyes.

Dear old soul! She was fifty, and her husband had been dead twenty-five years; yet she never mentioned him without tears. We sobered at once, and John repented.

“O well, mother!” he said, soothingly. “If that’s her cut, we’ll let her alone fast enough. Don’t be afraid.”

Mrs. Sanborn’s face cleared in a minute; and she was as beaming as ever before tea was over.

Let me sketch the dining-room and company, as I remember them. The dining-room was not a half-subterranean room, cold and damp, but a large room on the first floor, at the end of the front entry, and occupying all the back of the house, except a narrow stairway and closet that were taken off the side. Three windows looked out into a grape-vine that didn’t allow anything else to be seen in summer. But in winter there were glimpses of a neat yard seen through their interstices, and a view of the rear of a block of stylish houses, kept in nice order. The high green fence hid all the kitchen regions about, and reached as high as the parlor floors. This room had not the traditional canvas carpet, but in winter a bright crimson Brussels, and in summer a checked red-and-white Indian matting; the chairs were armchairs; there were valances at the windows to match the carpets; there were pictures and bookcases, rocking-chairs, a deep sofa long enough for the tallest of us to stretch himself on; there was a caged parrot in one corner, and a pair of canaries who knew when to hold their tongues. The family parlor was in front of this room, and there were two closets between, one in the parlor, one in the dining-room; and, for some reason or other, a slide had been put in the wall leading to the parlor closet. I don’t know what it was for, unless to make it convenient to give refreshments to visitors.

Mrs. Sanborn’s table was always a pleasure to see. The snowiest of cloths and napkins, the brightest of forks, spoons and china, and the best of fare. I don’t believe that Mother Sanborn made much out of us; for we had everything that was going.

For the company that surrounded this table, there were only gentlemen besides Mrs. Sanborn, as has been intimated. Another lady lived in the house, an invalid, Mrs. Porter, whose meals were sent up to her. Captain Porter, her husband, occupied the place of honor at the foot of the table, and represented the defunct host. He was a *el-devant* sea-captain, jolly, red-faced, quick-tempered, and full of yarns. Between him and Mrs. Sanborn were three on each side. On the window-side, at the lady’s right, I had the place of honor for a visitor, next me was my roommate, John Savin, and between him and the captain was the new boarder, Mr. Clarence Kavanagh. I must say a word of him, for he is a person of mark in this history.

He was nearly forty years of age, and decidedly handsome, though his features were not perfectly regular, nor his form perfectly symmetrical. He had fine gray eyes, and the most superb hair, beard and mustache, all of a soft brown seldom seen in a gentleman's hair, but sometimes in ladies'. His manner was really fascinating, though he had none of the airs assumed by would-be fascinating men. He was rather grave and slow-spoken; but there was a dignity and grace in all he said or did. He was a trifle haughty, but not supercilious; he was courteous to ladies, but was not a lady's man; he was kind, and honorable, and reserved, and occasionally showed a most delightfully merry mood. I can imagine that ladies might adore him. Report said, indeed, that he had been rather troubled by their attentions, and had disappointed not a few by his engagement to Miss Amy Cary. She was the only daughter of one of our portliest aldermen, and a pretty girl besides. As soon as Mr. Kavanagh should be well settled in business, they were to be married. Mr. Kavanagh, by the way, was a Portlander, and had come to our city solely on account of the aforesaid Amy.

Now I will go to the other side of the table. There was Andrew Moran, a bookkeeper and a fly-away young scamp whom everybody liked; James Sawyer, one of the head clerks in the great house of Thunder and Lightning, and Tom Sanborn, a nephew of Mrs. Sanborn and nothing else to speak of.

A gander party, you see.

For some time we kept up a little joking about Widow Barret, asking if she was consoled yet, when we were to be introduced to her, or if her enmity toward men had undergone any diminution. But after a few weeks the subject died out for want of anything to feed it, and we forgot that she was in the house. Not one of us had seen her face, save a faint, unprepossessing glimpse through a thick crape veil; and only two or three had seen as much as that. Mrs. Sanborn's idea was perfectly right. The new lodger was not one of the gay widows, that was clear. From what I saw, I perceived that she was small, slight, nervous, very shy, and I guessed, something over thirty, maybe almost forty; I could not tell. She had the front attire, and used to prepare the most of her own food, sometimes not going out for days together. Saturday nights I used to see coming in as I sat in our bow-window, her veil drawn close about her face, though it was dark, and her arms full of packages; provisions, I suppose.

"Poor thing!" Mrs. Sanborn said, when I laughed about the veil at night, "she is not used to being so alone, or to living in a large city. She says that she is ashamed to be seen going out alone in the evening, and carrying packages."

After that I tried not to see the little widow. We might have our fun; but not one of us was mean enough to annoy a poor, defenceless woman. Thanks to Mrs. Sanborn's pitiful speeches, we got to have quite a sympathy for "our lodger," as we began to call her. If, on coming down stairs, any one of us saw her shrinking back in the lower entry, her black robes and veil hiding her like a nun, he would pretend not to see, and make an excuse back to his room, to give her a chance to get up. If, on going up to my room, I glanced up and saw a little foot-tip through the very upper balusters, and a fold of black, and a flitting glimpse of a pale, thin face bending over, I always looked down instantly, and pretended that I didn't see.

For that our lodger did look over the balusters a good deal, there was no doubt. I often saw her there, and after a while, got in the way of looking up for her. I concluded that she was watching for a clear coast, that she might come down.

We all fell in love, as the girls say, with Mr. Kavanagh; and many a pleasant hour did John and I have with him. His room was on the same floor with ours, but at the back; and it got to be a settled thing that he should come in and smoke with us every evening after tea. Usually he stayed but a little while, going out for the evening with his lady. But one night came a tempest, and he stayed all the evening. He was gallant and devoted enough to go even in that weather; but Miss Cary, he knew, would not expect him.

John Savin was away for a few days, and there was no one but Mr. Kavanagh and I in the room. I lighted the gas, closed both windows and blinds, put a box of cigars on the table, and brought out a bottle of Scotch whiskey, glasses, sugar, water and lemons. We drew our chairs to the table, and proceeded to make ourselves comfortable.

Mr. Kavanagh was a temperance man, and had no objection to a punch, if it was properly concocted. The one we discussed that evening seemed to be to his taste; and under the influence of it his reserve melted away. We got talking about women, and flirting, and I told him some of my own experiences.

“I quite agree with you in one thing,” Mr. Kavanagh said; “and that is in your assertion that women are often, indeed nearly always, to blame for the unnatural relations that subsist between them and us. There is no reason why men and women should not associate in a friendly and pleasant way, without a thought of marriage. But it is my experience that a man can scarcely pay a friendly and courteous attention to a lady whom he finds agreeable, without either her or her friends thinking that he has matrimonial intentions. There would be more marriages if it were not so, for men are often frightened away from putting themselves in the way of being engaged. A fellow doesn’t like to think that if he asks a lady to go to the theatre with him once, when he sees her again she will cast her eyes down and blush as if he had come to propose. I hate such nonsense!”

My visitor spoke with unusual vehemence, and such an expression of disgust and impatience that I perceived clearly he had some particular case in his mind.

“I dare say you have had experiences enough in that sort of nonsense,” I said, insinuatingly, placing a second tumbler of punch before him.

He smiled, lifted the glass and took a sip, smiled again as if half ashamed of himself, took a whiff, leaned back and let the smoke curl up from his handsome mouth, then looked up at me and laughed.

“It seems silly enough to speak of such things,” he said; “but on stormy nights like this one must be amused. Besides, your punch stirs my memory, and your eyes weaken my will. I know you want me to boast a little.”

“Indeed I do!” I said, heartily.

He leaned forward, and rested his arms on the table.

“I would never boast of a woman’s love,” he said, with a momentary gravity, “if that love were such as to win my respect. But there is a sort of infatuation which women and men are sometimes subject to, which is worthy of pity, perhaps, but not respect. It is something which I do not understand, and cannot tolerate. To have a person whom you repulse cling to you, can you imagine anything more calculated to inspire you with loathing? I had a torment like that just before I came here; and if I hadn’t left Portland on Amy’s account, I should have left it to get rid of that woman. Of course I shall not tell her name. That, however is all the grace she deserves. We will call her Miss Smith. I met her first out of the city. We both happened to be in the stage going from Bath to Bangor when we met with an accident. The stage upset. Miss Smith was a little hurt, and fainted. I took her up in my arms and carried her into a farmhouse near. In a little while she recovered, and the stage was mended, and we went on. I hadn’t noticed her before; but naturally I did take notice of her afterward. Her ankle was sprained, and she had to be assisted to and from the coach. I had no company, and as she needed attention, I gave it to her. I found, too, that we had mutual acquaintances in both Bangor and Portland, that she belonged to Portland, and was going to return there at the same time with me.

“Then perhaps I shall have the pleasure of your company back,” I said, like a fool.

“I was rather pleased with her at first. She was not pretty, but she was delicate and lady-like, and there was occasionally a vividness of expression in her face which was very striking. Indeed, I soon found her expression too vivid. She seemed to me one of those intense beings who are always going to extremes in everything, and with whom repose is impossible. Moreover, I found her bitter and suspicious, even in that short time. Still, as I said, she was helpless, and I felt bound to befriend her.

“When we reached Bangor, I took leave of her at the door of the friend with whom she was to stop, promising to call if I had time, or, at all events, to be on hand to accompany her back to Portland on the next Thursday. It was then Saturday. I never thought of her again until Wednesday evening. I met Mr. Cary and Amy at the Bangor House, and was completely engrossed by them, or rather, by her. It was our first meeting; but I resolved that it should not be our last. Wednesday they came back to Boston; and in the evening I recollected Miss Smith. It was late, but I went up. She received me very smilingly, but with a little reproach that she thought I had forgotten her.

“What could I say? If I had known her then as I did afterward, I would have replied coldly that I had been busy. But I answered gallantly, bowing, ‘It would be impossible to forget you!’

“A sensible woman would have thought nothing of so evident a flattery. She wasn’t a sensible woman.

“Well, we went back to Portland, she smiling and grateful, I as kind as I thought I might safely be. I protest, though I saw that the woman was silly, I never dreamed of her being in love with

me, and I never dreamed of giving her any reason to be. She asked me to call and see her, and after waiting a week or two, I did call. She lived with a wealthy brother whom I knew pretty well. After that he and I had business relations of which I think she was the cause. I don't doubt that for awhile she made him believe that I was her lover. About three months from the time I first met her, her brother went to New York to live, and, greatly to my surprise, instead of going with him, she stayed in Portland, and came to board in the house with me. I was annoyed. For I could not deny that in a business way she had been friendly and even helpful to me; still I had not asked nor expected such favors from her, and I did not want them. But there was no help for it. There she was in the house, sitting opposite me at the table, in the parlor all the time, constantly meeting me in the entries; and I had to show her some civility. It isn't easy for me to be rude to women, even when they provoke me. But sometimes I did treat her with a coldness that came very near being rude. I couldn't help it. She had not been there a week before they all had it that she was in love with me. And she acted like it. I can't tell you how she acted, how she sat and stared at me, how she blushed and sighed, and cast down her eyes, and made the most transparent excuses to meet me everywhere about the house. I declare, I used to be scarcely able to get to the bathroom without coming across her. She watched me. I know that she observed where I went, and whom I went with, and that I was never out at night but she kept awake till I got in. She always looked sleepy the next morning after I had been out late. Of course all this made me appear like a fool; and you know that isn't agreeable.

“I got off after awhile and came to Boston to see Amy. Miss Smith got wind of my doings some way, and when I went back there were tragical scenes. She used to appear at the table with her eyes red with crying, she sat about with her head leaning on her hand, and a lugubrious expression of countenance that made me want to call her a simpleton. The boarders laughed more than ever, and named her the ‘maid of the rueful countenance.’ Sometimes I took pity on her, and tried to be frank and friendly; but it was of no use. She would turn her back on me and pout, and then come and ask my pardon, and weep. It was impossible to establish friendly or common-sense relations with her.

“I was making arrangements then to come here; and I kept it from her as long as I could. But at last she found out. I knew when I came home one day to dinner that the murder was out. I must say that I was frightened when I saw her. I came in late, and they were all at the table. Her chair was opposite mine, and I looked across to bow to her first. She gave me a look such as a woman might give a man who has done her a most bitter wrong, did not answer my salutation, and dropped her eyes instantly to her plate. She was as pale as death, her eyes were red and swollen, and her whole manner strange. She did not say a word during dinner, nor eat a mouthful, but sat there like a death's-head, making everybody feel disagreeable. No one felt disposed to laugh.

“I was angry, you may depend. The last touch of pity took flight at the sight of that exhibition; and instead of trying to conciliate her, I began talking gayly with the others. They were as vexed with her as I was, and readily joined in my humor. After awhile one of the ladies said:

“And when are we to congratulate you, Mr. Kavanagh?”

“‘I have not gone so far as that,’ I said, not daring to look at my opposite neighbor. ‘But I will inform you in good time.’”

“I knew that Miss Smith had raised her eyes at last, and was looking at me.

“I shall congratulate you with all my heart,’ my lady friend went on; ‘for I know no lovelier girl than Amy Cary. She is amiable, beautiful, accomplished, and modest.’

“I tried not to look at Miss Smith, but my eyes were drawn there in spite of myself. She was staring at me with an expression which I cannot describe. Evidently, though she knew that I thought of going away, this was the first she had heard that a lady was in the case. Her look exasperated me still more. I determined to give her a lesson.

“‘You are quite right,’ I said. ‘Amy is all that you describe her. I esteem myself highly favored by fortune in being her chosen husband.’

“Instantly Miss Smith started to her feet, upsetting her chair, and after taking one step, as if to leave the room, fell to the floor.

“Of course all was confusion at once. The women gathered around her, and the men hovered about outside, in a helpless way, all but me. I left the room in disgust, and went up stairs to pack my trunk.

“After a little while Mrs. Baker, the landlady, came up to ask if I wouldn’t go down and speak to Miss Smith, who, she said, was nearly crazy. I said I would not. She had no right to make such a fool of herself, and I would treat her with the contempt she deserved. I said, moreover, that I should leave the house the next day, and for the remainder of my stay in Portland stop at the Preblo House. I couldn’t submit to such annoyance any longer. Mrs. Baker felt very bad about it, and offered to send Miss Smith away; but I wouldn’t allow that. She told me that the confounded nuisance, she was that! had said I was a deceiver, that I had made love to her, and that her brother had got me to do business thinking that I was to marry her. Of course nobody believed her. The women left her to herself after a while. They said that her faint was only a make-believe, although she certainly was half-crazy with jealousy and anger. But would you believe that she posted herself in the front parlor and waylaid me when I came down? There she stood leaning against the side of the door as I went down the stairs.

“‘I would like to speak to you a minute, Mr. Kavanagh,’ she said.

“I choked down my anger as well as I could to answer with decent civility.

“‘My time is very much occupied; but if you have any business with me, I am ready to hear it.’

She drew back into the parlor, and I could do no less than follow her, sorely against my will, though. She waved her hand towards a sofa, but I remained standing just inside the door.

“‘Have you no pity?’ she exclaimed.

“I do not see in what you are particularly deserving of pity,’ I answered, ‘unless it is in your lack of self-control and sense of propriety. Your conduct is truly extraordinary.’

“She put her hands over her face, and began to cry.

“You shouldn’t have made me believe that you cared for me, if you didn’t want me to think so much of you,’ she sobbed.

“You are yourself to blame for that false impression,’ I said, indignantly. ‘I am no male flirt, and I never had any but the merest friendly regard for you, and I never dreamed of your fancying that I had. I am used to being courteous to ladies; but I am not used to having ladies think that every act of courtesy must be followed by an offer of marriage. You must excuse my plain speaking, Miss Smith; but you have annoyed me and compromised yourself, and I have good reason to feel displeased.’

“What she was going to say or do, I don’t know; but she came quickly forward, and flung herself on her knees at my feet. I didn’t stop to listen; I ran, and got out of the room as quickly as possible, and out of the house. In my haste I left the parlor door open; and Mrs. Malcome, one of the boarders, coming down stairs just then, glanced in and saw her before she had time to get off her knees. The ladies were all on the watch, and heard her call me into the parlor.

“Well, I went to the hotel, and saw no more of Miss Smith. But I got a note full of bitter reproaches that I had refused to listen to her, calling me a brute, and several other fine names.”

Mr. Kavanagh paused to take a sip from his tumbler, as if to wash the taste of the story out of his mouth.

“Have you heard anything about her since?” I asked.

“Only a word,” was the reply. “A friend wrote me that she had left Portland and gone to her brother in New York. She has probably got over her passion for me by this time, and fallen in love with some other unfortunate.”

As he ended, Mr. Kavanagh laughed, and his laugh was so pleasant that involuntarily I looked up at him. He sat directly between me and the door, and as I raised my eyes I glanced at the door, attracted there by some slight sound or motion. It was unlatched; and it seemed as though some one had been looking in through a little crack, and had drawn the door close when I raised my face. I was surprised and displeased. I could not think that any of the family was mean enough to listen to a private conversation. It seemed likely that some one, in passing, had looked in, and, seeing us engaged, had immediately withdrawn. Still I was annoyed; for I had certainly latched that door before sitting down, and when people come to my room, I like to have them come audibly. I hate tiptoe folks who get round without being heard.

Mr. Kavanagh noticed my expression, and turned and looked behind him, and saw that the door was not closed. Probably the story that he had just told made him suspicious; for he rose immediately, and going to the door, flung it open.

“Why, is it so late?” he said. “The gas is out!”

At the instant he spoke, there was the report of a pistol in the entry, and he staggered back. I started up, and ran to him, calling for help. All the doors flew open, lighting the entries.

“I am not hurt, I think,” said Kavanagh, recovering himself. “But it was pretty near.”

We hurried out into the entries to look, and were met by all the family, confusedly asking what was the matter, and who had fired the pistol, and if any one was hurt. Even the little widow was looking with a white face over the attic railing, and I heard her afterward questioning in a frightened voice of the servant.

We found the front door wide open, and that the gas had been turned off in the entries by some one not of the family. It was only ten o'clock, and the entry lights were never turned out till eleven. We sent for a policeman, and had a thorough search made. It seemed likely that there had been a burglar who fired when he fancied that Mr. Kavanagh saw him. But why he should fire when he had the door open for escape, was a mystery. While we were searching, Mrs. Sanborn exclaimed:

“Why, Mr. Kavanagh, what is the matter with your ear?”

He put his hand up, and drew it away stained with blood. Looking, we found out the shot had grazed his ear just enough to draw blood, but not enough for him to notice in the excitement. We commenced anew our search, and at length found the place where the ball had entered the wall over the mantelpiece opposite the door. Mr. Kavanagh stood in the door again, just where he had stood when the shot was fired; and from the wall and his position we marked the position of the person who had fired. He must have been very tall, and stood about half-way down the front stairs, lifting his arm to a little above the second landing. The shot was evidently fired upward, and from as far down stairs as the person could get and reach over the floor. For the hole in the wall was at the left side of the fire-place, and the stairs ran toward the right.

After doing all that we could do, and leaving the affair in the hands of the police, we settled ourselves in the entries, and the street door securely locked and bolted.

“Be sure you all lock your room doors to-night,” Mrs. Sanborn said, stopping at my door on her way up to bed. “And if you hear a pounding, run to my chamber. If I am disturbed, I shall pound on the wall. I would have the chamber-girl with me, but poor Mrs. Barret is so frightened that she wants her. She doesn't dare to sleep alone. The poor thing wants a policeman to stay in the house.”

When she had gone on, I looked at Kavanagh who was sitting with me again. He was slightly pale, as a man may well be when his life had been in danger, but perfectly cool and calm.

“Does it occur to you to connect this affair with the story you were telling me?” I asked, in a low voice, keeping my eyes on the door, though I knew there was no sort of chance for any one to get into the house now.

He shook his head, but did not smile. “It would be impossible to do so,” he said. “She is in New York, and, besides, she is no such person.”

“I should think she was just such a person,” I persisted. “You know, ‘hell holds no fury like a woman scorned.’”

Still he shook his head; but he said nothing more. After a little while he left me and went to bed.

The night passed without any alarm, and there was no news from the detective the next day. No one had seen a man coming out of our house, and no one had seen the door standing open. The recess of the entrance was so deep, that if the door had been open, it would not have been observed on a dark night, unless the passer had looked particularly. A week passed, and nothing happened, and we heard nothing. The whole affair was enveloped in mystery.

“It must have been a burglar who thought that you had discovered him,” Mrs. Sanborn said, one night as we sat at the tea-table. “Perhaps he was not on the lower stairs. He may have been crouching in the upper entry.”

I did not notice the reply. My attention was quite engrossed in something else; a trifle, it was; but it held my eyes. I had just chanced to notice a little before that the slide which I have mentioned as being between the dining-room and the parlor closet was shut closely. That was not remarkable, for it was always kept closed. But we sometimes notice, and give a momentary thought to trifles that seem utterly insignificant. When I looked up to Mrs. Sanborn as she spoke, I glanced past her; and as my eyes fell on the palling beyond, I saw that it was not quite close, but was pushed a very little aside; and as I looked, I saw clearly in that slight opening an eye. It was perfectly plain to me, an eye bright and fixed.

Instantly I started out of my chair, and ran toward the slide, my first thought being that some one was taking aim through it. While the family all turned and stared in utter astonishment, I pulled the slide back and looked into the closet. There was no one there; but the closet door was open into the parlor.

“What is it?” they exclaimed.

But I did not stop to answer. Tearing out of the room, I ran through the entry to the parlor. Not a soul was there. I searched everywhere, looked behind and under sofas and cabinets, and I wont be sure that I did not open drawers. Nothing did I find. I then bethought myself, and went to look up the balusters toward the attic. Nothing in sight there. Or was there a fold of black disappearing? If there was, what more natural than that any person in the house, hearing a disturbance, should come out to see what it meant?

When I went down stairs, John Savin was in the front entry, Mr. Kavanagh was standing in the dining-room door, and the others had all got up from the table, their faces expressive of more or less alarm. I was assailed with questions; and when I had told my story, was saluted with laughter, from all but Mr. Kavanagh and Mrs. Sanborn.

“Arnold is certainly getting nervous, or he scents a criminal case,” said the captain, taking his seat at the table again.

“At least I wasn’t frightened,” I retorted.

Mr. Kavanagh said nothing, but sat down and looked into his plate.

Mrs. Sanborn went out and investigated, then came back with a solution which satisfied her, and set the rest laughing again.

“The cat is in the entry,” she said, “and it must have been her eye at the slide. She is a mischievous creature.”

“Did she open the slide?” I asked, testily.

“Well, no,” the lady answered. “But are you sure that it was shut before?”

“I am sure of it!”

The captain laughed. “It must have been the little widow taking a peep at you fascinating fellows,” he said.

I sulked, dropped the subject, and no more was said about it that day.

Mr. Kavanagh had a headache that evening, and went to bed early. I was out until late, and didn’t see him; but the next morning he came into my room before breakfast. He looked rather queer. “Arnold,” he said, “were you in my room last night?”

I replied that I was not.

“Well, somebody was,” he said, looking at me with a strange expression of uneasiness.

I asked him to explain.

“My head ached so badly,” he said, “that I was confused, and forgot to lock the door, as I have done lately. I didn’t even want the trouble of undressing; and, instead of going to bed, I laid down on the sofa near the window. I laid awake some time, but at length my head grew easier, and I was about dropping asleep, when something disturbed me. I half-thought, half-dreamed that the door was tried, then slowly and softly opened, and that I heard a soft rustle as of a woman’s garments. I opened my eyes, I was really awake then, and saw a shadow at my bedside. I lay perfectly motionless, and shut my eyes, then opened them again, to make sure. There were

the windows, the faint brightness where the looking-glass was, and the shadow beside the bed. It wasn't like any one standing, but like one crouching beside the bed, with the arm stretched over it. The horrible thought came to me that whatever it was, was feeling for my heart. It was so strange and terrible, so unreal, that I felt my heart beating thickly, and a perspiration starting out over me. For an instant I could neither see nor hear. When I recovered, I was sure that I heard the door softly close. My visitor had not found me in bed, and thought that I was not in the room. I lay a minute, then got up as quietly as I could, and creeping to the door on tiptoe, locked it. I tried to do so silently; but the lock gave a little click. Then I went back to the sofa, and laid awake all night. I did not sleep a wink until daylight. Now, what do you think of this, Arnold? I don't like to be foolish; but it doesn't seem to me that I dreamed it."

"Mr. Kavanagh," I said, "did it ever occur to you that this Widow Barret may be a queer person, and that Mrs. Sanborn was very careless to take her in without going to see her reference?"

He stared at me. "I never thought of her," he said. "What do you mean?"

"May she not be your Miss Smith, more desperate than you thought?" I asked.

He started, but said nothing, seemed to be revolving the idea in his mind.

"I may be all in the wrong," I said; "but I have had this idea for some time. Mrs. Barret is altogether shy and mysterious. Besides, she came at the same time you came. I didn't like to mention my suspicions to Mrs. Sanborn; for she is timid, and if once she got afraid of the window, she would lose pity for her. But I think that you'd better try to get sight of the woman's face."

"I will," he said, promptly. "How can it be managed?"

We talked the matter over, and concluded to come home about two o'clock, that being the time at which I had heard Mrs. Sanborn say the widow usually went out.

At half past one that day we started for Home street, and walked slowly toward the house. As we never came home to dinner, she could not expect us. We posted ourselves in the door-way, and waited silently; but no one appeared. That is, no one appeared from our house; but the three Morris girls appeared in their window, and began to cast glances. They evidently thought that we were standing there to watch them.

"By George! Kavanagh, I have an idea!" I exclaimed, when we had waited so long that I began to think that our game had escaped us. If she has gone out, you might go over to the Morrises and ask permission to sit in one of their front windows, and watch. The widow is always in before tea, you know."

"How could I explain?" he said.

"Leave all that to me," I replied. "But now let's go into the house."

We went in and found Mrs. Sanborn taking a noon luncheon by herself, and much astonished to see us at that hour.

“Now, Mother Sanborn,” I said, “you needn’t stare nor scold. Kavanagh and I have come home to see the widow, and you must manage it for us. He suspects that she is an old love of his, and wants to make sure.”

“Well, gentlemen,” says Mrs. Sanborn, with dignity, “I am happy to say that you have got your labor for your pains. Mrs. Barret went away to Lowell this morning directly after breakfast. She has a sister married there whom she is going to visit. She may be gone several weeks; but she keeps her room here. On her return you can see her.”

“Kavanagh, what is your lady-love’s complexion?” I asked.

“The woman we were speaking of,” he said, “has dark-brown hair, a sallow skin and light blue eyes.”

“This lady has light hair and a pale face,” said Mrs. Sanborn, triumphantly.

We gave it up, and went down town. In my office I found a detective waiting. He had, he thought, tracked the man who tried to shoot Mr. Kavanagh. A certain man, a stranger, and a suspicious person, had been soon running out of Home street into the avenue that night, and since then he had tracked him, and almost caught him stealing. He was a very tall, slender man, and carried something in his pocket that looked like a pistol.

On the whole, I began to think I might have wronged the widow.

That was the last we heard for some time. There was no disturbance, Mrs. Barret didn’t come back from Lowell, though she sent the money for her room; and Mr. Kavanagh was so taken up with his pretty bride-elect that he forgot everything else. They had intended to be married at Christmas, but certain circumstances needless to recount here induced them to hasten the marriage which was now fixed for the first of September. That date was not long in coming, and everything prospered. We were in a bustle, for the couple were going to board at Mrs. Sanborn’s. I gave up my front room to them, and took the chamber above; and papa and mama Cary had the suite beautifully refitted and furnished.

We had a very pretty wedding, and the newly married couple went to New York for a week. Mr. Kavanagh’s business was such that he could not leave it longer.

The wedding was so quiet that I think no one knew anything about it till it was over, the ceremony taking place at Mr. Cary’s with not more than a dozen persons present.

The next day at tea-time Mrs. Sanborn said, “Mrs. Barret’s reference has been here; and a most respectable person she seems to be. Her husband is in the custom-house, in a very good position. She came to say that she had been to Lowell, and had seen Mrs. Barret who is coming back in a day or two. She is not going to stay, however, so you need not worry. Her health is not good, and

she is going South for the winter. She goes as companion to a wealthy southern lady, a Mrs. Blake.”

“Joy go with her!” I said. “I am not sorry to lose her.”

“Well, I must own that I’d just as lief have my room,” Mrs. Sanborn said. “What she pays me is no object. But she is a very respectable woman, and I won’t hear a word against her. Mrs. Martin, that’s the name of the lady who called, Mrs. Martin, No. 11 Bilk street,—a very genteel street—says that she has known Mrs. Barret from a child, and has the highest respect for her. Her troubles have made her a little odd and unsocial; but she says that not a word can be said to Mrs. Barret’s detriment. Now I hope that you are ashamed of yourself, young man.”

“‘To err is human,’ mother,” I said, philosophically, finding it impossible to feel a particle of sympathy for the little widow.

The very next day she came back, and came sick. She was only going to stay long enough to put her wardrobe in order, she told Mrs. Sanborn. In a week, probably, she would start for the South.

Our house was in some confusion all that week. In honor of her new boarders, Mrs. Sanborn had the entries and parlor fitted up a little; and the Carys were there every day at work on Amy’s room, preparing it for her reception. I scarcely knew my old domicile, though I had thought it very fine before. Such bright carpets and draperies, such filmy lace curtains, such countless pretty ornaments that only a woman knows how to arrange! We fellows would stop at the door on the way to our own rooms, and look with admiration and awe at the fairylike change by which this grub of a room became a butterfly. Mrs. Cary would pause in her busy arrangements at sight of us, smile, and ask our opinion of this or that. “Did we not think that the bust of Schiller would look better if placed in front of this ivy, its white showing against the green background? Or, no. Ivy was for decay; and the poet was immortal. This little group of the Oceanides should stand there since mythology had died out in Christianity, and the Schiller should have a bay-garland. And so on. It was very pleasant. And I must own that I, at least, had a new revelation in those days, of the charm of woman. How they beautify our lives! How much more of our little daily pleasures we owe them than we are aware of!

Lastly, in the evening train from New York came the happy couple, looking happy indeed.

But just before they came, for the first time I saw Widow Barret. It happened this way: I came home earlier than usual to bring an offering for the room of our expected friends, as handsome a banquet as I could find in town. Mrs. Cary had got everything arranged, and was hurrying to run home for something, and be back in time to receive her daughter. She met me on the stairs as I went up, admired my bouquet, and told me to go up and place it myself wherever I thought it looked prettiest. Then she went down, and meeting Mrs. Sanborn in the lower entry, talked a minute with her, and hurried away. Mrs. Sanborn went back to the kitchen where she was preparing a particularly nice supper.

I went into the Kavanaghs’ room, and, after looking about, put my flowers in a vase on the mantelpiece, first selecting from them two half-open roses, a red and a white. These last,

blushingly, yet with reverence, I laid on the pillows of the snow-white, lace-curtained bed, the red rose on the front pillow, the white one on the one next to the wall. Then I drew back and looked at the effect.

As I stood there silent a moment, the house and the street silent too, I heard presently a faint, uncertain rustling on the stairs, and, looking towards the door, saw after a minute, a fold of a black gown, but nothing else. I was standing in the front part of the room, near the alcove, and I immediately drew back so as not to be seen from the door. There was no sound of a step or breath; but in a moment I saw her. She came swiftly and noiselessly in, and looked round the room. Before she turned I had time to see her clearly as she stood there with her hands clenched together, and pressed to her heart. Her face was very thin, and perfectly white with a yellow pallor which was very disagreeable to see. She had on her bonnet and shawl, her veil put back, her profile showing sharply against it. I held my breath while I looked. There was no mistaking that expression. It was one of intense agitation. At a slight sound from below, she started and fled, as silent as a shadow. But she did not go down stairs. She went up. Evidently she had put on her bonnet and shawl so as to have the excuse of going out in case she were caught there.

In spite of all that had seemed to prove my suspicions incorrect, I felt my old uneasiness return. There appeared to me in this something more than the mere natural feminine curiosity to see the room. But I hated to disturb any one about it; and presently everything else was forgotten in the arrival of our friends. What gloomy fears could abide in the presence of Kavanagh's sunny face, ten years younger in the last week, or still more, before the sweet, childlike happiness of the lovely bride? They admired everything, were glad to see everybody, and thanked everybody for what had been done for their reception.

Mrs. Cary stayed only long enough to welcome her daughter, then went home, promising to come down a little while in the evening with her husband. We had a gay supper, gave the newly-married couple a pleasant surprise in the shape of a serenade, and after a merry evening, went to bed at a late hour.

I wanted to tell Kavanagh to be sure to lock his door; but I hated to say a word to cloud his happiness. Listening, however, I had the pleasure of hearing the key turn in his lock. Content, then, I went to bed, and was soon in a deep sleep.

How long I had slept I do not know. But I was awakened by such a cry as God grant I may never hear again. I started up, my blood chilling with horror. The door between my room and the Kavanaghs' was open, and my chamber door into the entry was open. From the inner room was heard the sound of a struggle; and before I had time to spring out of bed, I saw in the dim light Kavanagh appear in the door, pushing before him something which tried to escape, and made a faint gurgling as if choking. I heard his heavy breathing as he dragged her, his hand on her throat, pulled her through the door into the entry, and, with all his strength, flung her headlong down the stairs.

"My God! Arnold!" he said, coming back, not hearing the cries that rang through the house, for the whole family [was] alarmed.

I lighted my gas as quickly as my numbed fingers would let me, and saw him leaning against the entry door which he had shut.

He pointed to the door of his room, but made no motion to go there. The silence within was terrible.

“Go, go!” he gasped out. “I cannot look at her.”

I turned my gas to its highest, then went in, and, going straight to his chandelier, lighted that. Then, with a creeping all over me, I turned to look at the bed.

There lay the young wife, either dead or senseless, with her clothes and the sheet stained with blood, and blood soaking through the bosom of her night-dress. I looked up to find Kavanagh’s agonized face in the door.

“For God’s sake, tell me?” he cried out.

“I think she lives,” I said, “But we must have help at once.”

At that he went to her, taking her in his arms, and calling her by every fond name.

It was but the work of a minute, but it seemed an age before I had got my clothes on. By this time others of the family were at my door, and I heard a policeman in front of the house calling out to know what was the matter.

I opened my door to the other fellows, and without a word of explanation, ran to the front window and threw my latch-key out to the policeman.

“You’ll find her in the front entry,” I said.

It is impossible to describe the scene that followed. Going down to run for a doctor, I saw the officer raising from the floor the form of Mrs. Barret the widow, alias Miss Smith. One look in the face was enough. She was dead! I staid to answer no questions, but rushed out doors.

When I came back, Mrs. Sanborn was in Kavanagh’s room, and the poor little wife was lying in her husband’s arms, living, indeed, but, it seemed, almost at the point of death.

“There are three wounds to the breast,” Mrs. Sanborn whispered to me; “but two glanced aside on the bone, and are only flesh wounds; and I hope the other is not fatal.”

I drew a breath of relief, and went down stairs again.

“What am I to do with the woman?” asked the policeman. “Who is she? Where does she belong? Who has done this?”

I told him briefly, and bade him take her away.

“Don’t let her stay here another hour,” I said. “Dead or not, she is a murderer; and if you don’t take her out, we will pitch her into the street.”

It wasn’t easy to get a carriage at that time of night; but some of the fellows got one, and the dead body was taken away.

Well, poor Amy did not die; but it was many a month before she was able to go about; and when she did it was with a face so white and terror-stricken that it was painful to see her. For years after she would wake in the night with a cry of such terror, that many persons did not like to live in the house with her.

As soon as she was able to be moved, she was taken to her father’s house, and they never came back to Mrs. Sanborn’s again. Indeed, we all took a dislike to the place after that, and Mother Sanborn protested that she could not stay in it. So before winter came she got another house, and we all went there with her. Poor lady! she never quite got over that affair.

It was not before weeks had passed that Kavanagh could tell what he knew of that night. Of course the wretch had entered through my room, perhaps the key in the lock of their chamber door preventing her opening it. There was a skeleton key in the door between the rooms. Kavanagh had been awakened by a sudden movement of his wife’s, and at the same instant that he opened his eyes, her cries rang out, as, waking in the grasp of her foe, she looked up to find that fiendish face bending over her, and see the uplifted knife raised for a blow.

Of course the affair was a nine days’ wonder, and various were the stories and opinions about it. The popular version seemed to be that the poor demented creature had been betrayed by Kavanagh, and that grief had made her crazy. But nobody ventures to repeat that story in my hearing.

I have no pity for her. I say she got her dues, and am glad that she did not live to be shut up a little while in a madhouse, then let loose to succeed better next time. Some people are to blame for being crazy.

The only notice that Kavanagh takes of the stories is to draw himself up, and say haughtily, “My character is known.” And the only notice his wife takes of them, is to throw her arms around her husband’s neck, and protest that anything that wrongs his nobleness is false.

I made a little call on Mrs. Martin at No. 11 Silk street, and found that lady in an agony of terror and remorse.

“I did wrong in letting her go under an assumed name,” she said. “But I never called her by it, and all I said of her I believed. I have known her from childhood, and would as soon have expected my own sister to commit such a crime, as that she should. I knew that she was desperately in love with Mr. Kavanagh, and thought that she wanted to be near him. I tried to coax her to stay away; but since she would not, I consented not only to be guarantee for her, but—I—lent her the wig. I cannot tell you how sorry I am.”

“Well, madam,” I said, “I hope that it will be a lesson to you never again to give the weight of your name to any fraud, however seemingly harmless.”

“Indeed it will!” she sobbed.

“Every cloud has a silver lining,” somebody says. The silver lining in this one, so far as I was concerned, was that it led to an acquaintance with the Morris girls. Of course all the neighbors came to make inquiries, they among the number, and the result—but no. The tale that hangs thereby does not belong here.

The Flag of Our Union, Oct. 2, 1869