

Second Cousin Sarah

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"ANNE JUDGE, SPINSTER," "LITTLE KATE KIRBY,"
ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XXII.

It is time that we follow the fortunes of Second-cousin Sarah, whom we left with her shabby sister-in-law in the grounds of Sedge Hill. Taken off her guard by Mrs. Thomas Eastbell's sudden appearance, disturbed by the events of the night, and ever conscious of the danger which the presence of the two intruders in her aunt's house foreshadowed, she followed the woman in good faith some distance along the garden paths and in the direction of the high road.

"We will go no further," she said; "tell me what I have to fear from your husband and Peterson, and I will reward you handsomely."

"Listen then as well as you can. I ain't a-going to speak loud for anybody."

"I am listening."

Sarah Eastbell inclined her head more closely to the woman, who began whispering about her husband in a rambling fashion that was difficult to follow, until she went suddenly back three steps, to Sarah's surprise, and stood gazing at her, or at something near her.

"What is it?" exclaimed Sarah; "what—"

There was no opportunity to say more, to scream, or to struggle. Two strong arms closed round her, and a cloth, wet and sickly with drugs, was pressed to her mouth and nostrils by a merciless hand, that seemed to snatch her at once from active life to oblivion.

When she came back to consciousness it was to a life apart from Sedge Hill, and those who loved her there. She was lying on a bed, with Sophy Eastbell dozing by the side of a scantily furnished fire. There was a narrow window in the side of the room, with some boards nailed across it to keep the light of one spluttering candle from betraying itself to the night.

Suddenly Sophy woke up, and gave a nervous jump in her chair at finding her sister-in-law crouched upon the bed, with her great dark eyes glaring at her.

"Where have you brought me? Why am I in this dreadful place?" Sarah asked in an eager voice.

"You've come round, have you?" said Sophy. "Well, I am glad of that. Bless if I didn't think they'd overdone it with their klori-what's-its-name, and sent you bang off afore they meant it."

Sarah Eastbell was sitting at the edge of the bed now, regarding her jailer with eager attention. She was scarcely back from dreamland yet.

"Why have I been brought here?" she asked less patiently.

"You'll know in good time, gal. There's no 'casion for a hurry, or a flurry. Take it cool. You're safe enuf."

Sarah Eastbell was standing at the door of the room when she had recovered herself. It was locked, as she had suspected.

"It's no use your thinking of getting out, Sally," said Tom's wife; "don't build on that, or harm will happen to you. That's certain."

"Do you think I am the weak girl whom you remember last?" said Sarah, walking from the door to the woman's side, and clutching her tightly by the waist, "or that I am to be frightened by this trick of yours, and of the wretches who have assisted you? Do you know in what peril you have put yourself?"

"Oh, yes, we all know; it's all been thought on," said the woman ironically. "We're of the don't care sort, and have changed it. You can't say it wasn't well done, Sally."

"Give me the key of the door, or you will find me the stronger woman of the two!" cried Sarah.

"Don't ketch hold of my wrist like that," cried her sister-in-law, "or you'll be sorry if I go away, or if any one downstairs comes up instead of me, because you are too violent for my company. You can't behave like a lady, for all your fine flash silk. I have only to shriek out, and there are three men below who don't stand nonsense such as yours."

Sarah Eastbell released her hold. Yes, she was in danger, and must be cautious. They who brought her to this den had risked a great deal in entrapping her, and would risk more rather than allow her to escape. She must be prudent and on her guard, not defiant and aggressive.

"I ain't got no key, if you must know," said Sophy, as she returned to her chair and sat down; "this is my room, and we're both locked in together. I'm to take charge of you, that's all, my gal, and think yourself lucky it's me."

"What place is it?" Sarah asked again. "A place of bis'ness," was the enigmatic answer.

"Coiners—the old gang from Potter's Court—the Petersons," cried Sarah. Mrs. Eastbell did not answer. She warmed her thin hands at the fire, and a convenient cough prevented all possibility of reply. She was a prudent woman, and not likely to commit herself and her friends by responding to leading questions of this character.

The spiriting away of a young lady from home without her consent, and without leaving a clue wherewith to trace her, is no light feat in the nineteenth century, and Mrs. Thomas Eastbell had shown a natural pride in the neatness of the achievement. True, the house was five or six miles from a quiet city, and was desolate enough at all times, the hour was late, the circumstances were opportune, and how to profit by the riches of old Mrs. Eastbell and her granddaughter had been the study of six months, but still Mrs. Thomas Eastbell had something to take credit for. It was a bold stroke carried out by desperate men, and it had succeeded where a more timid line of policy would have assuredly failed.

It was the boldest bit of business that

the Peterson gang had ever been engaged in, and the Petersons had been engaged, under various aliases, in innumerable shady transactions. They had come to "fresh fields and pastures new" by adopting the fair county of Worcester as a sphere for their operations; they had rented a tumble-down old edifice in a wild part of the county, and put on the door the name of Jackson, button maker; they had even made a few acquaintances in distant villages, and bore a respectable name among honest, unsuspecting folk who believed in them and their buttons. No one visited them certainly—it was an out-of-the-way place, to which nobody was invited, and where only button making was the order of the day.

No one confounded the name of Jackson with Peterson—and it was possibly good policy in the Captain adopting his own name when he went with Thomas Eastbell to Sedge Hill. It kept matters clear and distinct, though he had not bargained for Sarah Eastbell's good memory, or imagined that he was known to her by sight.

It was he who unlocked the door of Sarah's extempore cell at seven in the morning, and stood before her, the avowed agent of her captivity.

"I have come to apologize for my friends' rough treatment of last night," he said, reclining languidly against the wall, and crossing his gloved hands, one with a very glossy hat in it, "and to express a hope that you have suffered no inconvenience from your temporary withdrawal from a home which you are accustomed to adorn. I, for one," he added with a low bow, "should regret very much to hear one word of complaint."

"This is your work then," said Sarah bitterly; "it is as I suspected. Tell me what my brother wants?"

"I would say a fair redress for the injury which you have done him. Your grandmother is rich, and will leave you all her money. And your only brother, a man of many admirable qualities—will be left to drag on his life in indigence, and to die in utter abjectness of spirit, without your assist him as fairly and liberally as a fond sister should do. Thomas, who is in difficulties, wants fifteen thousand pounds!"

Sarah drew a sudden and deep breath, but did not reply. The thin face of the woman stooping over the fire peered round at her, horrible in its eagerness and greed.

"Fifteen thousand pounds only from that immense fortune which must come to you when old Mrs. Eastbell dies, the simple conditions being that the sum must be paid at once, as your brother is very poor, and there is a balance of sixteen thousand three hundred and twenty-eight pounds lodged at your banker's, in your name, for the convenience of a current account."

"How do you know what money is lodged in my name at the bank?"

"Thomas tells me—that is all. He sent me here with your check book—he found that in your desk, too, he tells me. You have only to draw a draft for the amount, and you are free, Miss Eastbell. I promised a friend of yours that you should be at Sedge Hill this evening. Miss Holland will tell you everything to-night," he said as he drew the check book from his pocket and pitched it carelessly upon the deal table that was there.

"I have left everything for that young lady to explain. It is a story apart from yours, and suits not my style of narrative."

"This money is held in trust for another," she said; "it belongs neither to me nor to my grandmother."

"If to Mr. Culwick, we—I should say, your brother Thomas objects to the title."

"Let him!" cried Sarah with a sudden outburst of anger.

"Am I to understand then—"

"That I will not sign one of those checks. Yes, understand that for your friend. You may kill me," she cried, "but you shall not touch a penny of Reuben Culwick's money."

CHAPTER XXIII.

Captain Peterson, merchant service, received the ultimatum of Miss Sarah Eastbell with his customary sang froid. He was a man whom it took a great deal to disturb, or who concealed his annoyance by an enviable semblance of imperturbability.

"After that, I need not trespass further on your time," he said. "I will communicate with Thomas at once."

He unlocked the door and went to the landing place beyond, closing and locking the door behind him. Finally he went down the rickety stairs, which were crumbling to pieces with the house, halted at the bottom of the next flight, and listened at the right-hand door, as though there were another prisoner close at hand. The door was not locked, and he opened it softly, and put his head into the room beyond, withdrawing it in silence, as if contented with what had met his gaze; and proceeding down another flight of stairs, to a room on the ground floor, where three tall men, in shirt sleeves, were covering before a fire. If these men were Petersons, Captain Edward had taken the good looks of the family to himself.

"You've done your parts well, boys," he said in a quick, sharp voice, "but there may be more to do."

"How's that?" inquired scoundrel number one; "we've done enough now to get ourselves lagged for ten years."

"It's not easy," said Peterson, "but it must be gone on with at any risk. Failure means Worcester jail, success means ten thousand pounds between us all."

He had mentioned fifteen thousand pounds upstairs, but he and Thomas Eastbell were keeping an extra five thousand to themselves. Edward Peterson

did not tell his brothers everything when money was in question.

"What more is to be done?" asked the first scoundrel, who was the worst-tempered and most disputatious member of the gang.

"You will know when it's necessary," was the short answer; "at present the young lady is refractory."

"Will the girl sign the check before the day is out? that's the question," asked number one, "for we can't go on like this."

"I have said that it's her money or her life, and I mean it! She will be back to-night at Sedge Hill, or she will never return again. Mark that. Do you think any woman would prefer to be found in the Severn, to paying away money that she can afford to part with?"

"We don't want to hear anything about the Severn," said the first scoundrel; "you know what's safe better than we do, but we'll have no hand in it. Dennis and I and Mike have talked it over, and won't go further than we've done already—there!"

"You fools, have I asked you?" shouted Peterson, springing to his feet; "you've done the work I've set you to do, and I will pay you for it and be rid of you. The money's safe, and I'll keep my word—as I always do, and always will. I don't want your help—you are in the way, and must go."

"Go!" echoed the men.

"This house will be unsafe after to-night, and we must vanish before it's spotted. I will be in London to-morrow evening, at the old place, with your money."

One by one these men drifted away from home, without a thought of Sarah Eastbell's safety, and with an immense amount of consideration for their own.

It was not murder that troubled their mind so acutely as complicity with it, detection, and sentence. If Ned would take all the risk, he might murder half Worcester for what they cared; but it was out of their line, and they would prefer to return to London as quickly as possible, and wait for the money that had been promised them, or the bad news they half expected instead. It was two o'clock in the afternoon before the last of the three men passed out of the house, and went away down the narrow lane which led from the high road.

Captain Peterson stood at the front door. He was in excellent spirits, and he waved his hand to the disputatious Barney, who was the last to leave, by way of friendly salutation at parting.

"They're gone," he muttered, "and they're better gone, whichever way this affair is likely to turn out."

He lingered at the door meditating on the great scheme of his life. The sky was overcast, and he looked up at it and prophesied to himself that it would rain before the morning. He walked round to the opposite-side of the house and gazed moodily at the water flowing twenty paces from him, and at a boat lying on the long grass above the river bank. One glance at the darkened window in the topmost story where his fortune lay, he thought, and then he returned to the house meditating on the difficulties in his way, and of his genius to surmount them. He went into the house, and up stairs to the first floor room, wherein he had seen him gaze with interest at an early hour of the morning.

"Beas," he said in a sharp voice, and at the summons a small thin-faced child, in a hat and cloak, appeared at the door.

"You have come back then, father."

"Yes."

Edward Peterson went downstairs, followed by the little girl. At the front door he said:

"You were wise to keep to your room to-day, little woman, for they have been very cross, and Mrs. Eastbell has been worse than ever. You must find your way to Worcester to-night, all by yourself. Two miles from here is a railway station—you know it, where the red and green lights shine out like big eyes after dark. You have run about here a good deal, and know your way well, and you can find the station. Now, take care of that money."

He placed some money in her hands, and she wrapped it up in a corner of a dirty white handkerchief, and tucked it down the bosom of her dress, wrapping her cloak round her afterward with all the carefulness and confidence of a woman.

"At the railway station ask for a third-class ticket for Worcester. When the train comes up to the platform, get in. When they call out 'Worcester,' get out. At Worcester a lady, very pretty, and with hands full of toys, will be waiting for you at the postoffice. Ask the way to the postoffice like a woman as you are, and when you see the lady under the clock, say, 'Pa keeps his word—I'm Beasie.'"

"All right," said the child again, with a rare amount of confidence in her own comprehension of the details, which, however, he asked her to repeat, listening attentively to the recital.

She needed no second bidding to be off—it had not been so happy a home that she should grieve for it or him, and there had been a promise of a glorious change for her, and a bright child-world. She ran off quickly toward the narrow lane, already full of shadow that murky afternoon.

(To be continued.)

They Are Sensitive.

The sensitiveness of the families of distinguished men as to the early occupations of their ancestors is somewhat remarkable. Recently an author was asked to write a brief history of the life of a man who had done service to his state. Like Lincoln, this man had been a woodchopper, a fact to which his historian gave prominence.

"Don't say he was a 'woodchopper,'" said the spokesman of the family. "That will never do."

"What shall I say then?" asked the author.

"Say—let me see now. Just say that he was connected with the lumber business."

Don't use your voice when hoarse.



Bell Boy (outside of room 55)—Say, the gas is escaping in there. Countryman (inside of room 55)—No, it ain't; I locked the door.—Ex.

Mother—Johnny Jones, did you get that awful cold out skating? Son—Mother, I think I caught it washing my face yesterday morning.—Judge.

Chumply—I don't know whether I ought to take your daughter from her father's roof. Her Father—She doesn't live on the roof.—Philadelphia Bulletin.

"I say, Broom!" "Call me by my whole name, if you please. It has a handle to it, and it was meant to be used, sir." "That's so. Well, Broom-handle, how are you?"

Curioso—Your name is Ephraim, is it? How'd your parents come to give you that name? Modestus—I don't know for certain, but I suspect it was because I was a boy.—Boston Transcript.

"Women claim that the way to get on with a man is to give him plenty of nicely cooked food." "Well," answered Sirius Barker, irritably, "why don't some of them try it?"—Washington Star.

A Great Debt: Bragg—I owe nothing to any man. Newitt—Oh, yes, you do. Bragg—No, sir; Newitt—Oh, yes. You owe an apology to every man who has to listen to you blow.—Philadelphia Press.

Improvement at the Gas Office: "Did you have any luck when you went to complain about the gas bill?" "Better luck than last month," answered Mr. Meekton; "the man didn't laugh this time."—Ex.

"Funny about Ralston wanting his former wife to get a divorce from her second husband so that they might get married again." "Not very. He's always been falling in love with other men's wives."—Ex.

Daily Guide to Flattery: If there is something on the table that the hostess knows is so badly cooked that she feels bored about it, ask for more and eat it with the greatest apparent relish.—Baltimore American.

"Have you any taste for Thackeray?" asked Mrs. Oldcastle. "No," I can't say that I have," replied her hostess; "is that anything like this paprika they're puttin' in everything now?"—Chicago Record Herald.

What he Would Rather Have Expressed Differently: Gushing Lady—Oh, but Mr. Jones, I should love to be beautiful—even if for only half an hour! Jones—Yes; but you wouldn't like the coming back again!—Punch.

Conductor—All aboard! Please get aboard quickly, Miss; the train is about to start. Young Lady—But I wish to kiss my sister good-by. Conductor—Get aboard, get aboard; I'll attend to that for you.—Yale Record.

How to Hold Actors: "It always makes me mad to talk to an actor. He pretends to listen politely, but his attention is wandering all the time. Ever notice it?" "No. I always talk to them about themselves."—Philadelphia Ledger.

Owner of Fishpond (to man who is trespassing)—Don't you see that sign, "No fishing here? Angler—Yes, and I dispute it. Why, there's good fishing here. Look at this basketful. The man must have been mad who put that board up.

Cholly—A fellow told me to-day that I didn't know enough to go in when it rained. Miss Sharp—And what did it say? Cholly—I assured him it was quite unnecessary, doncher know, because I nevah go out when it rains. Philadelphia Ledger.

"It was only five years ago that I started in with our firm at five dollars a week," said Bragg, "and now I earn fifty a week without any trouble." "That's so; it's easy to earn that," replied Newitt, "but how much do you get?"—Philadelphia Press.

Ida—I don't believe Mr. Smart believes my handkerchiefs are linen. May—Why not? Ida—I told him I had my pin money wrapped in my handkerchief and lost it. He said there was a great deal of money lost in cotton these days.—Chicago News.

Fond Mother—I don't know what to do. I want to send my daughter to college, and yet I don't want to send her into the world unprotected. Wise visitor, who has observed the daughter's disposition—You mean that it would be unkind to send her out into the unprotected world!

Never say again that a newspaper writer is not a master of diplomacy. One of the fraternities was to write up the history of an old lady of 98. He was told she had never so much as learned her letters. Did he blurt it out in print? Not a bit of it. He merely stated on his finely written article that "she can read the finest print as well as she ever could."

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Success.

Some people think success means simply to get rich. Others think it means merely to keep out of jail. One of these definitions is about as near correct as the other, says a philosopher.

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Sometimes we may learn more from a man's errors than from his virtues.—Longfellow.

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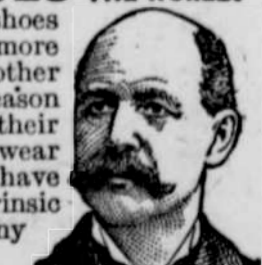
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