

Second Cousin Sarah

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

CHAPTER XXIII.—(Continued.)

It was dark when he returned to the house, and he closed the shutters and barred the door very carefully before he sat down by the fire to reflect upon his next step. He had been reflecting on that all day, without seeing his way too clearly to the results which he had set his heart—a large sum of money, and a new life abroad to enjoy it in.

He would not go upstairs yet awhile—another hour would be of advantage to him, and he must wait. The bank at Worcester was shut, and there would be no getting money till to-morrow morning—before that time came she would sign the check, and remain a prisoner in Jackson's button factory until time had been allowed for him to cash it. That was the end of the brilliant scheme which he had planned out like an artist.

Suddenly there was a violent knocking at the door, and Peterson sprang up, with his hand shaking on the back of the chair. He reached his hand toward the candle and extinguished the flame, as his first resource against an unseen enemy. Then he crept on tiptoe toward the door.

"Who's there?"

"Let me in."

"Tom Eastbell!" ejaculated Peterson. He opened the door, and dragged the applicant for admittance into the house by the collar of his coat—a man drenched to the skin by heavy rain.

"You muddler!" shouted Peterson; "why couldn't you stop at Sedge Hill? How dare you come intermeddling? Didn't you leave it all to me?"

"Here—let go my throat—let a fellow speak. What are you doing in the dark? Where are they all? Is Sarah here? Has she signed the check?"

Peterson released his hold and locked the front door again. Tom followed him into the room, and sat down shivering by the fire. His companion and adviser relighted the candle, and held it to his face.

"Why did you come?"

"For safety. Oh, Ned, I shall be hanged!" Tom cried. "The old woman is dead, and everybody thinks I have done it. Here's a blessed go for an innocent man! I never touched her, upon my soul; she died right off, bang, in the picture gallery, and it was nothing to do with me. I wouldn't have thought of such a thing."

"Dead? The old woman dead?" said Peterson, surprised again at this avowal. "Oh!—ugh!—yes," he said, shuddering more strongly. "Her eyes opened suddenly; Ned, and she was off. I shall never forget it. And then the beast of a woman, Hartley, came in when I screamed, and said that I had murdered her. I was talking her over to make a will, when she died—that's all. Oh! let's go to London."

"Tom," said Peterson with excitement, "you must go back. You must not leave everything to that Culwick. The old woman has died naturally—the doctor will prove that—and you have nothing to fear."

"Oh! haven't I? That's all you know about it."

"You accursed idiot! don't you see that you are rich?—that Sarah Eastbell was only between you and a colossal fortune?—and Sarah Eastbell is dead, too."

"Sarah dead, too!" screamed Tom Eastbell in his new excitement; "oh, don't say that. It can't be."

"Hush! Keep it quiet; it is an eternal secret between you and me; but she sprang out of the boat suddenly last night, they tell me, and was drowned. In a day or two they will find her in the Severn, and you will be heir-at-law."

"They'll say I killed the couple of them."

"Sarah ran away from home—everybody knows that—and came to harm by accident. There is nothing more natural."

"Poor Sally! She was a good sort," said Tom; "and she—she's dead, then. Thank goodness it was quite an accident—for nobody meant to kill her."

"Get back in haste—at any cost. Say you were distracted, and did not know what you were doing—that you have been in search of Culwick—or a doctor. Get back."

"Suppose they take me up for killing my grandmother; that's what I'm afraid of."

"Get back; you are safe. Get back, fool, to all that wealth."

Edward Peterson's excitement was greater than Thomas Eastbell's now. He thrust him from the house; he locked the door after him; he tottered back to the room.

Tom Eastbell would be rich—immensely rich—if his sister Sarah were removed from all the troubles of this world! Tom Eastbell in his power—at his mercy for many past offenses—a weak fool whom he could rule implicitly, and get money quickly by.

Then, with the light in his hand, he proceeded with a wonderful steadiness of step up the stairs. A strange specimen of a villain this—for he went into his daughter's room first, and said, "Poor Bees—you have gone for good then," and walked out again, and up the remaining flight, with a very sorrowful countenance. He drew the key from his pocket, unlocked the door, strode in, and then stopped suddenly—a man struck, as it were, into stone by his amazement.

The room was empty!

CHAPTER XXIV.
Reuben Culwick did not reach Sedge Hill till a late hour, when the blinds were down before every window of the great house. He did not dream of death at home while he had been abroad in pursuit of the living, and in the deep thought born of his baffled search, he strode up the broad garden path without being struck by the blank aspect of the mansion.

"How did it occur? Tell me everything?" he asked, as he went into the picture gallery, and Hartley followed him. The story was related, and he listened patiently. He heard of his aunt's death, and of Thomas Eastbell's flight—of the suspicion which attached to Thomas Eastbell until the doctor's arrival, and that gentleman's belief in the natural termination to the life and cares of the old lady—of the inquest which must follow her decease.

He walked up and down the great picture gallery in his old restless fashion, planning for the morrow. Suddenly he quitted the gallery, and went upstairs to Aunt Eastbell's room, at the door of which Hartley sat, as if the poor old woman needed protection still.

"Why are you waiting here now?" he asked the servant.

"If you please, sir, Mr. Thomas Eastbell has come back again. He has been looking for you, and for the doctor, he says—and I thought that I would sit here as usual."

"Where is the man?"

"In his own room, changing his clothes, which are wet."

"We will not disturb him. Have you my aunt's keys?"

There was a little lamp upon the bracket, and he passed into his aunt's bedroom, Hartley remaining at her post. It was a solemn moment in his life, which he remembers well. It was his last duty to the dead woman, and to the wishes of yesternight, before the tragedy of life fell on them like a pall.

He opened the iron box in which the will had been deposited, and where a glance assured him that it lay undisturbed, and then he closed and locked the box again, while the thought came to him that it might never be of use to Second-cousin Sarah.

"Has that man come back because he thinks so, too?" he muttered; "is it possible that this should be the end of my father's money—of yours, poor worn-out heart, that never was made happy by its acquisition? If I have done you wrong, old soul, I pray forgiveness now," he murmured.

"Amen," said a deep voice at his side, and he turned at the solemn response, for which he was unprepared. A thin woman, clad in shabby black, stood in the doorway looking at him.

"Lucy Jennings!" he exclaimed. "You telegraphed to me this morning," she said, advancing; "you asked me many questions, and I have come to answer them in person."

"It was kind of you, Lucy," he said, holding out his hand to her, "for I am in great trouble."

They went out of the room together. Reuben Culwick locked the door, and gave the key to Hartley, after which Lucy and he descended to the hall, Lucy calm and grave.

"What do you know of the Petersons? What became of them after leaving London?" asked Reuben eagerly; "have you a clew to their address?"

"I think I have."

"How did you find it?"

"Among my circle of penitents and of poor mortals struggling out of crime there are many links of life to the dark world. I found friends to help me at once. Patience. If Sarah Eastbell has been taken away by these Petersons, the clew to their haunt has been already pointed out."

"Heaven bless you, Lucy!"

"Probably I bring a blessing to you—it is in there."

She pointed to the door of the drawing room, and he said eagerly as he strode toward it:

"Sarah!"

"Not she. It is something you lost before your second-cousin, and took as much to heart in losing. It is something that changed you—and from which dated your hardness, and your suspicions of me—first of all. It may be your own flesh and blood, for what I know."

He left Lucy Jennings, and went with quick steps into the drawing room, where on the sofa lay a child asleep, a poorly clad little girl of five years old, with her hat lying by her side, and a tangled mass of fair, wavy curls thrust back from her face.

"Tots!" he cried in his astonishment. "I met her in the streets of Worcester, near the postoffice," said Lucy. "It was raining hard, and she was crying because a lady had not come to fetch her. Her father had sent her to Worcester, she said."

"Will she remember me?"

"It is unlikely—it is impossible."

"She was very young when she went away, poor Tots," said Reuben, sadly regarding her. "Yes, I suppose it is impossible."

"She came with me in all confidence. I told her that I would take her to her friends, and she believed me."

"You are very kind, Lucy," said Reuben. "How is it that you do me these good services, and yet dislike me so much?"

"I dislike the pride and anger in you," answered Lucy, "and they have turned me against you. I have had my great work to think of lately—not of the petty differences of eighteen months ago. See, the child is waking."

Reuben turned to the little girl, who had struggled into a sitting posture on the sofa, and was looking at them, all eyes—all blue eyes, too—as Tots had looked at him in Hope street, years ago.

"Tots," he said, advancing to her, "Tots, old lady—don't you know me?"

His manner was too impetuous, and his quick strides toward her were so symbolical of punishment for some offense which she in her ignorance had committed, that the child sprang up and ran to Lucy Jennings, burying her face in the skirts of her protector.

"The child is frightened of you," said Lucy, calmly; "let her be a while."

"Why, Tots, it's Uncle Roo," he cried, "old Uncle Roo—you know!"

The child still clung to Lucy's skirts, and would have none of his affection. He gave up, and walked away to the window.

"You see how this kind of love lasts," said Lucy bitterly, "and yet you value it so highly."

"Because it set a high value upon me," he answered quickly.

"It is dead."

"It will live again—it will come back."

"And if not," Lucy answered, "there is your second-cousin to console you."

The opening of the door cut short the clash of arms, and Thomas Eastbell advanced into the room with a forced and swaggering air. Tots clung still to the skirts of Lucy Jennings, with her face hidden in the folds.

"Oh! you're back," he said to Reuben; "of course you know what has happened since you've been away? I've been looking for you everywhere—I've been running after the doctors—if we had a plague in the house, I think people would stop in it more than they do," said Tom Eastbell. "Who's this?"

"My name is Jennings," said Lucy. "Oh! you're Jennings. I have heard of you, but I don't know that we have ever met before. May I ask what you want, marm, now you are here?" asked Thomas. "You'll excuse me, but since my grandmother's death and Sally's disappearance—and until Sally returns—I consider I am the head of this establishment."

"I am compelled to answer your question if this is a true statement," said Lucy.

"Yes, I should think you were. True indeed—that's a good one! Why, you don't know that my poor grandmother killed herself thinking about me," he said. "She was worried—she wanted to leave me all her money—and she died of disappointment because she hadn't time to finish her new will."

He addressed Lucy Jennings, but he was watching the effect of this announcement upon Reuben Culwick from the corner of his eyes.

"It is heaven's mercy that your grandmother died then," replied Lucy to him. "I have been making inquiries concerning you to-day, and I have heard of nothing to your advantage. You and one Edward Peterson were in this house, from which your sister has disappeared," said Lucy. "Among my congregation there were two or three who remembered the Petersons, and thought they could be traced. We are searching for them now under the name of Jackson."

Thomas Eastbell put one hand to his shirt collar; his throat had begun to swell suddenly, and he felt uncomfortable.

"Oh," he said, "if that's it you're on a wrong track."

Tots had looked round at the sound of his voice some moments since, but he had not noticed her till then, and then his voice utterly deserted him, and his eyes protruded in amazement. He did not ask any further questions of Miss Jennings. The child belonged to Edward Peterson. He and his wife had the charge of her once, and grown tired of her, and lost her in a Chamberwell back street, where Reuben had found her; and Edward Peterson had discovered her a year or so afterward, and taken her from the Jenningses; but he could not stop to explain that now.

A few days ago that child was at Jackson's button factory, and she must have come to Sedge Hill with the news. He was caught in a trap again. He knew it had not been safe to return, but that fool Peterson had persuaded him into a line by degrees; everything might have been discovered, for what he knew to the contrary. He must "cut it" at any risk.

He went into the passage and closed the door behind him. He took down a hat from the tree in the hall and put it on. It was Reuben's hat, and went over his eyes, and was altogether a bad fit; but the sooner he was off the better, and where he had put his own hat he could not recollect in the present confusion of his faculties.

He went on tiptoe to the front door, and drew back the heavy bolts and the big lock. He opened the door and let in the wind and rain—and Sarah Eastbell!

Yes, it was his sister, with a shawl over her hair, and her face, white and wild, peering from it. She had come back—she knew all—he was done for!

"Tom, you villain!" she shrieked forth, at first sight of him.

Thomas Eastbell went down on his knees at the same moment as Reuben came from the drawing room.

"Oh, Reuben! take care of me," Sarah murmured, as she went fearlessly to the friendly shelter of his arms; "I have no one else."

"She could never take care of herself," muttered the inflexible Lucy, as she followed Reuben Culwick into the hall.

It was as Mary Holland had said, and Sarah Eastbell was back in her own house.

(To be continued.)

His Explanation.
Why are people who buy gold bricks invariably farmers?" asked the man who assumes superiority.

"I dunno," answered Mr. Cornstossel, "unless it's because farmers are the only folks nowadays who have money enough to make it worth while for sharpers to bother with 'em."—Washington Star.

Almost Right.
"What do you know about this case?" asked the lawyer.

"Nothing," replied the witness. "I'm the expert."

Subsequently his testimony proved conclusively that he knew less than nothing.—Chicago Tribune.

A Suspense.
She—You didn't stay long in London. He—No, I couldn't stand it. Over there everybody knew me for an American right away. Here, in New York, no one ever suspects it.—Smart Set.



He—Why does this theater have its orchestra concealed? She—Why? Just wait until you hear it play.

Teacher—Where was the Declaration of Independence signed? Tommy At the bottom.—Chicago Daily News.

Wantanno—Why do you call that boy of yours "Finnel"? Duzno—Because he just naturally shrinks from washing.

Editha—I wonder why the dudes wear one eyeglass? Deborah—To prevent seeing more than they are able to comprehend.

"Ma, is there any pie left in the pantry?" "There is one piece, but you can't have it." "You are mistaken, ma; I've had it."

Pond Parent—I understand the faculty are very much pleased with your work. Dropped Junior—Yes, they endorsed my sophomore year.

Old Grim—Remember, young man, there is always room at the top. Young Sprawley—Oh, I know that; I'm waiting for the elevator now.—Judge.

Lord Littlecash (lovingly)—You are my soul. Editha—Yes; I told papa that. "Oh, what did he say?" "Said you didn't earn enough to keep your soul and body together."

Nurse—Johnny, stop asking your father so many questions. Don't you see it annoys him? Johnny—Why, nurse, it's not the questions that make him angry; it's because he can't answer them.

A husband said to his wife: "I dreamed last night that I caught a man running away with you." "What did you say?" she asked. "I wanted to know what he was running for," replied the husband.

Mrs. Closefast—Oh, do buy me a new bonnet, my dear. It will set all my friends talking. Closefast—If you're after notoriety, why don't you get the old one retimmed? That will make your friends talk twice as much.

"I see that choice Bengal tigers have been marked down to \$100 each." "For goodness' sake, don't let my wife read that paragraph. Here's my knife. Cut it out. If those tigers are on the bargain counter she'd want at least two."

He (bitterly)—If I were rich you'd marry me fast enough! She—Don't, Gustie, don't! Such devotion breaks my heart! He—What do you mean? She—Often you have praised my beauty, but never before my common sense!

"Hello, Freddie! Are you playin' robber?" "Playin' nuthin'. This is the real thing. I'm waitin' for the cook, an' when she comes she'll tell where she hides the pies, or I'll know the reason why."—New York Evening Journal.

"John," asked the lawyer's wife, who had recently taken up the health culture fad, "is it best to lie on the right side or the left side?" "My dear," replied the legal luminary, "if one is on the right side it isn't usually necessary to lie at all."

Mrs. Youngwed—You know Uncle Pincher said he was going to send us something that would help us save our coal bills this year? Well, it came. Mr. Youngwed—Really? A stock of coal? Mrs. Youngwed—No. A little arrangement for filling bills.

He (as they were seated in a quiet nook near the links)—Are you quite sure we have never met before this season? She—Yes; quite positive. He—And you haven't a sister? She—No; why do you ask? He—Well, I'm positive I hugged that blouse before, somewhere.

Call a girl a chick, and she smiles; call a woman a hen, and she howls. Call a young woman a witch, and she is pleased; call an old woman a witch, and she is indignant. Call a girl a kitten, and she rather likes it; call a woman a cat, and she'll hate you. Queer sex, isn't it?—Chicago News.

Burglar—Gimme yer jewels! Lady of the House—Did you shut the window after you? Are you sure you wiped your feet? What did you do with that burnt match? Did—Burglar—Er—I—I guess I forgot it. Don't say another word, ma'am, an' I'll go right out.—Chicago News.

"Did I understand you to say that you didn't have any company in the kitchen while I was out, Katie?" "Yis, mum, that's what I said." "But I smell the tobacco from a pipe all through the house." "Yis, mum; the policeman was in for half an hour, mum, but we were in the drawing-room."

Economical: First farmer—Did they hev fire-escapes at the hotel where ye slept, Zeke? Second farmer—No, but it was the most economical tavern I ever seen. First farmer—In what way, Zeke? Second farmer—Why, they had a rope hanging in every room, so that you could commit suicide without wastin' the gas.—Philadelphia Telegraph.

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Laxative doses of Ayer's Pills each night greatly aid the Sarsaparilla.

Meant What It Said.
Mr. Leighton has none of the spirit of a bargain-hunter, and Mrs. Leighton decided that to have him accompany her on one of her Monday expeditions was more of a trial than a pleasure, in spite of his capabilities as bundle-carrier.

"Edward, I wish you would look at that golf vest and see if you don't think it is exactly, in every particular, like the one we saw at Brown's. That was only \$3.75, and this is \$4.25. I'm sure I don't know what they mean by calling these bargains," said Mrs. Leighton.

"I can't see that it says they are bargains on that placard," said Mr. Leighton, in an uncomfortably clear tone. "It says, 'These goods are being sold regardless of cost,' and probably they are, my dear."

A Heart Story.
Folsom, S. Dak.—In these days when so many sudden deaths are reported from Heart Failure and various forms of Heart Disease, it will be good news to many to learn that there is a never failing remedy for every form of Heart Trouble.

Mrs. H. D. Hyde, of this place, was troubled for years with a pain in her heart which distressed her a great deal. She had tried many remedies but had not succeeded in finding anything that would help her until at last she began a treatment of Dodd's Kidney Pills and this very soon relieved her and she has not had a single pain or any distress in the region of the heart since. She says: "I cannot say too much in praise of Dodd's Kidney Pills. They are the greatest heart medicine I have ever used. I was troubled for over three years with a severe pain in my heart, which entirely disappeared after a short treatment of Dodd's Kidney Pills."

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