Libby, the Unloved

I.

Libby Anderson hung the dishcloth on its accustomed nail, and stood there surveying it. It was plain, from the way she looked, that she had determined to speak.

"Ma," she asked of the woman who was sitting before the little round stove, "what were those papers Dave put in his pocket as I came in?"

"Some things he was showin' me."

"Ma," she asked quiveringly, "you didn't sign anything, did you?"

"I didn't sign your name to anything." And the needles clashed again.

She knew her mother too well to press further.

"I just couldn't understand Dave coming here this time of year," she ventured; "and I thought he acted queer."

The old woman was folding her knitting.

"I'm going to bed, and you'd better come along, too," was her reply.

A week went by, and although Libby had twice forgotten to feed the chickens, and had several times let the kettle burn dry, she was beginning to feel more settled in her mind.

She did up the work one morning, and went to town.

Her first call was at the solicitor, and there she heard the worst. Ma had assigned their home to Dave. She did not make any fuss; she was too old-fashioned for hysterics.

It was not until the old place came in sight that she broke down.

"It's not fair," she cried out, "when I've stayed here and worked—it's not fair!" And, for the first time in many years, she was crying—passionately crying.

It was a feeling of outraged justice that made her speak, for she was just a woman—the daughter of pa.

"Ma," she said, "do you think pa would like to think of your assigning the place to Dave, when I've stayed here and kept it up the best I could for twenty years?"

The old woman put down her knitting.

"La, now, Libby," she said, not unkindly, "don't take on. You'll never want for nothin'!"

Libby stood there looking at her.

"I think you don't realize what you've done," she said; and turned to the bedroom to take off her things.

It was not until the next month, the blustering month of March, that all was made clear. It was early in the afternoon when Libby looked from the window and saw a man coming in at the big gate.

"That friend of Dave's from the city is coming ma," she said.

"Gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Anderson, "and such a day as 'tis!"

The stranger warmed his hands, and disbursed a number of pleasantries.

"Well, Mrs. Anderson," he said finally, "your son wants me to make a little proposition to you."

Mrs. Anderson looked pleasantly expectant.

"Dave's always makin' propositions," she chuckled.

"He's been a good deal worried about you this winter—afraid you were not just comfortable out here—you two, all alone."

"Dave's always thinkin' of his mother's comfort," she asserted; and looked triumphantly over to Libby.

"Well," he resumed, turning back to the older woman, "it worries Dave to think of your being out here alone now that you're getting along in years, so he's rented a nice little place in town, and he feels sure it would be better all round if you'd just go in and take it."

"If that ain't for all the world like Dave!—always some new idea in his head. But you just tell him, Mr. Murray, not to be bothering. We don't want to move to town—do we Libby?"

"Not if we can help it," she replied.

"Dave's been away from the place so long that he don't see just how 'tis," ma explained. "Libby and me wouldn't feel at home no place else."

"It's too bad you feel that way," he went on persuasively, "for Dave was so sure you'd like the idea that he's gone ahead and made all arrangements, and I'm afraid there might be a little trouble about unmaking them."

He turned to Libby.

"How soon do you think you could move? By the 1st of May?"

"I suppose so," she answered, in a dull voice.

II.

April came, and for the fiftieth time the old woman watched the white give way to the green on the hills that curved in and out around her old home.

As long as she could, Libby let her have her dream. Her heart was not hard towards ma now. Ma had not understood. And Libby was glad she could have those few spring days before she was torn from the old home.

"Ma," she began one morning, "I think I will have to be packing up this week."

"Packing up what?"

"Why, don't you remember, ma, we're going to town the 1st of May?"

"Oh, la, Libby, I've give that up long ago! I'm going to die on the old place."

"But you know, ma, the arrangements have all been made. I'm afraid we'll have to go."

She turned to her crossly.

"There's no use to argue wi' me, Libby Anderson. I ain't goin'!"

"But what about Dave?"

"You can jest write Dave, and say his mother don't want to leave the place. Dave won't have nothin' further to say."

She looked off at the meadowland as if it were all settled. Libby would have to tell her.

"Ma," she said, "it's no use to write to Dave."

"Why not?" she demanded, in a half-frightened, half-aggressive voice.

"He's sold the place, ma!"

"What's that you say? Something about Dave selling my place? Are you gone crazy, Libby?"

"You know you deeded it to him, ma. It was his after you did that. And he's sold it, and we'll have to move out."

Hearing no answer, she turned around, and it was then she coveted Dave's gift of saying things smoothly. The old woman was crouched low in her chair, and her face was quivering, and looked sunken and grey.

"I didn't think he'd do that," she faltered.

"Never mind, ma," Libby said awkwardly. "Poor ma!"

It was the nearest to a caress that had passed between them since Libby was a little girl.

Nothing more was said until after ma had gone to bed. Libby supposed she was asleep, when she called quaveringly to her.

"Libby," she said, "you mustn't be thinkin' hard of Dave. He must have thought it for the best."

Libby was used to caring for ma, and she needed care now.

"Yes, ma," she answered; "I'm sure he must."

It was not until the morning of the fourth day that the silence between them was broken. Libby got up to take down the clock, when she heard a strange noise behind her, and turning, she saw that ma's head was down low in her hands, and she was rocking passionately back and forward, and crying as though her old heart had bro'en.

She put down the clock, and again she wished for a little of Dave's silkiness of speech. But she did not have it, and the best she could do was to pull ma's chair out from the barren room into the sunshine of the porch. The hills, she thought, would still look like home.

Ma did not get up at all next day. Perhaps she was ill, or perhaps it was only that she did not want to go out in the sitting-room and see how unlike home it looked. But the next day she did not get up either, and then Libby went to town for the doctor. He said the excitement had weakened her, and did not seem very certain she would ever get up again. That night Libby wrote a letter to Dave, asking him again to let his mother die on the old place. A week passed, and an answer had not come, and still ma had not left her bed. The packing was all done, it was the 1st of May, and she was just waiting—she did not know for what.

Her whole soul rose up against moving ma from the old place now, when her days were so surely numbered; and so she sent a telegram to Dave, telling him his mother was ill, and asking leave to stay a little longer. There came a reply from his partner, saying that Dave was away, and would not be home for two weeks.

That night the old woman raised herself and sobbed out the truth.

"It's Dave that's killin' me! It's to think Dave sold the place, and turned me out to die!"

And then the way opened before Libby, and she saw her path.

The disinherited child wrote a letter that night, and to it she signed her brother's name. Out in the world they might have applied to it an ugly word, but Libby was only caring for ma. She was a long time about it, for it was hard to put things in Dave's round, bold hand, and it was hard to say them in his silky way.

The doctor said next morning that it was a matter of but a few days at most, for ma was much worse.

"It ain't that I'm goin' to die," she said, when Libby came in and found her crying; "but I was thinkin' of Dave. I keep thinkin' and thinkin' of him when he was a little boy, and how he used to run about the place, and how pretty he used to look; and then, just as I begin to take a little comfort in rememberin' some of the smart things he said, I have to think of what he has done, and it does seem like he might have waited till——" But the words were too bitter to be spoken, and, with a hard, scraping sound in her throat, she turned her face to the wall.

Libby put her hand to something in her pocket, and thought of last night's work with thankfulness.

About eleven o'clock she entered the room with the sheets of a letter in her hand.

"Ma," she said tremulously, "there's a letter just come from Dave."

"I knew it'd come—I knew it!" And the old voice filled the room with its triumphant ring. Then there crept into her face an anxious look. "What does he say?"

"He's sorry about selling the place, ma. He really thought you'd like it better in town. But he's fixed it up for us to stay. He says you'll never have to leave the place."

"I knowed it—I knowed it well enough! You don't know Dave like I do. But read me the letter."

She did read it, and the old woman listened with tears—glad tears now—falling over her withered cheeks.

"You can just unpack our things," she cried, when it was finished, "and get this place straightened out. The idea of your packin' up, and thin' we was goin' to move to town! Nice mess you've made of it! Jest as if Dave would hear of us leavin' the place. I always knowed you'd never 'preciated Dave."

Before morning broke ma was dead. Happy, because she had back her old faith in Dave—the blind, beautiful faith of the mother in the son. And Libby—the homeless and unloved Libby—was happy too, for she had finished well her work of caring for ma.

JAPANESE JUGGLER.

A Wizard's Wonderful Feats of Legerdemain.

With thumbs tightly bound together Ten Ichi performs a wonderful trick, says a writer in the London Mail. Two members of the audience, chosen at random, are summoned on to the platform, where they superintend the task of binding the wizard's thumbs as tightly together as they possibly can with strong cord. Some plain hoops are the only other implements used in this trick. Standing four yards from Ten Ichi, a Japanese lad tosses the hoops in the air, and as he does so the "Mikado juggler," as Ten Ichi is called, catches them one on each arm, so that they pass through his bound thumbs and fall just above the elbow. With thumbs still securely bound, he stretches out his arms to the audience, and at a glance it is seen that the cord has not been tampered with.

In order to prove that no underhand methods are made use of in this trick, the mystifying little wizard requests the members of the audience who are on the platform to clench their fists together as tightly as possible, and on no account to allow them to become unfastened. Then, with thumbs still tightly bound, he advances towards them, and with a rapid movement performs with his bound hands what the hoops performed on him; that is to say, he apparently passes his arms right through the clenched fists until they rest on the arms of the wondering novices.

Another feat is performed with a bowl of flowers, a sword, a fan and two Japanese boys, from which are produced four ready-made fountains. For, with a wave of his hand, from the blade of the sword spurts forth a leaping flood of water, another mystic wave, and from the top of the head of one there springs another fountain, and so on. While on being handed a cup and saucer, the wizard puts those homely articles to novel use, for no sooner does he wave his hand again over the cup than there bursts forth still another fountain. Then two lighted torches are handed to him, but they too, from the midst of the flames, send forth another "waterspout."

CONAN DOYLE'S FIRST CASE.

Sir Conan Doyle, on being asked why he gave up the practice of medicine, replied that it was too hard work, and related the following story. The doctor's first call took place on a cold January midnight.

The jangle of the door-bell woke me from a sound sleep, and shivering and yawning, I put my head out of the window and said:

"Who's there?"

"Doctor," said a voice, "can you come to Peter Smith's house at once? His youngest girl has took a dose of laudanum by mistake for paregoric, and we're afraid she'll die."

"All right; I'll come," I said.

I dressed and tramped three miles through the cold and the wet to Smith's. Twice on the way I fell on the icy pavement, and once my hat blew off, and I was half an hour finding it. Finally I reached Smith's. The house was dark—shutters all closed—not a light. I rang the bell. No answer. At last a head stuck itself gingerly out of the window in the third story.

"Be you Doctor Doyle?" it said.

"Yes, let me in."

"Oh, no need to come in, doctor," said the head. "Child's all right. Sleeping quiet."

"But how much laudanum did you give it?"

"Only two drops, doctor. Not enough to hurt a cat. Guess I better take my head in now. Night air is cold. Sorry to have troubled you."

I buttoned up my coat and turned homeward, trying to stifle my anger. Suddenly the window was raised again and the same voice cried:

"Doctor! I say, doctor!"

I hurried back. Perhaps the child had taken a turn for the worse.

"Well, what do you want?" I said.

The voice made answer:

"Ye won't charge nothing for this visit, will ye?"

CONFESSIONS ARE BOGUS

MEN MAKE THEM TO GAIN NOTORIETY.

And in the Hope of Escaping Severe Punishment for Crime.

It sometimes pays a man to confess to a crime which he could not possibly have committed. So well has this fact been recognized, that Scotland Yard receives scores of bogus confessions immediately following any mystery which may attract public attention. It is not generally known that after the acquittal of Henry Buckley, who was charged with the shooting of two gamekeepers on Marsden Moor last year, the authorities received no fewer than five confessions, of which two were made by soldiers, says London Answers.

It is a curious fact that the majority of bogus confessions come from men in the Army with bad records. Among these it is recognized as a sure way of escaping the more severe punishment of the military authorities, and is often accompanied with no little monetary advantage.

THE PEASENHALL STORY.

Within one month three soldiers at Dover have confessed to crimes which have either never been committed, or with which they could have had no connection. The most remarkable is the confession of Artilleryman Taylor made a few weeks ago. The soldier was at the time undergoing imprisonment in the military prison, and became a victim to melancholia. One day he sent for Major Daniels, and, declaring that the murder had preyed on his mind so that he could not keep silent no longer, he volunteered the confession of being guilty of the Peasenhall murder, for which the local preacher, Gardiner, had been twice tried and acquitted. Superintendent Staunton, who has been throughout connected with the case, was sent for, and then it was, in the course of a searching cross-examination, that Taylor's confession was proved to be utterly false.

Another Dover soldier, a few weeks before, confessed himself guilty of a crime in Yorkshire. His was successful, for he was taken from the prison and sent to the place, where he stayed whilst the matter was investigated. Of course, nothing was known of the crime, nor was there an atom of fact in the soldier's story.

OUTWITTED THE POLICE.

One hundred pounds was netted by a couple of men who "faked" a confession to a murder committed in Melbourne, just five years ago. That was the amount offered for the discovery of the criminal, and full particulars of the crime were sent to England, whither it was believed the murderer had fled. These two men, Gordon and Hemmings, arranged a cute plan for getting the money. Gordon took what purported to be a dying confession by Hemmings to the police, but refused to hand it over until the reward was paid. Thereupon Hemmings was visited by an officer, was found in bed with every symptom of illness, and bore examination astonishingly well. The Melbourne authorities were wired for instructions, and a return cable approved, among other things, the payment of the reward. Gordon got the money, and an officer stayed by Hemmings in the hope of his recovery. Then one morning the dying man had disappeared, and nothing has since been heard of the pair.

A bogus confession is frequently made as a dodge to draw the detective investigation a case off the real trail. This was so in the notorious Brixton coining raid. Mellor got an inkling that his premises were being closely watched, and that a raid was contemplated. He went boldly to the police, and confessed that he was coining, but at quite another address, giving a house at Dalston. Of course, he was arrested, and the house, which proved to be his private residence, searched, but nothing of importance was found. Meanwhile, the Brixton premises were cleared by the gang of which he was leader. At the next hearing of the case, when the result of the inquiries was reported, Mellor admitted he had made a bogus confession through the nervousness and worry he had endured by the watchings of the police. It is highly probable that he would have been released, if one of the gang had not had the misfortune to be caught on another charge while the case was in hand, and turned King's evidence.

A "RIPPER" INCIDENT.

There were two confessions sent to Scotland Yard at the time of the "Ripper" crimes in the East End of London. One of them came from a seaman awaiting trial on another serious offence of which he was actually guilty. His confession was made following the third of the Whitechapel murders. It occupied three pages of foolscap, written in a rough scrawling hand, and related with surprising consistency to movements of the author on the night of the crime. But this very consistency was his pitfall. The offence for which he was awaiting trial was committed at the same time as he gave for the murder, so that if his confession was true he could not have been guilty of the other crime. So the police ignored his papers, and proceeded with the original charge against him. When he found that this plan had failed, he admitted that he had resorted to this dodge in the hope of being discharged on the real count, and then, confident that he could free himself later of the murder charge, entirely escape.

THE ARTFUL EMIGRANT.

It will be remembered that during the South African war a Manchester man named Perris won considerable notoriety by surrendering himself to the police, and confessing to having killed a man in Johannesburg two years previously. The story of the crime, as related by him, was very dramatic, and bore every appearance of being genuine. The Johannesburg authorities were cabled to, and such a crime was found to have been actually committed. They knew nothing of the man who had confessed, nor had they any clue to the murderer. After a fortnight the self-accused man was sent to Africa, accompanied by a detective. This was just what he had desired, and though he discreetly kept to his story for a few days after his arrival at Johannesburg, he ultimately admitted that he had only read of the crime in the papers, and made the confession in order to get to the Colony.

WHY SPINKS LEFT.

It was dark and the road was uncertain, so, when my horse balked at something in the middle of the road, I dismounted and proceeded to investigate. At the first glance I took the object to be a woman, but as I untangled the sheet in which the body was wrapped, a weak, masculine voice whined:—

"Don't hit a man when he's down."

"Here, get up," said I, shaking him, thinking it was simply a case of drunk.

He sat up and glanced around nervously.

"Has the widder gone?" he whispered.

"There was no one here when I arrived," I answered. "What is the trouble?"

"I wuz playing a joke on the widder. Ye see, 'bout two years ago Ole Bill Spinks turned up his toes, leastwise he never came back after leavin' home one day; an' yere's his widder a refusin' ter git spliced agin' 'cause she's afraid thet he might come back agin, seein' how thet she is not sure whether he is dead or not. An' this yere widder has got fifteen acres an' a dawg. So I jes thought thet I would play a joke on the widder, an' make her believe that Bill wuz dead all right enough, an' then she'd be reddy ter get spliced, an' I would be the happy man.

"Wul, I put on this yere sheet and waited fer the widder ter come along; wul, when she did, I stepped out in the road an' commenced greanin'.

"'W-ho-o-o be-e y-e-e?' she chattered.

"'I'm yer ole man,' says I, in a hollow voice.

"'Humph! Ole Bill Spinks?' says she.

"'I'm the critter,' says I.

"Then she fell on me like a ton of bricks!

"'Come back, hev ye?' she yelled, as she swatted me. 'Can't stay where they planted ye, wharever thet may be!'

"In jes five seconds I wuz a licked man, and the widder wuz settin' on me.

"'You, Bill,' said she, 'whar's thet dollar and a-half thet I give ye ter buy bacon with?'

"'I ain't got no dollar and a-half,' says I.

"'Don't ye lie ter me, Bill,' says she, 'or I'll swat ye agin! When ye left home ye had a dollar and a-half thet I had given ye ter buy bacon with. Now ye hand over thet dollar and a-half or somethin' is gwine ter happen!'

"'An' I had ter give it to her to save my life. An' then she told me ter get back inter the grave thet I had come from, an' if she ever caught me tryin' ter hant her agin thet she would tie me inter knots an' fling me ter the dawgs!

"But I've found out one thing. I know why Ole Bill Spinks left, an' why he ain't never comin' back agin!"

PRACTICING MEDICINE AT 90.

Longevity of Irishmen is proverbial, but even in that country for a doctor to be in practice at the age of 90 is unique. Dr. Woods of Birr has the distinction, and at the last meeting of the district board of guardians it was decided to grant him a full superannuation allowance. Popular with his parents, whom he visited on a bicycle, the venerable practitioner strenuously objected to retiring when the proposal was first brought forward. He urged that he was willing and able to earn his salary, and did not wish to take money from the public that he did not earn.

LIFTING AN OPERA HOUSE.

Thirty men have accomplished in Pittsburg the feat of moving a weight of 4,992,000 lb., a distance of 22 feet. They have lifted the Grand Opera House of the city off its foundation, moved it forward 22 feet, and planted it on a new base. It required less than thirty-six hours to accomplish the job, and one could not see the structure moving. In this colossal building were the largest theatre in Pittsburg, the largest billiard and pool room in the United States, a bowling alley, a barbers shop, and various other establishments, yet the whole massive fabric has been transplanted without accident, without jar, and without even the slightest injury to any part of it.