

MISS TWITTER'S CONSPIRACY

Years ago I had a young person in my employ named Annabel Brown. The Brown was not, of course, surprising in a parlor-maid, but the Annabel was, and the more so when the cook made Hannibal of it, who I need not remark was a gentleman and a general. For my part, I would not encourage such a name at all in one in her position, but called her plain "Annie," with which she was quite content. She was an orphan; but I had known both her parents, and very honest, good folks they were, with plenty of common-sense too, so that it could not have been they, but her "godfather and godmother in her baptism," as the service says, who gave her such an outlandish name—for Christian I can't call it. She was a modest girl, who, if she had a fault in dress, was given to extreme simplicity; indeed, some of my visitors used to say: "So you have got a Quakeress, I see;" which, of course ridiculous, for though one does not want one's servants to be chatterboxes, one likes one's questions to be answered by something more than "Yes" or "No," to which, I believe, the vocabulary of the Friends is limited. Moreover, though I am not a great lady, nor anything like it, it was not likely I should permit my parlor-maid to "thou" and "thee" me, and far less my guests. However, what with the meekness of her manners and the simplicity of her attire, Annabel Brown might have sat for Mrs. Fry, supposing that good lady to have ever been eighteen and a beauty. Annie had brown hair, very silken and plentiful; large brown eyes like those of a gazelle; and a soft, rather alarmed expression of face, which, if it did not suggest modesty, was the most hypocritical mask that ever woman wore. Her movements were quick, but noiseless; and altogether she reminded one of a mouse. Like a mouse, however, she was not as regards purloining, even so much as a rind of cheese. I could have trusted her with untold gold; and when I had a new bonnet or other piece of finery, I felt as certain that Annabel Brown would never try them on even, to see how she looked in my cheval-glass, as though I had kept them under lock and key. Finally and above all she had no followers; or, at all events, they followed her at a distance that they never came within view of my windows, and I have pretty long sight for such gentry.

I need not say that Annie was a constant church-goer, and as sure as Sunday came round, always went "to hear the Word" (that was her phrase, though she was by no means a pharisee) twice a day, whether it was wet or fine. In the evenings she never went out, not even on week-days, which itself spoke volumes in her praise. She had no friends in town, she said, in explanation of this phenomenon. She was the only maid I ever had who never asked leave to pass an evening with her "friends" or "cousins." Well, being such a pattern of propriety, you may imagine my astonishment on seeing her come home from church one day accompanied by a young man, who left her at the front door (my area gate is always locked on Sunday) with a bow that would not have disgraced Lord Chesterfield.

Though a fine morning, it had turned out wet, and I noticed, with a little distress of mind, that the umbrella which he was holding over her with much apparent solicitude was a handsome silk one; the man himself, too, had an alarmingly genteel appearance. I made sure that Annie would explain this unprecedented circumstance without any inquiry on my part; and when some hours passed without her doing so, the matter appeared to me all the graver.

Accordingly, at night, when she was assisting me in my room, I broached the subject myself.

"Annie," I said, "I was very much surprised to see you come home from church this morning accompanied by a stranger. How did that happen?"

"Well, ma'am, it was very wet," returned she (with a simplicity that would have quite disarmed me, even if I had entertained any indignation against her, which I did not; I only felt angry with the man), "and as I had no umbrella, the gentleman, who was at church himself, kindly offered to see me home."

"Annie," said I solemnly, "do not imagine that men—and especially gentlemen—only go to church as you do, to say their prayers. I once heard a great preacher, Mr. Spurgeon, divide 'church-goers' into a number of classes, some of which were of a very unsatisfactory sort. Among others there was the 'umbrella Christian,' as he termed it—the man who goes into a church merely to save his hat or get out of the rain."

"But please, ma'am, this gentleman had an umbrella," observed Annabel Brown.

I thought it rather pert, and very unlike herself, that she should argue with me on this matter, but still I was determined not to lose my temper.

"In this particular case that may have been so," I said; "but he might have gone to church with a wrong motive, for all that. To my eyes he did not look a suitable person for a young woman in your position to be walking with. He left you at the front door, and he may have been mistaken at your condition in life. Did you inform him of it?"

"No, ma'am,"

Next Sunday was a fine one, and yet, if you will believe me, Annie came home again escorted by that very man! I had gone to church myself, and returned, as usual, some minutes after her; but cook informed me—with rather a malicious grin, I thought—that such had really been the case. I had not put the question; I had merely asked whether Annie had come in, feeling pretty sure, however, that she had, and was gone up stairs to take off her things, which was the case.

"Oh! yes, ma'am, she 'avo come come in. I only wonder her friend didn't come in with her, he seemed so very much attached."

"What friend?" asked I, with assumed indifference.

"Oh! pray, ma'am, don't ask me; Hannibal, I know, is such a pattern! Otherwise I should have said as 'ow he was a follower."

"And what sort of a man was he, cook?"

"Oh! quite the gentleman to look at; fine feathers make fine birds to them as can see no further." And cook looked as if she could see a great deal further, and, amongst other things, the house robbed, and her mistress's throat cut, in no distant perspective.

But I did not fear for anything, except upon Annie's account, and resolved at once to give her a good "talking to."

"Now, my good girl," said I, having summoned her into the drawing room, "this matter must be put a stop to at once. I will not have that man come to this house again. Don't say 'What man?' because you know who I mean perfectly well. I mean the umbrella-man."

"Please, ma'am, he had no umbrella to-day."

She was so simple that I felt quite ashamed of being angry with her.

"Umbrella or not," said I, "he shall not come here. A man without a name—and with much too good an address—is perfectly scandalous."

"Please, ma'am, his name is Trevelyan."

"Then that is much too good for you," answered I. "You have a nice manner and appearance of your own, and they have evidently deceived him; and no good can come of such a misunderstanding to either of you. Do you understand me?"

"Mr. Trevelyan knows, ma'am, that I am but a servant," observed Annabel gently, and with a little blush.

"Then the more shame for him," said I sharply. "Mind, from this moment, you never walk with him, or you leave my service."

Annabel Brown lowered her head in respectful assent; she would have said "Yes, ma'am," if she could, but the tears were falling fast down her pretty cheeks. I was very sorry for her, and did not relent.

The next Sunday she came home alone. She had been very depressed throughout the week, but going to church seemed to have done her good, for she looked much more cheerful. My impression was that she had seen him, and got rid of him; and in doing so, had discovered the wisdom of such a proceeding. He had shown his hand—with the false cards in it—and she knew him for a cheat and a deceiver, and was glad to have escaped tolerably heart-whole.

She was not so much to be pitied, however, after all, my gentle reader, as you will hear; so please to reserve your compassion for the person who really suffered. Mr. Trevelyan at once proceeded to transfer his attentions to me.

The very next morning, Annie, looking rather white, but quite as usual, brought up a card into the drawing-room. "This gentleman wishes to see you for a few minutes, if you are disengaged, ma'am."

"Mr. Arthur Trevelyan!" exclaimed I, reading the printed name; "why, that's never your Mr. Trevelyan."

She was about to say "Yes, ma'am," but putting on what was for her a bold face, answered, "Well, I hope he will be mine, ma'am."

The next moment he was in the room, and Annie had shut the door, leaving me alone with this Don Giovanni. I am bound to say he was a very good-looking, gentlemanly person, and with anything but an impudent air.

"I have ventured to call upon you, madame, with relation to Annabel Brown, who is, I believe, at present your parlor-maid."

"Well, sir," said I, very stiff and formal.

"I thought it would be only courteous to let you know that she would be leaving you, probably before the month is up, in order to become my wife. If, as she says, you forbid us to meet, I shall take her even earlier; as I find it impossible to exist without her society—at all events on Sundays."

do so. The chief object of my calling upon you was, indeed, to request a personal favor in connection with our approaching nuptials. Annabel tells me that she has neither father nor mother, nor, indeed any friend in London except yourself."

"That certainly was my belief," said I, "until lately."

Mr. Trevelyan only smiled at this significant reply.

"Well, madam, this being so, and you having reason, I believe, to be satisfied with Annabel as to her moral qualities, I come to ask of you the great favor of your giving her away at the altar."

"I give Annie away! and to you, a perfect stranger! Never!"

"My dear madam, I honor your scruples," returned the young man with a low bow (and I must say, for grace of manner I have seldom seen his equal); "but this is the address of my lawyers, and this of a parish clergyman in your vicinity, who will both vouch for my respectability and good family. Beyond these facts, and that I have sufficient means, independent of a profession to support a wife, I don't feel called upon to speak."

Mr. Trevelyan seemed such a nice young man, and I had such a true regard for Annabel, that absurd as the proposition of my giving her away to him at first seemed, I finally came in to it, and about three weeks afterwards, they were married by special license. She was not at all puffed up by her good fortune, and though he gave her a great sum for her trousseau, she expended it with her usual quiet good taste. Annabel Brown was adapted for any position in life into which she happened to be thrown that did not require energy or powers of conversation, in which she was certainly deficient; and out of the fifty-maid-servants that I have had in my service from first to last, she was the only one of which I could say so much.

"But how," my readers may ask, "did Annabel get on after she became Mrs. Trevelyan?"

That I can't tell you, but I can tell you what happened me in consequence, which is the terrible part of the whole story.

A stately carriage drove one day up to my door, and my new maid (a very different one from dear Annie) came running up the stairs in a state of great excitement. "Oh! mum, please, num, there's a lord's coach at the door, and her ladyship wishes to see you."

"What's her name?" demanded I quietly; for I did not wish this grinning idiot to suppose that I was never called upon by members of the aristocracy.

"Here's her card, mum: the Lady Hallis something or other. 'It is not your business to read visitors' cards,' said I stiffly. 'Show Lady Alice Trevelyan up.'"

The similarity of name with that of Annabel's husband of course struck me at once; yet I was totally unable to conjecture her business with poor insignificant me. I was not long, however, left in doubt. A tall, bony, stiff-backed woman of about sixty years of age presently sailed into the room.

"Miss Twitter, I believe?" said she. "The same," replied I politely. "Will not your ladyship take a seat?"

"Certainly not," answered she, snappishly. "I merely came to see that sort of a person by whose nefarious assistance my unfortunate nephew has been entrapped into matrimony. This is the house, is it," said she, looking round my little drawing-room in a very depreciatory way, "where this conspiracy was hatched? In this vile hole you baited your trap, did you, for that innocent boy?"

"I am quite at a loss, madam, to know what you mean," said I (though I began to guess), except that you intend to make yourself offensive."

You are right there, woman," she rejoined acidly, "if you should never again be right in your life. It is the only consolation left to me, after the ruin of our house, to tell you to your face what I think of you. You are a treacherous, designing creature; you entered into a fraudulent conspiracy. Yes, I know it's actionable, if there's a witness; but if you dare to come near the bell, I'll knock you down! I say you conspired to seduce the affections of my nephew, the Honorable Arthur Trevelyan, heir-presumptive to the Earl of Manlands. I don't say you did it yourself; I wish you had, because then the probability is that the disgrace would only have lasted your lifetime; you employed a youthful accomplice, who passed as your maid-servant, it seems, and whose fatal charms overcame poor Arthur's scruples. It is my belief that you both ought to be hanged. Don't answer me! don't venture to speak to me, lest the sound of your hated voice should provoke me beyond all bounds! You were a witness to this atrocious marriage. I have read your foolish name in the register, you false, perjured, crafty, abominable woman! If I was not a lady born and bred, I don't know what I shouldn't call you!"

What she would have called me had she not been a lady of hereditary title, it is impossible to conjecture; she had an immense vocabulary of abuse even as it was, and she exhausted it.

"I shall come again and let you know what my opinion of you really is!" were her last words, which were perhaps the most terrible of all. She had nearly frightened me out of my wits as it was; and the threat of that scene being repeated lay heavy on my soul for many a day, until my lease was out, and I took another house. Thank Heaven, I never saw her ladyship again.

Once, however, I saw Lady Manlands herself (for her husband's uncle died after a few years) going to court in the very quietest dress in which

any lady ever did go there; she gave me a bow and a smile out of the carriage window, and that was all. She never called on her mistress. It is my impression that in her heart she was not worthy of her husband. How they got on together I never heard, but what I have narrated is, I think, a lesson to mistresses against encouraging servant-maids to wed above their position. I have heard it said by prudent persons, "Never give anything away; but above all I would impress upon all spinster ladies, 'Never give a parlor-maid away in marriage to the heir-presumptive of an earldom, especially if he has an aunt who is touchy about the honor of the family.'"—Chambers's Journal.

A Murderer in Chains.

The Williamsport (Penn.) Gazette says, that the handcuffs have been removed from the murderer named Wade, he having broken the pair put upon his wrists, and that he is now bound by an iron collar and chain. It says: "The iron collar goes around the neck, and fastens with a lock, and the chain, seven feet in length, extends from the collar to a ring in the floor, giving the prisoner the privilege of his cell. Yesterday, a visitor to the jail, in passing along from cell to cell, was startled by a man leaping from his bed. It was Wade, and as he struck upon his feet he seized the chair, dashed it upon the floor, and gave a yell that made the situation rather an unpleasant one for a person looking upon the criminal for the first time. In conversation, Wade said he had gold enough to make a longer and heavier chain than the one he was dragging around. He is rather severe upon the Sheriff for thus ironing him, and he thinks he would be given more liberty if he was a first-class Republican; but he says he isn't—McClellan being his man every time. Yet, he prefers the collar and chain to handcuffs—the latter being too tiresome. He has lined the inside of his iron collar with cloth; the iron being rough he says it hurts his neck. While our informant was conversing with Wade, the latter pulled from his pocket a roll of bills, and boastingly stated that they had searched him for money but could not find it, yet he had plenty and knew where to keep it. He had cigars and other luxuries in his cell, and invited the visiting party to partake of the hospitality of his dungeon. When asked how he passed his nights, Wade replied, 'jolly'; last night I had McBride's ghost in here, and I made it lively for the apparition."

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