

STRONGER THAN LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

A drawing-room in a sombre house in a gloomy London street—unmistakably the drawing-room of a lodging-house. A girl sitting before a piano—an Erard, hired by the month—looking at the music on the desk before her and yawning undisguisedly, it being no breach of politeness to yawn when there is nobody but oneself in the room. The drawing-room is the drawing-room of the house No. 33, Carleton Street, and the girl is myself.

My name is Allie Somers Scott, and I have come up to London for the purpose of having singing-lessons. I had a lesson this morning, and I have gone over it again and again till I am tired to death of words and music both. But I have set it up before me now with the laudable intention of going over it once more before it grows too dark to see. To that end I play the prelude through conscientiously, and then I lift up my voice and sing:

He thinks I do not love him!
He believed each word I said;
And he's led away in sorrow
Ere the sun had left its bed;
I'd have told the truth this morning,
But the ship was out of sight;
Oh, I wish these waves would bring him
Where we parted yesternight!
Oh, I wish—

A knock at the street-door, and a knock wherein the knocker gives no uncertain sound. I hear it through the melancholy wail of my own high-pitched voice, through the pianoforte accompaniment. I leave the instrument and rush to the window. Olive Deane promised to make her mother set her down here, instead of going to the Rollestons' "At home" in Berkeley Street. I hope it may be Olive, though I had given her up half an hour ago. I have spent such a stupid afternoon cooped up in this dingy room that more than once I have been tempted to break my promise to uncle Tod and sally forth into the street. Why uncle Tod thinks it quite permissible to go out in the morning for my music-lesson, yet out of the question that I should put my head out of doors alone in the afternoon, passes my comprehension. I suppose he knows, or thinks he knows, more about London than I do. Poor dear uncle Tod!

That is not the Deanes' carriage, that hansom drawn up before the door. Nor is this Olive Deane running up the steps. I draw back from the window infinitely disappointed. It is horribly unkind of Olive not to come; she does not know how lonely I am in these stupid old lodgings, how long the afternoons and evenings are. She cannot comprehend a feeling of loneliness, with that great household of brothers and sisters in Dexter Square. But she might keep a promise when she makes one. I shall scold her when I meet her at the singing-class to-morrow, and tell her she does not embody the idea of a friend.

But, if it is not Olive, who is it? The hansom has driven away, but the door has not yet opened; and I flatten my nose against the glass to see the doormat, which are partly concealed by the open ironwork of the balcony. A young man is standing below waiting, patiently or impatiently—the top of his round felt hat giving no clue to his mood—until such time as Mrs. Wauchope's maid-of-all-work shall see fit to ascend from the basement storey to open the street-door. He is coming to stay, evidently, for he carries in one hand a black leather valise, in the other what looks like a large picture, in a kind of rough wooden case. Of himself I can see nothing but a dark overcoat and the round hat already mentioned, except the gloved hand which holds his valise, his figure, as visible from my stand-point, being so foreshortened that it presents very little beyond the felt hat and the toes of his boots. I wonder who he is! Scarcely a tradesman, though at first I had fancied he must be a glazier, with his tools in the black bag and his pane of glass in the wooden case. And certainly not Mrs. Wauchope's son, for he is a small boy of eleven and to my certain knowledge does not wear a round hat.

He may be related to the two maiden ladies whom the maid-of-all-work calls "the parlors," as I suppose she calls me "the drawing-room," when relating all she knows of me and my affairs to some body else. I can distinguish the initials "G. B." printed in white on the black bag. "G. B." stands for nothing that I can think of on the spur of the moment but "Ginx's Baby." The name is not satisfactory, nor are my surmises likely to lead to any appreciable result. I leave the window convinced on this point, just as Mary Anne opens the door and admits the stranger, without a question apparently, and certainly with but little delay in closing the door behind him.

I glance at the open piano, but I cannot bring myself to sit down and finish that song. I had been longing to learn it; the Deanes raved about it, but I have had enough of it. It was unkind of Olive not to come—we could have had a pleasant chat and drunk tea together—Mary Anne has carried up the tea-things, the tea-pot stands under that hideous dark blue knitted cosy on the little square table near the fire. I do not care to drink tea all alone.

I wander away from the window and round the room aimlessly, my hands clasped behind me, my long blue gown trailing over the carpet—the ugly shabby old-fashioned room which is "my doleful prison this sixth of May," as poor Anne Boloyne wrote in the Tower three hundred and fifty years ago. Not that this is the sixth of May. This is the sixth of March, and dear old uncle Tod's birthday. He is seventy-two to-day.

Not that I am in prison here, either. Nobody wanted me to come here—I came of my own free will. Indeed a great many people wanted me not to come, and Rosa among them, who thinks it very

outré for a young girl like me to live in lodgings in London all by myself, in she objected very much to my coming and to town, even for the laudable purpose of improving myself.

I knew these furnished lodgings to be eminently respectable—was not Mrs. Wauchope housekeeper at Woodhay Manor when I was a child?—and I have promised uncle Tod to be very steady, and not to go anywhere without the Deanes.

"Why, Allie, you look exactly like Mr. Millais's picture of 'Yes, or No.'"

I turned my head. Olive Deane is standing in the doorway, with her gold-rimmed glasses on her saucy nose, laughing at me.

"You wretch!" is my salutation. "Where have you been all the afternoon?"

"At the Rollestons'—mamma would not let me off. But I got her to put me down on her way home, and she has promised to send Fred for me at half-past five."

An hour and a half! It is an eternity of enjoyment to look forward to. I put Olive into my own hammock-chair, and take off her fur tippet.

"I intended to give you a great scolding," I confess laughingly. "But, now that I have got you, I can't find it in my heart to say anything."

"But it wasn't my fault, Allie; mamma would not let me go; and, oh, I've got an invitation for you—you're to come with us to the Rollestons' dance on Friday. Won't that be fun?"

"But I have no evening-dresses here, Olive!"

"Then you must send down for one, unless you choose to buy a new one."

"Oh, I can send down for the dress I wore at the Hatchells! We don't go out much at the Vicarage, so don't be shocked when I tell you that I have only one ball-dress in the world."

"That's why I want you to come on Friday. You haven't been at a dance since you came up to town."

"I don't know what aunt Rosa will say. I came up to town for singing lessons."

"She can't say a word when mamma is chaperoning you. It is not to be a grand affair, you know—only a nice little carpet-dance. We'll call for you in the carriage at nine."

"But aunt Rosa will object to it," I say, shaking my head.

"As if you really minded your aunt Rosa! You know it's a shame you haven't regularly 'come out,' Allie—mamma says so, and everybody."

"Uncle Tod doesn't care for London society."

"But you must take a season or two when you come of age."

"If you mean a season or two of balls and garden-parties, I certainly shall do no such thing."

"But why, Allie? You don't mind their old-fashioned notions at the Vicarage?"

"My dear Olive, I don't care a pin about balls and garden-parties."

"That's because you know nothing about them."

"Oh, is it? I've been to garden-parties at the Towers and at Dunsandle. They were enough for me."

"But you ought to be introduced into society, Allie."

"Yes, if I were a beauty, perhaps, and likely to make a sensation. But I'm not a beauty—quite the contrary; and, besides, it would be a joke to 'come out' at one-and-twenty."

"Ellinor is to come out next season, and then mamma will have three of us on her hands," Olive says meditatively.

"But Poppy is engaged! And I'm going to retire into private life and take up aestheticism or woman's rights!" Olive laughs, taking her cup of tea out of my hands. "I can't compliment you on the beauty of your tea-service, Allie. You won't find it very hard to 'live up to' that tea-pot!"

"Or the cosy!" I say, holding it up for her inspection. Isn't it 'utter,' Olive?"

"Utterly hideous!" Olive answers, looking at it through her glasses. "Why don't you throw it behind the grate and work a new one for yourself in crewels on peacock velvet, like what I am making for Ellinor?"

"I don't do crewel-work; and, besides, I don't want to insult Mrs. Wauchope. She made that cosy herself."

"So I should have supposed. You must find it lonely here in the evenings, Allie—looking round the room."

"Lonely!" I echo. "You may say so, my dear! I never felt so lonely before in my life."

"Then why do you stay here, you ridiculous girl?"

"Oh, because I won't give aunt Rosa the satisfaction of going home before the end of the month! She would only tell me for the hundredth time that it was a pity I didn't know my own mind."

"Then why don't you come to us?"

"And practice scales half the day for your delectation and that of your visitors? No, thank you, my dear. I came up to get singing-lessons, not to amuse myself; and, having put my hand to the plough, I won't turn back—yet awhile. And it's not so bad here, after all, only a little lonely—and the music-lessons are great fun."

"How do you like the new song?"

"I have murdered it till it threatens to haunt me for the rest of my life," I laugh, glancing at the piano. Then, struck by a sudden recollection—"Oh, Olive, I've a piece of news for you! We've got a gentleman-lodger at Number Thirty-three."

"A gentleman lodger?"

"Yes. He arrived about twenty minutes ago, with a black valise and a huge wooden case."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know. Mrs. Wauchope never told us a word about him. She said there

was nobody in the house but those two old maiden ladies down-stairs."

"Well, he wasn't in the house then, I suppose!" Olive says, laughing. "What is he like, Allie? Young or old, dark or fair?"

"Why don't you ask Mary Anne?"

"She has not been up here since he came into the house."

"Then ring for her now, and we'll cross-question her," Olive suggests, with animation.

Olive is more up to mischief than I am, notwithstanding her spectacles. I ring the bell.

"We need not expect her for ten minutes or so," I say; and, pending her arrival, we drift into talk about our singing-lessons, of the concert we are to take part in with the rest of the pupils on the twenty-first, Poppy's bridesmaids' dresses, and a hundred other things. When at last Mary Anne does make her appearance, we stare at her with a vague surprise in both our faces.

"You rang, miss," she says, with a look of stolid inquiry.

"Oh, yes!" Olive answers, in quite a sprightly way. "You want coal on the fire, Allie, didn't you?"

Mary Anne puts coal on the fire ponderously.

"Who was the gentleman who came in just now?" I ask, trying to speak with a gravity which might excuse the question.

"The atticks," Mary Anne answers, putting some finishing touches to the coal with her fingers.

"What is his name?" Olive inquires, without a change of countenance.

"I forgot his name. We call him the Count."

"Is he a Count?"

"Oh, no—no more of a Count than you are! But he's so dark and foreign-looking, and so short-like of money, we call him the Count. Not that he's mean or that—he's as proud as Lucifer, and wouldn't owe anybody a farthing."

"Then how do you know he is poor?" Olive inquires with interest.

"In course he wouldn't live up four pairs of stairs if he had much money to spare, for all he wants to be near the skylight."

"What does he want with the skylight?"

"He's an artist," Mary Anne answers, with such an inimitable air of pity, not to say contempt, that Olive and I were absolutely afraid to look each other in the face.

"Is he a photographer?" Olive asks innocently.

"Oh, no—a painter! And a poor thing he makes of it, though the mistress do say that, if he worked at it, he'd make a name for himself. He do work hard enough sometimes, but it's only by fits and starts. And he has a lot of idle young friends that come bothering him—I don't doubt but he'd do well enough if they let him alone."

"Where has he been for the last fortnight?" I inquire, thinking of aunt Rosa.

"On a sketching tour," Mary Anne answers glibly, "up in Scotland or somewhere. Can I take away the tea-things now, ma'am?"

Permitted to take away the tea-things, Mary Anne returns with them to the lower regions, whence we had evolved her. The moment the door closes behind her Olive and I begin to laugh.

"What will aunt Rosa say?" Olive exclaims delightedly.

"Indeed I don't know," I answer more seriously. "I only hope she won't know anything about it for the next fortnight. I shan't tell her."

"You'll never see him," Olive says, "unless you happen to meet him on the stairs, and that's not very likely." And, as for his friends, I dare say Mrs. Wauchope will give him a hint not to bring them about the house while you are here."

"I don't mind his friends, or himself either. Only I know aunt Rosa will think my being here more outré than ever. I say, Olive, wouldn't you like to see his studio?"

"I should, very much. I wonder if he takes portraits, Allie? Wouldn't it be fun if I got him to paint my picture? You could come with me to play propriety, you know; or would it be necessary to have up Mrs. Wauchope? I wish we knew his name."

"I shall soon find it out. Ginx's Baby, I call him—the initials on his valise were 'G. B.'"

"G. B." Olive repeats musingly.

"Fred knows a great many young artists. I'll ask him if he knows any 'G. B.'"

"I am afraid the 'four pair back' is an artist as yet unknown to fame," I laugh, poking the fire into a bright cheery blaze. It has grown dark already in Carleton Street; but I do not care to light the gas yet; it makes the evenings seem so interminably long to light the gas at half-past five.

"I'm afraid so, Allie, what color is your evening-dress?"

"Blue, my dear—the most delicate shade of bird's-eggs blue."

"Gauze or grenadine?"

"Neither, silk and crepe. Oh, it is a very decent dress! I was extravagant enough to get it from Madame Garoupe."

"Then it is sure to be all right," Olive says, with a sigh of complete satisfaction as if the crepe and silk "confection" were absolutely before her eyes. "I wish I could order my dresses from Madame Garoupe."

"I can afford it; I get so few of them."

"Afford it!" Olive laughs, shrugging her shoulders.

"Oh, well, you know uncle Tod doesn't allow me much for dress!"

"Then why don't you make him give you more?"

"I don't want it. He lets me have my horse and my dogs; and nobody dresses much at Yattendon."

So "Ginx's Baby" drops out of the conversation. And so completely have we forgotten his existence that, when Fred Deane comes in, we never think of

asking him if he knows of asking him if he knows of any artist whose initials are "G. B." Fred wants to engage me for the first walk on Friday evening, and, as he dances very badly, I want to reserve myself for his brother Gus, who is sure to ask me, and who dances very well.

"What's to be the color of your dress, Miss Scott?" Fred inquires, thinking no doubt of Covent Garden.

"Blue—cerulean blue."

"Taking color from the skies, can heaven's truth be wanting?" he quotes sentimentally, looking into eyes which were certainly not "made for earnest granting," blue as they may be.

"Come home, Fred; we shall be late for dinner. Send him away, Allie; you'll have lots of time to flirt on Friday evening. Good-bye, my dear, and mind you write down to Yattendon for your dress. I'll see you at Madame Cronhelm's to-morrow. Farewell till we meet again!"

An hour later, while I am engaged in demolishing my solitary chicken I hear voices overhead—high overhead—Mrs. Wauchope's voice and another, and then a careless boyish laugh. I glance at my closed door, at the great empty silent room, at the chair by the fire, where I shall presently try to while away the rest of the evening with aid of a dish of almonds and raisins and Octave Feuillet.

How lonely it looks! How wearisome it will be without a voice to break the silence! I envy people who have other people to talk to—I envy Mrs. Wauchope—I even envy Mary Anne. That boy's laugh is an offence to me—I, who have nothing to make me laugh.

Yet he must be as lonely as I am, up there at the top of the house. The evenings must seem just as dreary and long to him as they do to me. Not a bit of it! Before I have finished my dinner I hear him run down stairs, cross the hall, and go out at the front door. On the doorstep he pauses a moment to light a match, and then he walks away down the street quickly, as though he knew where he was going, and is glad to go.

It is good to be a man, I think, a little bitterly, as I lean back in my hammock-chair and stretch out my hand lazily for an almond. How pleasant it would be if I could put on my Newmarket now and sally out into the gaily-illuminated streets—to the theatre perhaps, or to meet and chat with a friend! But, instead of that, I must sit here over the fire, reading a book I know by heart and munching almonds and raisins.

"Who went out?" I ask Mary Anne, as she folds up the table-cloth.

"The Count," Mary Anne answers laconically.

"Does he go out every evening?"

"Mostly—to the Opera or something."

"Where was he going this evening?" I ask carelessly.

"To a dance," Mary Anne answers vaguely. "And he do look well when he's dressed for the evening," she adds, with some lighting up of her stolid countenance. "The mistress told him so just now on the stairs."

That was what made him laugh. What a careless young laugh it was! It rings in my ears still. To drive it away I throw down my book and go to the piano. A piece of music lies on the carpet; I take it up and set it open on the desk before me. It is a song—a favorite of mine—"The Cross-Roads"—and I play the prelude dreamily, lingering over each familiar chord. In the days to come I may wonder vaguely what led me to sing this song to night. On to the very last verse, I sing it through:

"Was I not made for him? We loved each other.
Yet fate gave him one road, and me another!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

The Dime Novel Cure.

A trustee of the Providence Public Library has undertaken to cure the small boy of his interest in the dime novel, and can be said to have succeeded. He has met the antecedent with its consequent. He has gathered into a scrapbook the adventures of the boys who read dime novels, and has made it his business in a quiet way to ask the boys one by one who are interested in these stories to spend an hour or two in reading, not the imaginative story, but the way in which the small boy has attempted to realize how boys ought to live and what they ought to be allowed to do. It is said that the dime novel boy usually reads the scrapbook, which is rapidly increasing in size as the fresh exploits of the dime novel adventurers are added to it, about two hours. He then lays it down in disgust, and nothing can induce him to return to those stories again. He asks the person in charge of the reading room for a better class of books. This cure of a disease with its own poison has been so effective in Providence that the trustee in question is thinking of taking out a patent for the process, lest other libraries and the heads of families and the guardians of small boys generally may appropriate his invention without due credit. This gentleman is the first among moderns to give point to the old saying, "Look on this picture and then on that," and it is the other picture that is powerful enough to wind up the dime novel business. These are the realism in literature, and this man going further than Mr. Howells or Mr. James, or even M. Zola, has substituted the pastepot and actors for the imagination, gathering his horrors and tragedies from actual life, in the firm belief that if truth is not stranger than fiction, it has a wonderful power at the right moment over an awakened mind.

"Brother A., how does it happen that you need two horses? Brother C., of the Methodist church, has only one horse, and Brother D., of the Baptist church, drives only one horse, and I drive only one. Why do you need two horses?" Brother A.—"Because I am not a one-horse preacher."

REVOLUTIONIZING TELEGRAPHY.

An Astonishing Invention That Threatens to Supersede all others.

An invention has recently been perfected at Philadelphia that bids fair to revolutionize all existing systems of electrical communication, both telegraphic and telephonic. The secret of it has been carefully guarded by the inventors and by the small company of large capitalists who control it, while it was being fully covered by patents, both American and foreign. Now that all is secure, it is to be suddenly sprung upon the public by an exhibition at the Continental hotel, probably during the present week, as one of the gigantic scientific surprises of the century. To state in brief what it is, it is nothing less than making telegraphy as simple, rapid, and easily within the command of everybody as is the operating of the caligraph or type-writer. Effecting what is claimed for it, it will be the means of greatly reducing the cost of telegraphy, of enabling the opening of some forty thousand new telegraph stations in railroad and express offices throughout the United States where there have hitherto been none, and of taking the place generally of the telephone. Any person who can pick out a word on the keys of a type-writer can transmit a message by the system accurately and with rapidity, only restricted by the speed of the picking, while, as for receiving messages, the instrument does that automatically, whether there is anybody superintending its operations or not. There was a private exhibition of the system recently, the results attained at which seemed to fully sustain all that is claimed for this most remarkable invention.

The instrument used is both a transmitter and a receiver. The two instruments used in this exhibition were connected by about one hundred miles of wire coiled about the offices. Each appeared in its front part to be simply an ordinary type-writer, with the letters, numerals, etc., on raised keys. Behind this rises a small column, with blank paper wrapped around it and moved up line by line as required by a simple device. Inside that column is a small hammer that strikes outwardly, so as to, whenever a key is touched, press the paper against the periphery of a horizontal wheel that lies between the keyboard and the column. On that periphery, in high relief, are the letters of the alphabet, numerals, and points for punctuation. The wheel spins around with lightning-like rapidity as the keys are successively touched by an expert. When it has receded in an alphabetical order it flies back to a fixed point, as does the wheel of a gold and stock indicator, but very much more swiftly. All the delicate and intricate electrical attachments necessary are below, and when understood are much less complicated than they seem, their apparent complication being caused by their multiplicity. A separate wire leads from each key to a common wire, and each of these key-connected wires serves either for transmission or reception of messages. The sending or receiving of a particular letter or figure is governed by the strength of current required for just that individual one, and for no other. It seems very strange that all those various impulses should be flashed along a wire—even in opposite directions at the same time—without jostling each other or getting mixed up, but they do. Many messages were sent and received during tests by non-experts at a speed of from forty to fifty words per minute with greater accuracy than is usually shown by expert "sound" operators, and that speed, it was affirmed, could be very greatly increased. A noticeable and valuable feature of the system is that it prints clearly in the sight of the person transmitting a message just what is being sent to the receiver, so that errors are avoided, or if committed are readily corrected. The messages sent over a wire by this instrument can be read by sound, so that it is much more favorable to the privacy often desirable in business than either the Morse system or the telephone. Inasmuch as the instrument can be adjusted to any system of wire communication and will work to as great distances as is required in telegraphy, it will be of inestimable value to railroad and express companies, bankers, brokers, merchants, and the general public. There are no formidable complications in its construction, and expert electricians who have examined it pronounce it one of the most wonderful achievements of the age. Should it only do half what is claimed for it, and that it shows it can do, it would practically revolutionize telegraphy.

The company controlling this great invention has been organized upon a capital of \$2,000,000, but no stock is for sale, all being held as an investment.

Persian Names in Afghanistan.

Is it not very desirable (writes an Anglo-Indian correspondent) that during this Russo-Afghan business the names of places on the disputed boundary should be so spelt as to produce when possible the actual sound of the name in the language of the country concerned? Now, in all the papers, without exception, I see "Penjeh" written, the real sound being "Panjeh"; that is "five villages," "punj" being five, and "deh" a territorial division, not necessarily forming a single village, but generally including several inhabited places, such as a village or parish at home often includes subordinate hamlets. An analogous instance in our own Indian Empire is "Panjab," which signifies five rivers, from "punj" five, and "ab," water. Again, "Pul-khishti" meaning a brick or masonry bridge, from "pul," bridge, and "khisht," brick, should have the short accent over the "u" in "pul," so as to produce the sound of pull (a boat) in English. In both instances the names are Persian.—[Pall Mall Gazette.]