

Stockton Frank Richard

The Squirrel Inn



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Содержание

I	5
II	7
III	10
IV	14
V	17
VI	20
VII	22
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	25

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I

THE STEAMBOAT PIER

The steamboat *Manasquan* was advertised to leave her pier on the east side of the city at half-past nine on a July morning. At nine o'clock Walter Lodloe was on the forward upper deck, watching the early passengers come on board, and occasionally smiling as his glance fell upon a tall man in a blue flannel shirt, who, with a number of other deck-hands, was hard at work transferring from the pier to the steamer the boxes, barrels, and bales of merchandise the discouraging mass of which was on the point of being increased by the unloading of a newly arrived two-horse truck.

Lodloe had good reason to allow himself his smiles of satisfaction, for he had just achieved a victory over the man in the blue shirt, and a victory over a busy deck-hand on a hot day is rare enough to be valuable. As soon as he had stepped on board, he had deposited his hand-baggage in a place of safety, and walked forward to see the men run on the freight. It was a lively scene, and being a student of incident, character, and all that sort of thing, it greatly interested him. Standing by a strangely marked cask which had excited his curiosity, he found himself in the way of the deck-hand in the blue shirt, who, with red face and sparkling forehead, had just wheeled two heavy boxes up the incline of the gang-plank, and was about to roll them with easy rapidity to the other side of the deck; but Lodloe, with his back turned and directly in front of him, made it necessary for him to make a violent swerve to the right or to break the legs of a passenger. He made the swerve, missed Lodloe, and then, dumping his load, turned and swore at the young man with the promptness and accuracy of a cow-boy's revolver.

It was quite natural that a high-spirited young fellow should object to be sworn at, no matter what provocation he had given, and Lodloe not only objected but grew very angry. The thing which instantly suggested itself to him, and which to most people would seem the proper thing to do, was to knock down the man. But this knocking-down business is a matter which should be approached with great caution. Walter was a strong young fellow and had had some practice in boxing, but it was not impossible that, even with the backing of justifiable indignation, the conventional blow straight from the shoulder might have failed to fell the tall deck-hand.

But even had Lodloe succeeded in stretching the insulting man upon the dirty deck, it is not at all probable that he would have staid there. In five seconds there would have been a great fight, and it would not have been long before the young gentleman would have found himself in the custody of a policeman.

Lodloe's common sense was capable of considerable tension without giving way, even under a strain like this, and, although pale with anger, he would not engage in a personal contest with a deck-hand on a crowded steamboat; but to bear the insult was almost impossible. Never before had he been subjected to such violent abuse.

But in a flash he remembered something, and the man had scarcely turned his empty truck to go back to the pier, when Lodloe stepped in front of him, and with a wave of the hand stopped him.

Two nights before Lodloe had been sitting up late reading some papers on modern Italian history, and in the course of said reading had met with the text of the *anathema maranatha* pronounced by Pius IX. against disbelievers in his infallibility. The directness, force, and comprehensiveness of the expressions used in this composition made a deep impression upon Lodloe, and as it was not very long he had committed it to memory, thinking that he might some

time care to use it in quotation. Now it flashed upon him that the time had come to quote this *anathema maranatha*, without hesitation he delivered the whole of it, and square, straight into the face of the petrified deck-hand.

Petrified immediately he was not. As first he flushed furiously, but after a few phrases he began to pale and to turn to living stone; enough mobility, however, remained to allow him presently to raise his hand imploringly, but Lodloe had now nearly finished his discourse, and with a few words more he turned and walked away. The deck-hand wiped his brow, took in a long breath, and went to work. If another passenger had got in his way, he would not have sworn at him.

Therefore it was that, gently pleased by the sensations of victory, Walter Lodloe sat on the upper deck and watched the busy scene. He soon noted that passengers were beginning to come down the pier in considerable numbers, and among these his eye was caught by a young woman wheeling a baby-carriage.

When this little equipage had been pushed down nearly to the end of that side of the pier from which the passengers were going on board, it stopped, and its motive power looked behind her. Presently she turned her head towards the steamer and eagerly scanned every part of it on which she could see human beings. In doing this she exhibited to Lodloe a very attractive face. It was young enough, it was round enough, and the brown eyes were large enough, to suit almost any one whose taste was not restricted to the lines of the old sculptors.

When she completed her survey of the steamboat, the young woman turned the carriage around and wheeled it up the pier. Very soon, however, she returned, walking rapidly, and ran the little vehicle over the broad gang-plank on to the steamboat. Now Lodloe lost sight of her, but in about five minutes she appeared on the forward upper deck without the baby-carriage, and looking eagerly here and there. Not finding what she sought, she hastily descended.

The next act in this performance was the appearance of the baby-carriage, borne by the blue-shirted deck-hand, and followed by the young woman carrying the baby. The carriage was humbly set down by its bearer, who departed without looking to the right or left, and the baby was quickly deposited in it. Then the young woman stepped to the rail and looked anxiously upon the pier. As Lodloe gazed upon her it was easy to see that she was greatly troubled. She was expecting some one who did not come. Now she went to the head of the stairway and went down a few steps, then she came up again and stood undecided. Her eyes now fell upon Lodloe, who was looking at her, and she immediately approached him.

"Can you tell me, sir," she said, "exactly how long it will be before this boat starts?"

Lodloe drew out his watch.

"In eight minutes," he answered.

If Lodloe had allowed himself to suppose that because the young woman who addressed him was in sole charge of a baby-carriage she was a nurse or superior maid-servant, that notion would have instantly vanished when he heard her speak.

The lady turned a quick glance towards the pier, and then moved to the head of the stairway, but stopped before reaching it. It was plain that she was in much perplexity. Lodloe stepped quickly towards her.

"Madam," said he, "you are looking for some one. Can I help you?"

"I am," she said; "I am looking for my nurse-maid. She promised to meet me on the pier. I cannot imagine what has become of her."

"Let me go and find her," said Lodloe. "What sort of person is she?"

"She isn't any sort of person in particular," answered the lady. "I couldn't describe her. I will run down and look for her myself, and if you will kindly see that nobody knocks over my baby I shall be much obliged to you."

Lodloe instantly undertook the charge, and the lady disappeared below.

II

THE BABY, THE MAN, AND THE MASTERY

The young man drew the baby-carriage to the bench by the rail and, seating himself, gazed with interest upon its youthful occupant. This individual appeared to be about two years of age, with its mother's eyes and a combative disposition. The latter was indicated by the manner in which it banged its own legs and the sides of its carriage with a wicker bludgeon that had once been a rattle. It looked earnestly at the young man, and gave the edges of its carriage a whack which knocked the bludgeon out of its hand. Lodloe picked up the weapon, and, restoring it to its owner, began to commune with himself.

"It is the same old story," he thought. "The mother desires to be rid of the infant; she leaves it for a moment in the charge of a stranger; she is never seen again. However, I accept the situation. If she doesn't come back this baby is mine. It seems like a good sort of baby, and I think I shall like it. Yes, youngster, if your mother doesn't come back you are mine. I shall not pass you over to the police or to any one else; I shall run you myself."

It was now half-past nine. Lodloe arose and looked out over the pier. He could see nothing of the young mother. The freight was all on board, and they were hauling up the forward gang-plank. One or two belated passengers were hurrying along the pier; the bell was ringing; now the passengers were on board, the aft gang-plank was hauled in, the hawsers were cast off from the posts, the pilot's bell jingled, the wheels began to revolve, and the great steamboat slowly moved from its pier.

"I knew it," said Lodloe, unconsciously speaking aloud; "she hadn't the slightest idea of coming back. Now, then," said he, "I own a baby, and I must consider what I am to do with it. One thing is certain, I intend to keep it. I believe I can get more solid comfort and fun out of a baby than I could possibly get out of a dog or even a horse."

Walter Lodloe was a young man who had adopted literature as a profession. Earlier in life he had worked at journalism, but for the last two years he had devoted himself almost entirely to literature pure and simple. His rewards, so far, had been slight, but he was not in the least discouraged, and hoped bravely for better things. He was now on his way to spend some months at a quiet country place of which he had heard, not for a summer holiday, but to work where he could live cheaply and enjoy outdoor life. His profession made him more independent than an artist – all he needed were writing materials, and a post-office within a reasonable distance.

Lodloe gazed with much satisfaction at his new acquisition. He was no stickler for conventionalities, and did not in the least object to appear at his destination – where he knew no one – with a baby and a carriage.

"I'll get some country girl to take care of it when I am busy," he said, "and the rest of the time I'll attend to it myself. I'll teach it a lot of things, and from what I have seen of youngster-culture I shouldn't wonder if I should beat the record."

At this moment the baby gave a great wave with its empty rattle, and, losing its hold upon it, the wicker weapon went overboard. Then, after feeling about in its lap, and peering over the side of the carriage, the baby began to whimper.

"Now then," thought the young man, "here's my chance. I must begin instantly to teach it that I am its master."

Leaning forward, he looked sternly into the child's face, and in a sharp, quick tone said:

"Whoa!"

The baby stopped instantly, and stared at its new guardian.

"There," thought Lodloe, "it is just the same with a baby as with a horse. Be firm, be decided; it knows what you want, and it will do it."

At this instant the baby opened its mouth, uttered a wild wail, and continued wailing.

Lodloe laughed. "That didn't seem to work," said he; and to quiet the little creature he agitated the vehicle, shook before the child his keys, and showed it his watch, but the wails went on with persistent violence. The baby's face became red, its eyes dropped tears.

The young man looked around him for assistance. The forward upper deck was without an awning, and was occupied only by a few men, the majority of the passengers preferring the spacious and shaded after deck. Two of the men were laughing at Lodloe.

"That's a new way," one of them called out to him, "to shut up a young one. Did it ever work?"

"It didn't this time," answered Lodloe. "Have you any young ones?"

"Five," answered the man.

"And how do you stop them when they howl like that?"

"I leave that to the old woman," was the answer, "and when she's heard enough of it she spansks 'em."

Lodloe shook his head. That method did not suit him.

"If you'd run its wagon round the deck," said another man, "perhaps that would stop it. I guess you was never left alone with it before."

Lodloe made no reply to this supposition, but began to wheel the carriage around the deck. Still the baby yelled and kicked. An elderly gentleman who had been reading a book went below.

"If you could feed it," said one of the men who had spoken before, "that might stop it, but the best thing you can do is to take it down to its mother."

Lodloe was annoyed. He had not yet arranged in his mind how he should account for his possession of the baby, and he did not want an explanation forced upon him before he was ready to make it. These men had come on board after the departure of the young woman, and could know nothing of the facts, and therefore Lodloe, speaking from a high, figurative standpoint, settled the matter by shaking his head and saying:

"That can't be done. The little thing has lost its mother."

The man who had last spoken looked compassionately at Lodloe.

"That's a hard case," he said; "I know all about it, for I've been in that boat myself. My wife died just as I was going to sail for this country, and I had to bring over the two babies. I was as seasick as blazes, and had to take care of 'em night and day. I tell you, sir, you've got a hard time ahead of you; but feedin' 's the only thing. I'll get you something. Is it on milk yet, or can it eat biscuit?"

Lodloe looked at the open mouth of the vociferous infant and saw teeth.

"Biscuit will do," he said, "or perhaps a banana. If you can get me something of the sort I shall be much obliged"; and he gave the man some money.

The messenger soon returned with an assortment of refreshments, among which, happily, was not a banana, and the baby soon stopped wailing to suck an enormous stick of striped candy. Quiet having been restored to this part of the vessel, Lodloe sat down to reconsider the situation.

"It may be," he said to himself, "that I shall have to take it to an asylum, but I shall let it stay there only during the period of unintelligent howling. When it is old enough to understand that I am its master, then I shall take it in hand again. It is ridiculous to suppose that a human being cannot be as easily trained as a horse."

The more he considered the situation the better he liked it. The possession of a healthy and vigorous youngster without encumbrances was to him a novel and delightful sensation.

"I hope," he said to himself, "that when the country girl dresses it she will find no label on its clothes, nor any sign which might enable one to discover the original owners. I don't want anybody coming up to claim it after we've got to be regular chums."

When the boat made its first landing the two men who had given advice and assistance to Lodloe got off, and as the sun rose higher the forward deck became so unpleasantly warm that nearly everybody left it; but Lodloe concluded to remain. The little carriage had a top, which sufficiently shaded the baby, and as for himself he was used to the sun. If he went among the other passengers they might ask him questions, and he was not prepared for these. What he wanted was to be let alone until he reached his landing-place, and then he would run his baby-carriage ashore, and when the steamboat had passed on he would be master of the situation, and could assume what position he chose towards his new possession.

"When I get the little bouncer to Squirrel Inn I shall be all right, but I must have the relationship defined before I arrive there." And to the planning and determination of that he now gave his mind.

He had not decided whether he should create an imaginary mother who had died young, consider himself the uncle of the child, whose parents had been lost at sea, or adopt the little creature as a brother or a sister, as the case might be, when the subject of his reflections laid down its stick of candy and began a violent outcry against circumstances in general.

Lodloe's first impulse was to throw it overboard. Repressing this natural instinct, he endeavored to quiet the infantile turbulence with offers of biscuit, fresh candy, gingercakes, and apples, but without effect. The young bewailer would have nothing to do with any of these enticements.

Lodloe was puzzled. "I have got to keep the thing quiet until we land," he thought; "then I will immediately hire some one to go with me and take charge of it, but I can't stand this uproar for two hours longer." The crying attracted the attention of other people, and presently a country woman appeared from below.

"What is the matter with it?" she asked. "I thought it was some child left here all by itself."

"What would you do with it?" asked Lodloe, helplessly.

"You ought to take it up and walk it about until its mother comes," said the woman; and having given this advice she returned below to quiet one of her own offspring who had been started off by the sounds of woe.

Lodloe smiled at the idea of carrying the baby about until its mother came; but he was willing to do the thing in moderation, and taking up the child resolutely, if not skilfully, he began to stride up and down the deck with it.

This suited the youngster perfectly, and it ceased crying and began to look about with great interest. It actually smiled into the young man's face, and taking hold of his mustache began to use it as a doorbell.

"This is capital," said Lodloe; "we are chums already." And as he strode he whistled, talked baby-talk, and snapped his fingers in the face of the admiring youngster, who slapped at him, and laughed, and did its best to kick off the bosom of his shirt.

III

MATTHEW VASSAR

In the course of this sociable promenade the steamboat stopped at a small town, and it had scarcely started again when the baby gave a squirm which nearly threw it out of its bearer's arms. At the same instant he heard quick steps behind him, and, turning, he beheld the mother of the child. At the sight his heart fell. Gone were his plans, his hopes, his little chum.

The young woman was flushed and panting.

"Upon my word!" was all she could say as she clasped the child, whose little arms stretched out towards her. She seated herself upon the nearest bench. In a few moments she looked from her baby to Lodloe; she had not quite recovered her breath, and her face was flushed, but in her eyes and on her mouth and dimpled cheeks there was an expression of intense delight mingled with amusement.

"Will you tell me, sir," she said, "how long you have been carrying this baby about? And did you have to take care of it?"

Lodloe did not feel in a very good humor. By not imposing upon him, as he thought she had done, she had deceived and disappointed him.

"Of course I took care of it," he said, "as you left it in my charge; and it gave me a lot of trouble, I assure you. For a time it kicked up a dreadful row. I had the advice of professionals, but I did all the work myself."

"I am very sorry," she said, "but it does seem extremely funny that it should have happened so. What did you think had become of me?"

"I supposed you had gone off to whatever place you wanted to go to," said Lodloe.

She looked at him in amazement.

"Do you mean to say," she exclaimed, "that you thought I wanted to get rid of my baby, and to palm him off on you – an utter stranger?"

"That is exactly what I thought," he answered. "Of course, people who want to get rid of babies don't palm them off on friends and acquaintances. I am very sorry if I misjudged you, but I think you will admit that, under the circumstances, my supposition was a very natural one."

"Tell me one more thing," she said; "what did you intend to do with this child?"

"I intended to bring it up as my own," said Lodloe; "I had already formed plans for its education."

The lady looked at him in speechless amazement. If she had known him she would have burst out laughing.

"The way of it was this," she said presently. "I ran off the steamboat to look for my nurse-maid, and if I hadn't thought of first searching through the other parts of the boat to see if she was on board I should have had plenty of time. I found her waiting for me at the entrance of the pier, and when I ran towards her all she had to say was that she had made up her mind not to go into the country. I was so excited, and so angry at her for playing such a trick on me at the last moment, that I forgot how time was passing, and that is why I was left behind. But it never entered my mind that any one would think that I intended to desert my baby, and I didn't feel afraid either that he wouldn't be taken care of. I had seen ever so many women on board, and some with babies of their own, and I did not doubt that some of these would take charge of him."

"As soon as I saw that the steamboat had gone, I jumped into a cab, and went to the West Bank Railroad, and took the first train for Scurry, where I knew the steamboat stopped. The ticket agent told me he thought the train would get there about forty minutes before the boat; but it didn't, and I had to run every inch of the way from the station to the wharf, and then barely got there in time."

"You managed matters very well," said Lodloe.

"I should have managed better," said she, "if I had taken my baby ashore with me. In that case, I should have remained in the city until I secured another maid. But why did you trouble yourself with the child, especially when he cried?"

"Madam," said Lodloe, "you left that little creature in my charge, and it never entered my mind to hand it over to anybody else. I took advice, as I told you, but that was all I wanted of any one until I went ashore, and then I intended to hire a country girl to act as its nurse."

"And you really and positively intended to keep it for your own?" she asked.

"I did," he answered.

At this the lady could not help laughing. "In all my life," she said, "I never heard of anything like that. But I am just as much obliged to you, sir, as if I were acquainted with you; in fact, more so."

Lodloe took out his card and handed it to her. She read it, and then said:

"I am Mrs. Robert Cristie of Philadelphia. And now I will take my baby to the other end of the boat, where it is more sheltered, but not without thanking you most heartily for your very great kindness."

"If you are going aft," said Lodloe, "let me help you. If you will take the baby, I will bring its carriage."

In a few minutes the mother and child were ensconced in a shady spot on the lower deck, and then Lodloe, lifting his hat, remarked:

"As I suppose two people cannot become conventionally acquainted without the intervention of a third person, no matter how little each may know of said third party, I must take my leave; but allow me to say that, if you require any further assistance, I shall be most happy to give it. I shall be on the boat until we reach Romney."

"That is where I get off," she said.

"Indeed," said he; "then perhaps you will engage the country girl whom I intended to hire."

"Do you know any one living there," she asked, "who would come to me as nurse-maid?"

"I don't know a soul in Romney," said Lodloe; "I never was in the place in my life. I merely supposed that in a little town like that there were girls to be hired. I don't intend to remain in Romney, to be sure, but I thought it would be much safer to engage a girl there than to trust to getting one in the country place to which I am going."

"And you thought out all that, and about my baby?" said Mrs. Cristie.

"Yes, I did," said Lodloe, laughing.

"Very well," said she; "I shall avail myself of your forethought, and shall try to get a girl in Romney. Where do you go when you leave there?"

"Oh, I am going some five or six miles from the town, to a place called the 'Squirrel Inn.'"

"The Squirrel Inn!" exclaimed Mrs. Cristie, dropping her hands into her lap and leaning forward.

"Yes," said Lodloe; "are you going there?"

"I am," she answered.

Now in his heart Walter Lodloe blessed his guardian angel that she had prompted him to make the announcement of his destination before he knew where this lady was going.

"I am very glad to hear that," he said. "It seems odd that we should happen to be going to the same place, and yet it is not so very odd, after all, for people going to the Squirrel Inn must take this boat and land at Romney, which is not on the railroad."

"The odd part of it is that so few people go to the Squirrel Inn," said the lady.

"I did not know that," remarked Lodloe; "in fact I know very little about the place. I have heard it spoken of, and it seems to be just the quiet, restful place in which I can work. I am a literary man, and like to work in the country."

"Do you know the Rockmores of Germantown?" asked Mrs. Cristie.

"I never heard of them," he answered.

"Well, then, you may as well stay on board this steamboat and go back home in her," said Mrs. Cristie; "if you do not know the Rockmores of Germantown Stephen Petter will not take you into his inn. I know all about the place. I was there with my husband three years ago. Mr. Petter is very particular about the guests he entertains. Several years ago, when he opened the inn, the Rockmores of Germantown spent the summer with him, and he was so impressed with them that he will not take anybody unless they know the Rockmores of Germantown."

"He must be a ridiculous old crank," said Lodloe, drawing a camp-chair near to the lady, and seating himself thereon.

"In one way he is not a crank," said Mrs. Cristie; "you can't turn him. When he has made up his mind about anything, that matter is settled and fixed just as if it were screwed down to the floor."

"From what I had been told," said the young man, "I supposed the Squirrel Inn to be a free and easy place."

"It is, after you get there," said Mrs. Cristie, "and the situation and the surroundings are beautiful, and the air is very healthful. My husband was Captain Cristie of the navy. He was in bad health when he went to the Squirrel Inn, but the air did him good, and if we had staid all winter, as Stephen Petter wanted us to, it would have been a great advantage to him. But when the weather grew cool we went to New York, where my husband died early in the following December."

"I will take my chances with Stephen Petter," said Lodloe, after a suitable pause. "I am going to the Squirrel Inn, and I am bound to stay there. There must be some road not through Germantown by which a fellow can get into the favor of Mr. Petter. Perhaps you will say a good word for me, madam?"

"I don't know any good word to say," she answered, "except that you take excellent care of babies, and I am not at all sure that that would have any weight with Stephen Petter. Since you are going to the inn, and since we have already talked together so much, I wish I did properly know you. Did you ever have a sister at Vassar?"

"I am sorry to say," said Lodloe, "that I never had a sister at that college, though I have one who wanted very much to go there; but instead of that she went with an aunt to Europe, where she married."

"An American?" asked Mrs. Cristie.

"Yes," said Lodloe.

"What was his name?"

"Tredwell."

"I never heard of him," said the lady. "There don't seem to be any threads to take hold of."

"Perhaps you had a brother at Princeton," remarked Lodloe.

"I have no brother," said she.

There was now a pause in the dialogue. The young man was well pleased that this very interesting young woman wished to know him properly, as she put it, and if there could be found the least bit of foundation on which might be built a conventional acquaintance he was determined to find it.

"Were you a Vassar girl?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Cristie; "I was there four years."

"Perhaps you know something of old Matthew Vassar, the founder?"

Mrs. Cristie laughed. "I've heard enough about him, you may be sure; but what has he to do with anything?"

"I once slept in his room," said Lodloe; "in the Founder's Room, with all his stiff old furniture, and his books, and his portrait."

"You!" cried Mrs. Cristie. "When did you do that?"

"It was two years ago this spring," said Lodloe. "I was up there getting material for an article on the college which I wrote for the 'Bayside Magazine.'"

"Did you write that?" said Mrs. Cristie. "I read it, and it was just as full of mistakes as it could be."

"That may be, and I don't wonder at it," said the young man. "I kept on taking in material until I had a good deal more than I could properly stow away in my mind, and it got to be too late for me to go back to the town, and they had to put me into the Founder's Room, because the house was a good deal crowded. Before I went to bed I examined all the things in the room. I didn't sleep well at all, for during the night the old gentleman got down out of his frame, and sat on the side of my bed, and told me a lot of things about that college which nobody else ever knew, I am sure."

"And I suppose you mixed up all that information with what the college people gave you," she said.

"That may be the case," answered Lodloe, laughing, "for some of the old gentleman's points were very interesting and made a deep impression upon me."

"Well," said Mrs. Cristie, speaking very emphatically, "when I had finished reading that article I very much wished to meet the person who had written it, so that I might tell him what I thought of it; but of course I had no idea that the founder had anything to do with its inaccuracies."

"Madam," said Lodloe, "if it had not been for the mistakes in it you never would have thought of the man who wrote the paper, but you did think of him, and wanted to meet him. Now it seems to me that we have been quite properly introduced to each other, and it was old Matthew Vassar who did it. I am sure I am very much obliged to him."

Mrs. Cristie laughed. "I don't know what the social authorities would say to such an introduction," she answered, "but as baby is asleep I shall take him into the saloon."

IV

LODLOE UNDERTAKES TO NOMINATE HIS SUCCESSOR

It was late in the afternoon when the Romney passengers were landed, and Mrs. Cristie and Lodloe, with a few other persons, repaired to the village hotel.

"There is a sort of stage-wagon," said the lady, "which takes people from this house to the Squirrel Inn, and it starts when the driver is ready; but before I leave Romney I must try to find some one who will go with me as nurse-maid."

"Madam," said Lodloe, "don't think of it. I have made inquiries of the landlord, and he says the roads are rough, and that it will take more than an hour to reach the Squirrel Inn, so that if you do not start now I fear you and the baby will not get there before dark. I prefer to stay here to-night, and it will be no trouble at all for me to look up a suitable person for you, and to take her with me to-morrow. It will be a good plan to take four or five of them, and when you have selected the one you like best the others can come back here in the wagon. It will be a lark for them."

Mrs. Cristie drew a long breath. "Truly," she said, "your proposition is phenomenal. Half a dozen nurse-maids in a wagon, from whom I am to pick and choose! The thing is so startling and novel that I am inclined to accept. I should very much dislike to be on the road after dark, and if you have planned to stay here to-night, and if it will not be much trouble – "

"Say not another word," cried Lodloe; "project your mind into to-morrow morning, and behold a wagon-load of willing maidens at the door of the inn."

When Mrs. Cristie and the baby and an elderly woman who lived in Lethbury, a village two miles beyond the Squirrel Inn, had started on their journey, Walter Lodloe set about the task he had undertaken. It was still hot, and the Romney streets were dusty, and after an hour or two of inquiry, walking, and waiting for people who had been sent for, Lodloe found that in the whole village there was not a female from thirteen to seventy-three who would think of such a thing as leaving her home to become nurse-maid to a city lady. He went to bed that night a good deal chagrined, and not in the least knowing what he was going to do about it.

In the morning, however, the thing to do rose clear and plain before him.

"I can't go to her and tell her I've failed," he said to himself. "A maid must be got, and I have undertaken to get one. As there is nobody to be had here, I must go back to the city for one. There are plenty of them there."

So when the early morning boat came along he took passage for the nearest railroad station on the river, for he wished to lose no time on that trip.

The elderly lady who was going to Lethbury took a great interest in Mrs. Cristie, who was to be her only fellow-passenger. She was at the hotel with her carpet-bag and her paper bundle some time before the big spring-wagon was ready to start, and she gave earnest attention to the loading thereon of Mrs. Cristie's trunk and the baby-carriage. When they were on their way the elderly woman promptly began the conversation:

"I think," said she to Mrs. Cristie, "that I've seed you before."

"Perhaps so," said the other; "I was in this region three years ago."

"Yes, yes," said the elder woman; "I thought I was right. Then you had a husband and no child. It now looks as if you had a child and no husband."

Mrs. Cristie informed her that her surmise was correct.

"Well, well," said the elderly woman; "I've had 'em both, and it's hard to say which can be spared best, but as we've got nothin' to do with the sparin' of 'em, we've got ter rest satisfied. After all, they're a good deal like lilock bushes, both of 'em. They may be cut down, and grubbed up, and

a parsley bed made on the spot, but some day they sprout up ag'in, and before you know it you've got just as big a bush as ever. Does Stephen Petter know you're comin'?"

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Cristie, quite willing to change the subject; "all that is arranged. I was so pleased with the place when I was here before, and Mrs. Petter was so good to me, that I quite long to spend a summer there with my child."

"Well, I'm glad he knows you are comin', but if he didn't, I was goin' ter say to you that you'd better go on to Lethbury, and then see what you could do with Stephen to-morrow. It's no use stoppin' at his house without givin' notice, and like as not it ain't no use then."

"Is Mr. Petter's house filled?" asked Mrs. Cristie.

"Filled!" said the elderly woman. "There's nobody on the place but his own family and the Greek."

"Greek!" exclaimed Mrs. Cristie.

"Yes," said the other; "he keeps a Greek in an outhouse, but what for nobody knows. I think Stephen Petter is gettin' more oncommon than he was. If he wants to get custom for his house the best thing he can do is to die. There ain't no other way, for Stephen's not goin' to do no changin' of himself. My niece, Calthea Rose, the daughter of Daniel Rose, who used to keep the store, – she keeps it now herself, – goes over there a good deal, for she's wonderful partial to Susan Petter, and there's a good reason for it too, for a better woman never lived, and the walk over there is mostly shady, or through the fields, to both of which Calthea is partial, and so she knows most things that's goin' on at the Squirrel Inn, which latterly has not been much, except the comin' of the Greek; an' as nobody has been able to get at the bottom of that business, that isn't much, neither."

"I think I remember Miss Calthea Rose," said Mrs. Cristie. "She was tall, wasn't she, with a very fair complexion?"

"Yes," said the elderly woman; "and it's just as fair now as it was then. Some of it's owin' to sun-bonnet, and some of it to cold cream. Calthea isn't as young as she was, but she's wonderful lively on her feet yit, and there ain't many that could get ahead of her walkin' or bargainin'."

"And she keeps the store?" asked Mrs. Cristie.

"Yes," said the other; "she keeps it, and in more ways than one. You see, when Dan'el died – and that was two years ago last March – he left everything to Calthea, and the store with the rest. Before he died he told her what he had done, and advised her to sell out the stock, and put the money into somethin' that would pay good interest, and this she agreed to do, and this she is doing now. She wouldn't consent to no auction, for she knew well enough the things wouldn't bring more 'n half they cost, so she undertook herself to sell 'em all out at retail, just as her father intended they should be sold when he bought 'em. Well, it's took her a long while, and, in the opinion of most folks, it'll take her a long while yit. You see she don't lay in no new goods, but just keeps on sellin' or tryin' to sell what she's got on hand."

"It was purty easy to get rid of the groceries, and the iron and wooden things got themselves sold some way or other; but old dry-goods, with never any new ones to lighten 'em up, is about as humdrum as old people without youngsters in the family. Now it stands to reason that when a person goes into a store and sees nothin' but old calicoes, and some other odds and ends, gettin' mustier and dustier and a little more fly-specked every time, and never a new thing, even so much as a spool of cotton thread, then persons isn't likely to go often into that store, specially when there's a new one in the village that keeps up to the times."

"Now that's Calthea Rose's way of doin' business. She undertook to sell out them goods, and she's goin' to keep on till she does it. She is willin' to sell some of the worst-lookin' things at cost, but not a cent below that, for if she does, she loses money, and that isn't Calthea Rose. I guess, all put together, she hasn't sold more 'n ten dollars' worth of goods this year, and most of them was took by the Greek, though what he wants with 'em is more 'n I know."

"I am sorry to hear that there are no guests at the Squirrel Inn," was Mrs. Cristie's only reply to this information.

"Oh, you needn't give yourself no trouble about loneliness and that sort of thing," said the elderly woman; "before to-morrow night the whole house may be crowded from cockloft to potato-cellar. It never has been yit, but there's no tellin' what Stephen Petter has a-brewin' in his mind."

V THE LANDLORD AND HIS INN

Stephen Petter was a man of middle age, who had been born on a farm, and who, apparently, had been destined to farm a farm. But at the age of thirty, having come into a moderate inheritance, he devoted himself more to the business of cultivating himself and less to that of cultivating his fields.

He was a man who had built himself up out of books. His regular education had been limited, but he was an industrious reader, and from the characters of this and that author he had conceived an idea of a sort of man which pleased his fancy, and to make himself this sort of man he had given a great deal of study and a great deal of hard labor. The result was that he had shaped himself into something like an old-fashioned country clergyman, without his education, his manners, his religion, or his clothes. Imperfect similitudes of these Stephen Petter had acquired, but this was as far as he had gone. A well-read man who happened also to be a good judge of human nature could have traced back every obvious point of Stephen Petter's character to some English author of the last century or the first half of this one.

It was rather odd that a man like this should be the landlord of an inn. But everything about Stephen Petter was odd, so ten years before he had conceived the notion that such a man as he would like to be would be entirely unwilling to live in the little village of Lethbury, where he had no opportunity of exercising an influence upon his fellow-beings. Such an influence he thought it fit to exercise, and as he was not qualified to be a clergyman, or a physician, or a lawyer, he resolved to keep a tavern. This vocation would bring him into contact with fellow-beings; it would give him opportunities to control, impel, and retard.

Stephen Petter did not for a moment think of buying the Lethbury "Hotel," nor of establishing such a house as was demanded by the village. What he had read about houses of entertainment gave him no such motives as these. Fortunately he had an opportunity of carrying out his plan according to the notions he had imbibed from his books.

Some years before Stephen Petter had decided upon his vocation, a rich gentleman had built himself a country-seat about two miles out of Lethbury. This house and its handsome grounds were the talk and the admiration of the neighborhood. But the owner had not occupied his country-home a whole summer before he determined to make a still more attractive home of it by lighting it with a new-fashioned gas of domestic manufacture. He succeeded in lighting not only his house but the whole country-side, for one moonless night his mansion was burned to the ground. Nothing was left of the house but the foundations, and on these the owner felt no desire to build again. He departed from the Lethbury neighborhood and never came back.

When Mr. Petter became impressed with the belief that it would be a good thing for him to be an innkeeper, he also became impressed with the belief that the situation which the rich man had chosen for his country-home would be an admirable one for his purposes. He accordingly bought the property at a very reasonable price, and on the stone foundations of the house which had been burned he built his inn.

This edifice was constructed very much as he had endeavored to construct himself. His plans for one part of it were made up from the descriptions in one of his books, and those of another part from the descriptions or pictures in some other book. Portions of the structure were colonial, others were old English, and others again suggested the Swiss chalet or a château in Normandy. There was a tall tower and there were some little towers. There were peaks here and there, and different kinds of slopes to the various roofs, some of which were thatched, some shingled in fanciful ways, and some covered with long strips or slabs. There were a good many doors and a good many windows,

and these were of different forms, sizes, and periods, some of them jutting boldly outward, and some appearing anxious to shrink out of sight.

It took a great deal of thought and a good deal of labor to build this house; which was also true of Mr. Petter's character. But the first-named work was the more difficult of the two, for in building up himself he consulted with no one, while in planning his inn he met with all sorts of opposition from the village workmen and builders.

But at the cost of all the time that was needed and all the money he could spare, he had his house built as he wanted it; and when it was finished it seemed to exhibit a trace of nearly everything a house should possess excepting chronology and paint. Mr. Petter had selected with a great deal of care the various woods of which his house was built, and he decidedly objected to conceal their hues and texture by monotonous paint. The descriptions that he had read of houses seldom mentioned paint.

The interior was not in the least monotonous. The floors of the rooms, even in the same story, were seldom upon the same level; sometimes one entered a room from a hallway by an ascent of two or three steps, while access to others was obtained by going down some steps. The inside was subordinated in a great degree to the outside: if there happened to be a pretty window like something Mr. Petter had seen in an engraving, a room of suitable shape and size was constructed behind the window. Stairways were placed where they were needed, but they were not allowed to interfere with the shapes of rooms or hallways; if there happened to be no other good place for them they were put on the outside of the house. Some of these stairways were wide, some narrow, and some winding; and as those on the outside were generally covered they increased the opportunities for queer windows and perplexing projections. The upper room of the tower was reached by a staircase from the outside, which opened into a little garden fenced off from the rest of the grounds, so that a person might occupy this room without having any communication with the other people in the house.

In one of the back wings of the building there was a room which was more peculiar than any other, from the fact that there was no entrance to it whatever, unless one climbed into it by means of a ladder placed at one of its windows. This room, which was of fair size and well lighted, was in the second story, but it appeared to be of greater height on account of the descent of the ground at the back of the inn. It had been constructed because the shape of that part of the building called for a room, and a stairway to it had been omitted for the reason that if one had been built in the inside of the house it would have spoiled the shape of the room below, and there seemed no good way of putting one on the outside. So when the room was finished and floored the workmen came out of it through one of the windows, and Stephen Petter reserved his decision in regard to a door and stairway until the apartment should be needed. The grounds around the Squirrel Inn were interesting and attractive, and with them Stephen Petter had interfered very little. The rich man had planned beautiful surroundings for his country-home, and during many years nature had labored steadily to carry out his plans. There were grassy stretches and slopes, great trees, and terraces covered with tangled masses of vines and flowers. The house stood on a bluff, and on one side could be seen a wide view of a lovely valley, with the two steeples of Lethbury showing above the treetops.

Back of the house, and sweeping around between it and the public road, was a far-reaching extent of woodland; and through this, for the distance of half a mile, wound the shaded lane which led from the highway to the Squirrel Inn.

At the point at which this lane was entered from the highroad was the sign of the inn. This was a tall post with a small square frame hanging from a transverse beam, and seated on the lower strip of the frame was a large stuffed gray squirrel. Every spring Stephen Petter took down this squirrel and put up a new one. The old squirrels were fastened up side by side on a ledge in the taproom, and by counting them one could find out how many years the inn had been kept.

Directly below the bluff on which the house stood were Stephen Petter's grassy meadows and his fields of grain and corn, and in the rich pastures, or in the shade of the trees standing by the bank of the rapid little stream that ran down from the woodlands, might be seen his flocks and his herds. By nature he was a very good farmer, and his agricultural method he had not derived from his books. There were people who said – and among these Calthea Rose expressed herself rather better than the others – that Mr. Petter's farm kept him, while he kept the Squirrel Inn.

When it had become known that the Squirrel Inn was ready to receive guests, people came from here and there; not very many of them, but among them were the Rockmores of Germantown. This large family, so it appeared to Stephen Petter, was composed of the kind of fellow-beings with whom he wished to associate. Their manners and ways seemed to him the manners and ways of the people he liked to read about, and he regarded them with admiration and respect. He soon discovered from their conversation that they were connected or acquainted with leading families in our principal Eastern cities, and it became his hope that he and his Squirrel Inn might become connected with these leading families by means of the Rockmores of Germantown.

As this high-classed family liked variety in their summer outings, they did not come again to the Squirrel Inn, but the effect of their influence remained strong upon its landlord. He made up his mind that those persons who did not know the Rockmores of Germantown did not move in those circles of society from which he wished to obtain his guests, and therefore he drew a line which excluded all persons who did not possess this acquaintanceship.

This rule was very effectual in preventing the crowding of his house, and, indeed, there were summers when he had no guests at all; but this did not move Stephen Petter. Better an empty house than people outside the pale of good society.

VI THE GREEK SCHOLAR

Mrs. Cristie and her baby were warmly welcomed by Stephen Petter and his wife. They had learned during her former visit to like this lady for herself, and now that she came to them a widow their sentiments towards her were warmer than ever.

Mrs. Petter wondered very much why she had come without a maid, but fearing that perhaps the poor lady's circumstances were not what they had been she forbore to ask any immediate questions. But in her heart she resolved that, if she kept her health and strength, Mrs. Cristie should not be worn out by that child.

The young widow was charmed to find herself once more at the Squirrel Inn, for it had been more like a home to her than any place in which she had lived since her marriage, but when she went to her room that night there was a certain depression on her spirits. This was caused by the expected advent on the next day of Mr. Lodloe and a wagon-load of candidates for the nurse-maidship.

The whole affair annoyed her. In the first place it was very awkward to have this young man engaged in this service for her; and now that he was engaged in it, it would be, in a manner, under her auspices that he would arrive at the Squirrel Inn. The more she thought of the matter the more it annoyed her. She now saw that she must announce the coming of this gentleman. It would not do for him to make a totally unexpected appearance as her agent in the nurse-maid business.

But no worry of this sort could keep her awake very long, and after a night of sound and healthful sleep she told her host and hostess, the next morning at breakfast, of the Mr. Lodloe who had kindly undertaken to bring her a nurse-maid.

"Lodloe," repeated Mr. Petter. "It strikes me that I have heard the Rockmores mention that name. Is it a Germantown family?"

"I really do not know," answered Mrs. Cristie; "he is from New York."

Here she stopped. She was of a frank and truthful nature, and very much wished to say that she knew nothing whatever of Mr. Lodloe, but she was also of a kindly and grateful disposition, and she very well knew that such a remark would be an extremely detrimental one to the young man; so, being in doubt, she resolved to play trumps, and in cases like this silence is generally trumps.

Mrs. Petter had a mind which could project itself with the rapidity of light into the regions of possibilities, and if the possibilities appeared to her desirable her mind moved at even greater velocity. It was plain to her that there must be something between this young widow and the young man who was going to bring her a nurse-maid; and if this were the case, nothing must be allowed to interfere with the admission of said young man as a guest at the Squirrel Inn.

Mrs. Cristie did not want to talk any more on this subject. Nothing would have pleased her better at that moment than to hear that Mr. Lodloe had been unable to find her a suitable girl and that business had called him to New York.

"Mr. Petter," she exclaimed, "I was told yesterday that you kept a Greek in an outhouse. What on earth does that mean?"

Here Mrs. Petter laughed abruptly, and Mr. Petter slightly lifted his brow.

"Who could have told you such nonsense?" he said. "There is no Greek here. It is true that a Greek scholar lives in my summer-house, but that is very different from keeping a Greek in an outhouse."

"And he's always late to breakfast," said Mrs. Petter; "I believe if we sat down at the table at nine o'clock he would come in just as we were finishing."

"How does it happen," said Mrs. Cristie, "that he lives in the summer-house?"

"He does not know the Rockmores of Germantown," said Mrs. Petter.

"He is a man of learning," remarked Stephen Petter, "with a fine mind; and although I have made a rule which is intended to keep up the reputation of this house to a desirable level, I do not intend, if I can help it, that my rules shall press pinchingly, oppressively, or irritatively upon estimable persons. Such a person is Mr. Tippengray, our Greek scholar; and although his social relations are not exactly up to the mark, he is not a man who should be denied the privileges of this house, so far as they can be conscientiously given him. So you see, Mrs. Cristie, that, although I could not take him into the inn, there was no reason why I should not fit up the summer-house for him, which I did, and I believe he likes it better than living in the house with us."

"Like it!" exclaimed Mrs. Petter; "I should say he did like it. I believe it would drive him crazy if he had to keep regular hours like other people; but here he is now. Hester, bring in some hot cakes. Mrs. Cristie, allow me to introduce Mr. Tippengray."

The appearance of the Greek scholar surprised Mrs. Cristie. She had expected to see a man in threadbare black, with a reserved and bowed demeanor. Instead of this, she saw a bright little gentleman in neat summer clothes, with a large blue cravat tied sailor fashion. He was not a young man, although his hair being light the few portions of it which had turned gray were not conspicuous. He was a man who was inclined to listen and to observe rather than to talk, but when he had anything to say he popped it out very briskly.

Mr. Petter, having finished his breakfast, excused himself and retired, and Mrs. Petter remarked to Mr. Tippengray that she was sorry he had not taken his evening meal with them the day before.

"I took such a long walk," said the Greek scholar, "that I concluded to sup in Lethbury."

"Those Lethbury people usually take tea at five," said his hostess.

"But I'm not a Lethbury person," said he, "and I took my tea at seven."

Mrs. Petter looked at him with twinkles in her eyes.

"Of course you went to the hotel," she said.

Mr. Tippengray looked at her with twinkles in his eyes.

"Madam," said he, "have you noticed that those large blue-jays that were here in the spring have almost entirely disappeared. I remember you used to object to their shrill pipes."

"Which is as much as to say," said Mrs. Petter, "you don't care to mention where you took tea yesterday."

"Madam," said Mr. Tippengray, "the pleasure of taking breakfast here to-day effaces the memory of all former meals."

"The truth of it is," said Mrs. Petter to Mrs. Cristie, when they had left the table, "Caltha Rose gave him his tea, and he don't want to say so. She's mightily taken with him, for he is a fine-minded man, and it isn't often she gets the chance of keeping company with that kind of a man. I don't know whether he likes her liking or not, but he don't care to talk about it."

Her first day at the Squirrel Inn was not altogether a pleasant one for Bertha Cristie. In spite of the much-proffered service of Mrs. Petter the care of her baby hampered her a good deal; and notwithstanding the delights of her surroundings her mind was entirely too much occupied with wondering when Mr. Lodloe would arrive with his wagon-load of girls, and what she would have to say to him and about him when he did arrive.

VII ROCKMORES AHEAD

It was late in the afternoon of the day after Mrs. Cristie reached the Squirrel Inn that she slowly trundled the little carriage containing the baby towards the end of the bluff beneath which stretched the fair pastures where were feeding Mr. Petter's flocks and herds. All day she had been looking for the arrival of the young man who had promised to bring her some candidates for the position of child's nurse, and now she was beginning to believe that she might as well cease to expect him. It was an odd sort of service for a comparative stranger voluntarily to undertake, and it would not be at all surprising if he had failed in his efforts or had given up his idea of coming to the Squirrel Inn.

Having philosophized a little on the subject, and having succeeded in assuring herself that after all the matter was of no great importance, and that she should have attended to it herself, and must do it the next day, she was surprised to find how glad she was when, turning, she saw emerging from the woodland road a one-horse wagon with Mr. Lodloe sitting by the driver, and a female figure on the back seat.

The latter proved to be a young person who at a considerable distance looked about fourteen years old, although on a nearer and more careful view she would pass for twenty, or thereabouts. She wore a round straw hat with a white ribbon, and a light-colored summer suit with a broad belt, which held a large bunch of yellow flowers with brown centers. She had a cheerful, pleasant countenance, and large brown eyes which seemed to observe everything.

As the wagon approached, Mrs. Cristie rapidly pushed her baby-carriage towards the house. Before she reached it the young girl had jumped to the ground, and was advancing towards her.

"I suppose this is Mrs. Cristie," said the newcomer. "I am Ida Mayberry"; and she held out her hand. Without a word Mrs. Cristie shook hands with the nurse-maid.

"I think," said the latter, "before we have any talk I would better go to my room and freshen myself up a little. I am covered with dust"; and then she turned to the driver of the wagon and gave him directions in regard to a medium-sized trunk, a large flat box, and several long packages tied up in brown muslin, which had been strapped to the back of the wagon. When these had been taken into the inn, she followed them.

As Mr. Lodloe approached Mrs. Cristie, hat in hand, she exclaimed in a tone which she was not in the habit of using to comparative strangers, in which category sober reflection would certainly have placed the gentleman:

"Will you please to tell me what is the meaning of this? Who is that girl, and where did she come from?"

"Madam," said Lodloe, in a deprecatory tone, "I can scarcely pick up the courage to say so, but that is the nurse-maid."

"And you brought her to me?" exclaimed Mrs. Cristie.

"I did," he answered.

"Did you get her in Romney?"

"No," said Lodloe; "there wasn't a girl of any sort or kind to be had there. I was obliged to go to New York for one."

"To New York!" cried the astonished Mrs. Cristie.

"Madam," said Lodloe, "let me propose that we retire a little from the house. Perhaps her room may be somewhere above us."

And the two having walked a short distance over the lawn, he continued:

"I really believe that I have done a very foolish thing, but having promised to do you a service I greatly disliked not to keep my word. I could find no one in Romney, and of course the only way to get you a girl was to go to New York; and so I went there. My idea was to apply to one of those establishments where there are always lots of maids of all grades, and bring one to you. That was the way the matter appeared to me, and it seemed simple enough. On the ferryboat I met Mrs. Waltham, a lady I know very well, who is a member of the Monday Morning Club, and a great promoter of college annexes for girls, and all that sort of thing; and when I asked her advice about the best intelligence office, she told me to keep away from all of them, and to go instead to a teachers' agency, of which she gave me the address, where she said I would be almost sure to find some teacher who wanted occupation during the holidays."

"A teacher!" cried Mrs. Cristie.

"Yes," said Lodloe; "and you may be sure that I was as much surprised as you are. But Mrs. Waltham assured me that a great many women teachers found it necessary to make money during the summer, and were glad to do anything, just as college students wait at hotels. The more she talked about it the more she got interested in it, and the matter resulted in her going to the agency with me. Mrs. Waltham is a heavy swell in educational circles, and as she selected this girl herself I said not a word about it, except to hurry up matters so that the girl and I could start on an early afternoon train."

"Never in my life!" ejaculated Mrs. Cristie.

"Madam," interrupted Lodloe, "I beg you not to say what you intended. It is impossible for you to feel as badly about it as I do. Just to think of it stuns me. Did you see her baggage? She has come to stay all summer. There is no earthly reason to think she will suit you. I don't suppose she ever saw a baby."

Mrs. Cristie's mind was still filled with surprise and vexation, but she could not help laughing at Mr. Lodloe's comical contrition.

"I will see her presently," she said; "but in the mean time what are you going to do? There is Mr. Petter standing in the doorway waiting for your approach, and he will ask you a lot of questions."

"About the Germantown family, I suppose," said Lodloe.

"Yes," said Mrs. Cristie; "that will be one of them."

"Well, I don't know them," said Lodloe, "and that's the end of it."

"By no means," said the lady, quickly; "Mr. Petter has on his most impressive air. You must go and talk to him, and it will not do to sneer at the Rockmores."

"If it is absolutely necessary to have credentials in order to secure quarters here," said Lodloe, "I don't see what is to be done about it."

"Come with me," said Mrs. Cristie, quickly; "you have put yourself to a great deal of trouble for me, and I will see what I can do for you."

When Walter Lodloe and Mr. Petter had been formally introduced to each other, the brow of the latter bore marks of increased trouble and uncertainty. From the confidential aspect of the interview between Mrs. Cristie and the young man, the landlord of the inn had begun to suspect what his wife had suspected, and it galled his spirit to think of putting his usual test question to this friend of Mrs. Cristie. But he was a man of principle, and he did not flinch.

"Are you from Philadelphia, sir," he asked, "or its vicinity?"

"No," said Lodloe; "I am from New York."

"A great many Philadelphia people," continued the landlord, "or those from its vicinity, are well known in New York, and in fact move in leading circles there. Are you acquainted, sir, with the Rockmores of Germantown?"

Mrs. Petter now appeared in the doorway, her face clouded. If Mrs. Cristie had known the Rockmores she would have hastened to give Mr. Lodloe such advantages as an acquaintance in

the second degree might afford. But she had never met any member of that family, the valuable connection being entirely on the side of her late husband.

"I did not know," said Lodloe, "that you required credentials of respectability, or I might have brought a lot of letters."

"One from Matthew Vassar?" said Mrs. Cristie, unable to resist her opportunity.

"Were you acquainted with Matthew Vassar?" interpolated Mrs. Petter with energetic interest. "He was a great and good man, and his friends ought to be good enough for anybody. Now put it to yourself, Stephen. Don't you think that the friends of Matthew Vassar, the founder of that celebrated college, known all over the world, a man who even after his day and generation is doing so much good, are worthy to be accommodated in this house?"

Mr. Petter contracted his brows, looked upon the ground, and interlaced his fingers in front of him.

"The late Mr. Matthew Vassar," said he, "was truly a benefactor to his kind, and a man worthy of all respect; but when we come to consider the way in which the leading circles of society are made up – "

"Don't consider it at all," cried Mrs. Petter. "If this gentleman is a friend of Mrs. Cristie, and is backed up by Matthew Vassar, you cannot turn him away. If you want to get round the Rockmores you can treat him just as you treat Mr. Tippengray. Let him have the top room of the tower, which, I am sure, is as pleasant as can be, especially in warm weather, and then he will have his own stairs to himself, and can come in and go out just as Mr. Tippengray does, without ever considering whether the Squirrel Inn is open or shut. As for eating, that's a different matter. People can eat in a place without living there. That was all settled when we took Mr. Tippengray."

An expression of decided relief passed over the face of Mr. Petter.

"It is true," he said, "that in the case of Mr. Tippengray we made an exception to our rule – "

"That's so," interrupted Mrs. Petter; "and as I have heard that exceptions prove a rule, the more of them we have the better. And if the top room suits Mr. Lodloe, I'll have it made ready for him without waiting another minute."

Mr. Lodloe declared that any room into which the good lady might choose to put him would suit him perfectly; and that matter was settled.

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