

Storyteller.

THE UNWELCOME VISITOR.

"What's up, mother?" asked Madge, the younger of two sisters who had been observing their mother's troubled expression while reading a letter.

"Well, Madge," her mother answered, "our plans for our eighteenth birthday are completely upset! Cousin Constance wants to come here to recuperate, and then get work. How foolish I was to give her such a glowing account of these parts."

"Work, mother. How horrible," exclaimed Madge.

"In this letter she says that, 'if quite convenient, she will accept the invitation of last year, and pay us a visit.'

But, girls, things are now altogether different. Cousin Constance has since lost her husband, and three months ago, Max, the second of her two boys, in hospital; the elder on the field of battle a few months earlier. I gather that her husband left her insufficiently provided for, and that she is in poor health."

"I call that making a convenience of us, don't you, mother?"

"Oh, Madge, how can you talk like that?" Lillian, her senior by two years asked in a hurt tone.

"One would think to hear you talk, Lillian, that you had a monopoly of sympathy. But being of a practical turn of mind, I want to know what Cousin Constance has to do with changing our plans to-day?"

"Only this," her mother drily remarked, "in a few hours she will be here, and if we have no where else to put her, she will be foisted upon us."

"But, mother, why not have her here?" earnestly interposed Lillian, who had, some eighteen months before, spent a whole month with this loved cousin in her beautiful home. It was there she had witnessed ideal family life, and there learnt to know the Saviour as her own. And as she thought of the great change in this cousin's life—loss of her dear ones, health, fortune, her heart ached. Oh! mother," she pleaded, "think what it must mean for Cousin Constance, five years older than you to begin life, as it were, afresh."

Ignoring her remarks, the mother said, addressing Madge, "Here you, the practical one, put on your things, and

we will find some place for Cousin Constance."

Outside the gate the two started off to a distant, not easily accessible neighbourhood, to make frequent meetings impossible, and there began their search.

Each failure to secure suitable accommodation was followed by invective on the head of the innocent cause, with such remarks as, "Beggars must not be choosers, mother."

"The fact of the matter is Madge, Cousin Constance has been completely spoilt by an adoring husband and children."

"Well, mother, she must now earn, as you have often said to me, 'to cut her coat according to her cloth.'"

At last, almost abandoning search in despair, Mrs Phipps made enquiries at a corner baker's shop.

"Yes," the proprietress said, "Mr and Mrs Ridge of the large gray house opposite take boarders."

"Respectable," I should think so. It is a favourite resort of students and others, the terms being reasonable, and not far from town."

Here Madge angrily tugged at her mother's sleeve, and whispered, "Do be careful, mother, and don't let this slip."

"They do say," the woman continued, "that Mrs Ridge has an awful temper, and loves to take a rise out of certain of her boarders, and that everything is on the **near** side, but some get on very well with her." And she whose spirit and bearing showed plainly that she would not submit lamely to anything she did not like, added, "There are drawbacks everywhere, and we must put up with them."

Their knock was answered by Mrs Ridge herself. The eyes that looked into theirs were hard, and full of suppressed passion; the mouth cruel; the voice deep and harsh. To conciliate her was the one concern of the two callers, and to make a favourable impression. After passing over two of the best rooms with the comment, "I am sure, Cousin Constance will not be willing to pay the terms for either of these," they were shown a back room, overlooking some dilapidated cottages. The furniture was odd, and had long since seen its best days. With "a take it or leave it style," with her eyes flashing with anger, Mrs Ridge said, "The lady who has lately occupied this room, and she was

a real lady, was very comfortable with me."

"I am sure she was," hurriedly interposed Mrs Phipps, "everything is very nice, and as to the dining-sitting room, that ought to charm anyone, with its antique furniture and cosy nooks and corners. But it is difficult to choose for another. What do you say, Madge? Do you think this will satisfy her?"

"It ought to, mother," was the decided answer.

Arrangements completed, the visitors left with sincere regrets that a pressing engagement, involving a few days' absence from home, would prevent a meeting for a few days, and would Mr Ridge meet the train and explain matters, and if you will allow me, Mrs Ridge, I will pen a letter of welcome. See, I have everything I need in my bag," she added, with her most ingratiating smile. "I think you will find Mrs Barclay an agreeable inmate of your home. She is a good woman. But she is not in the best of health just now. She is very particular, but of course she must not expect to carry all before her, as in her own home."

With a sagacious nod, Mrs Ridge closed the door, while a grim smile of satisfaction played around the cruel mouth. Returning to the kitchen, she summed up the situation to her husband and two maids. "She's either the poor relation, or frightfully mean. Her people don't mean to be bothered with her, that's plain. She's evidently full of fads, but I shall have no one to interfere with me, and I can manage the likes of her."

Never had the home appeared more attractive to mother and daughter than when they were partaking of the well-cooked evening meal. Throughout the evening many a look of appreciation was passed between the two. But their conversation was all about the grandeur of the large gray house; its antique furniture; its handsome dining-sitting room; the appetising smell of the meal in course of preparation.

Here Lillian interrupted with, "Cousin Constance can't sit with others, with her music, singing, painting, and writing. What about her bedroom? Is that large, and fitted for her to carry out her life-work?"

There was anger in look and tone as her mother replied, "How often I have to tell you 'not to ask inconvenient questions.'" The last remark was lost