

WAVERLAND.

A TALE OF OUR COMING LANDLORDS.

BY SARAH MARIE BRIGHAM.

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One evening about a week after Stella's departure, I came home from a long ride more sad and lonely than ever. After eating a few mouthfuls of supper I went to my room, thinking I would form some plan for leaving Waverland. As I sat trying to decide what course to pursue, I heard Stella's voice as plainly as I ever did in my life, saying, "If I were you I would not let my inheritance go to waste."

"When shall we meet again? Dear heart, the time is long; That brings this quested strain, Like minor in a song."

"Some day the clouds will lift From off my waiting brow; And through the golden rift, Sun-lighted beams will dart."

"For on that day you'll come; Your hand will touch my own; My heart, now sadly dumb, Will speak for you alone."

That seemed a sweet promise for the future, and I was comforted. I believed that Stella was safe and that sometime we would meet again. What a sense of rest came to my mind, bringing by the aid of memory all her quiet ways and pleasant words back again, until I seemed to feel her very presence. I was anxious to do some good deed to be worthy of her pure love. Can mind take form and visit mind? Yes, I believe that sympathy of love can unite as though distance may intervene. But would she believe what my mother said, that Annie and I were engaged? O, mother, how could you tell her that! Annie and I had been playmates, but what was my love for her compared with this strong, deep passion, that filled my waking thoughts and visited my dreams? My Stella was my queen, my life-star, and if I failed to find her I felt that life would be a failure.

Moving some furniture one day in Stella's room a little blank envelope fell to the floor. I picked it up and found it was not sealed. Surely here was the message I had longed for. I hastened to my room to examine the contents. I had not a doubt that it was for me, until I opened it. I found a little square card divided into thirty-six equal parts. Twenty-seven were closed and nine were open. Such a card, at college, the boys called a grating. It was used to decipher messages when great secrecy was desired. What was the message? Should I read? For a little while I debated with myself, then curiosity prevailed, and I tried. It was addressed "To my darling," and contained the following words:

There was no meaning to the words in this shape. But I had learned the use of the grating years ago, when we had planned midnight raids about the buildings and grounds of the university. I copied the first row of words into squares corresponding to the thirty-six equal parts of the grating. Then I placed the card with the nine open squares over my letters, carefully observing the little cross on the upper left hand corner, which marked the top. Then the letters revealed through the spaces were: d, n, a, l, g, e, e, k, r. There was no more meaning than before. But I replaced my card, moving the cross to the right hand upper corner; these letters were visible: a, p, s, n, e, v, a, r, m.

"You mistake me. I want to make you more comfortable. On your small holding you can hardly raise enough to keep your family from want. But if you will work for me, I will give you good wages for yourself, your wife, and all the child that are large enough to work."

"My father lived here and his father before him; and now as soon as ye're master ye come to root us out of the soil!" he said, shaking his fist in my face, while his wife kept coming nearer and showing the spirit of an angry tigress about to spring.

"But, Mike," I protested, "I want you to live more comfortable. It is hard work to live in this way," pointing to the pigs and cow.

"Yer want the cow turned out to die, so we can't pay our rent," said Mike, "thin ye'd turn us from our home. No, yer may leave us to ourselves."

I tried to reason with him, but could not make him believe but that I meant to harm him. Mike was honest, industrious and sober, but the few acres he held were not enough to keep his family from want if he never paid any rent. Yet I could not make him believe it was for his good I made the offer.

I visited a dozen farmers, but they were all of the same opinion as Mike, and preferred to live in filth and degradation rather than give up their little holdings. Instead of helping them as I had planned to do, I nearly caused an insurrection. The men gathered together and were ready to fight if I persisted in asking them to change. I soon found the reason for such filthy yards and houses was fear of the rent being raised if the place looked thrifty. Very carefully I set to work to overcome their mistaken prejudices.

I had commenced the work of improvement before Stella had left, as she had advised on that day which seemed to me years ago. O, why was I silent that morning! If I had only spoken the loving words within my heart, I might have kept her by my side. How much I missed her now! I had learned to value her words of counsel. Her ready tact would influence the tenants to do her will, as I often found. When I offered any plan for change if she had ever spoken of it to them they were very willing to accept it. Gradually I had to learn her way of dealing with the people and was guided accordingly. It was the story of Topsy and Eva over again. Stella was the Eva to teach me there must be sympathy to win regard. As I followed out that principle the tenants began to trust me. I started improvements that gave them work, and the wages gave them a good many comforts.

After a good deal of thought and some expense I had the satisfaction of knowing that every tenant had a comfortable house and that the pigs and cows were sheltered without being members of the family. It was a beautiful morning in January; the trees and shrubs were clothed with the fairy garb that Jack Frost loves to deck the world in, when I rode over to Sir Wren's to receive instructions for my London visit. He was in his favorite place, the library. He looked up as I entered, and extended his hand, saying: "I began to think you had forgotten your promise, Lloyd. But there is time enough yet. O, by the way, your new theory did not work; came near having a row, I hear."

"Then Parnell must be the prince of Irish fashion," said Colonel Haynes. "Parnell a prince," sneeringly said the Duke of Melvorne. "Yes, he is a prince to a man who has people's pockets. Why, even, the Americans were gulled into paying him large sums of money for his 'Irish sufferings.'"

"But Parnell did not use the money, it came to the people, as I can testify. I have seen ships from America loaded with provisions in our harbors, and I have seen those same provisions portioned out to the starving people of Ireland. I have also seen the English government paying an armed force to evict these same people without a thought of aid," I said, indignant that an Englishman, of all men, should accuse Parnell of trickery and dishonesty.

"Yes, Lord Waverland, you are right. I, too, have seen ships from the United States, in the Irish harbors, loaded with the same provisions that other ships were loaded with, that were leaving Ireland for England. It was not lack of food that made famine," said Colonel Haynes.

"That is true, sir," I said. "There is enough of everything raised in Ireland for her people to have plenty. At the very time when American food and money were being distributed to the suffering people they were sending from Ireland to England thirty large steamers every week, laden to the gunwales with fat cattle, sheep, pigs and the most expensive kinds of food."

"Then what made the famine?" asked the Duke of Melvorne. "The feudal system of land tenure under which Ireland is groaning is what caused it," I answered.

"Why, are you a landlord and yet advocate the tenants' rights so zealously?" asked Lord Sanders a little annoyed.

"Yes, Lord Sanders, I am a landlord, yet I would willingly yield my interest in the land as the Persians did theirs."

"Why, how was that?" asked Colonel Haynes. "The land-owners were compensated for their lands by the government issuing bonds bearing four per cent interest to them, while the tenants paid the government five per cent on the bonds," I explained.

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