

# THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR

A STORY OF MYSTERY

By LUCIA CHAMBERLAIN, Author of "THE COAST OF CHANCE."

## CHAPTER VI.

### The Spanish Woman's House.

Sunday, which found me sole mistress of the place, was beautiful, warm, and beguiling. That lovely locked-in feeling, which comes only when the streets are quiet, and no tradesmen, not even the postman, comes knocking, soothed me after the days of tension and expectancy. Abby went off early to church, and I took a book out to the rustic seat by the heliotope. At about half-past ten Mr. Dingley came through the conservatory; but he was used to coming in and out of the house so much that his joining me in the garden was no more of an invasion than if he had been one of the family. He said father had told him he was to be out of town, and he had come around to see how the household was getting on. We sat there very comfortably in the warm sun, aimlessly talking, hearing the sweet notes of church bells. I was just about to resume my book when Lee put his head out of the conservatory door.

"Some one to see you, Miss Ellie," he announced, and disappeared abruptly before I could ask who.

I went in, feeling it would prove to be some girl whom I did not know well, who had called out of mere curiosity. I was surprised to find, awaiting me in the hall, a person whom I did not know at all—whom I had never even seen before. It was a half-grown, shuffling Mexican, with a blank and stupid face, looking as if he might be some one's stable-boy. But as soon as he saw me, he produced from some pocket and presented to me with remarkable swiftness and dexterity, a small immaculate white note. It was addressed to me, and the writing was not Estrella Mendez's small copperscript but a larger, bolder, more dashing hand, scarcely like a woman's.

"To the Senorita Elena," it began—and I wondered whether it could be from one of mother's old friends, for she had had several among the great Spanish families of the North. "I am asking if you will honor me with your presence for a short hour this morning," the letter ran. "It is impossible that I come to you for I am ill. But there is a very great reason why I must see you. It is a matter touching justice. You will not fail." It was signed "Carlotta Valencia."

I read the signature twice over, and then the letter. No, my eyes were not playing tricks. But still, could it be some practical joke? I put the envelope to my face. Ah, it was she, it was the perfume of that flower! She had really written; she had summoned me.

The very fact that she had communicated with me, this being who was not as I was, whose life seemed as irrevocably separated from mine as if she inhabited another planet, was amazing. And as for those expressions in her letter, "a very great matter," "touching justice," "I dared not think what I wanted to believe."

I carried the note out into the garden. "I don't know how to answer this," I said, handing it to Mr. Dingley.

He read it, and whistled. "Well!" he said; and then, "there's one thing sure; you will not go alone!"

"Why, you don't mean to say I'm to go?" I cried.

He looked inquiringly. "Why not?"

"Oh, but father doesn't even like me to speak her name."

Mr. Dingley coughed. "Quite right, quite right! That is, of course, under ordinary circumstances. But in affairs of this sort, where State's evidence is concerned, we are obliged to lay personal feeling aside. Now from this letter," and Mr. Dingley tapped the little sheet which he held before him, "I gather that the Senora Valencia may have some information concerning this case of ours now going forward. Of course if it's incriminating, the State must have it. On the other hand, if it should tend to exonerate the defendant, of course we shall be very glad."

"A murmured, 'Oh, yes!' The hope of a possible means of clearing Johnny Montgomery went flushing through me.

If the Spanish woman had anything to say I knew it would be in his favor. Still, there was something strange about it. "But if she has this information," I asked, "why doesn't she tell it in the court?"

"My dear Miss Ellie, why indeed? We never know why women do things. But it has been my experience in legal cases, and especially in criminal ones, that women will often give evidence in some such high-fantastic way as this, which could never be got out of them through the proper channel—that is, by means of cross-examination, in court. Now she's evidently taken a fancy to tell you something, and I feel it is our duty to see just how much is in it."

"Oh, yes," I said again, but this time more faintly, for when I thought of whom I was to face, some cowardly thing in me wavered. "But are you sure it's safe?"

Mr. Dingley laughed. My dear Miss Ellie, we don't live in the dark ages!"

He made me feel ashamed of my hesitations. I went back into the hall, told the Mexican in Spanish, yes, that I would come quickly. He seemed satisfied with this verbal message, and I watched him shuffle down the steps, in spite of his loose-hung gait, with admirable quickness. Then I told Lee that I was going out; dinner at half-past two, all as simply and usually as if I had been intending merely to stroll over to the beach. But there the usualness of things ended.

Mr. Dingley did not at all take the way I expected, the most direct and open way by the broad easy streets, where at this hour of Sunday the church-goers were promenading; and we went round about, through unexpected short cuts, and then across the empty stretches of the sand-lots toward the long, gray facade of the convent stretched, and close beside it the high fence with the latticed top, which surrounded the Spanish woman's house. Above the fence the roof and the small windows beneath the eaves were just visible. As we grew near my heart beat quickly, and still I felt that, as when I was a child, I was only going to pass it. But we turned, and I realized I was actually stopping at the gate.

This was so high it was merely a door cut in the fence, allowing no glimpse of what was within, and instead of immediately opening it, Mr. Dingley rapped upon it with the iron knocker, whose

lion head had been wont to snarl at me years ago. I heard a sharp clicking as of some thing being unlocked, and the gate opened. But after we got inside I got an uncanny shock, for excepting ourselves there was not a soul to be seen. "Clever contrivance that," said Mr. Dingley, glancing up. And then I noticed a wire which ran from the fastening of the gate to its top, and from there in a straight line to the house. But even this discovery didn't remove my uneasy sense of being in an enchantment.

Around us were weedy grass plots, bushes, smothering in vines, broken flower urns, a dry and weather-stained fountain, and to and fro, across the neglect of it all, moved the shadows of the restless eucalyptus trees. A brick path, very mossy and giving uncertain foothold, ran straight to the front of the house—a blank-looking facade, all the



The Spanish Lady.

shutters closed over the windows, and a deeply-hooded door.

Mr. Dingley gave the bell handle a vigorous pull, but not the faintest rattle reached through the interior. We waited. There wasn't sound of any one inside approaching through the hall. I was fully prepared to be admitted by the same unseen agency that had moved the gate. But when, quite suddenly, the door opened, I was aware of a figure, very dimly seen in the gloom of the hall. We were allowed to enter without a question, without a word; and as quickly as the door closed upon us. After the broad sunlight the hall seemed so dark. I could not see high ceilings and hanging draperies above my head, and feel beneath my feet the soft depth of a carpet. All that my eyes could distinguish was the little white glimmer of Mr. Dingley's card as he handed it to the person who had opened the door.

We were led through several rooms; but either they were interior rooms, without windows, or else the windows were closely muffled, for they were so dark I could hardly find my way. But, when at last, our conductor drew back a curtain, a tempered light streamed upon us, and showed me that the corners of the ante-room where we were standing were gilded, that the carpet which I was crushing under my feet, was the color of wine, and every fold of the velvet curtain where it took the light like a ruby. The servant, holding it back, was a strange creature, with a tightly closed mouth, and eyes that looked as if he kept them open only a crack to see out of, but not on any account to let any one peep in. He waved at the room in front of us, and then, still silent as an apparition, returned, disappearing into the gloom through which he had come, carrying Mr. Dingley's card with him. I followed Mr. Dingley into the great apartment, which I thought must be the sala of the house, and sat down in the midst of its magnificence.

It was a strange contrast to the neglect of the garden without; and to my eyes it was novel in character. There were dark portraits in old gold frames on the wall; curtains shutting out all light, but the faintest and most colored; mirrors multiplying the tapestries and marble statues, and seeming to extend the very walls of the room itself. I kept catching glimpses of figures standing in these delusive vistas, and then, with a start, realizing they were but myself. Presently the servant returned. I saw multiple images of him advancing upon me from all sides as if to surround me. They filtered, disappeared, and the real presence bowed.

"The Senora wishes to say she is too ill to descend to the sala. Will the Senorita graciously come up-stairs?" Mr. Dingley turned to me. "That's about as I expected. Then I will wait for you here."

Involuntarily I took hold of his coat. "But you said I shouldn't go alone!"

"Oh, of course, of course," he smiled. "I meant I'd come with you to the house. That's one matter. But to go up-stairs, that's hardly possible! Don't you see, Miss Ellie, he lowered his voice, "it's quite probable this is just a ruse to get rid of me? She would hardly want to speak before a third party."

The reminder that the Spanish woman was going to speak, and the probability of what that speech might mean was enough to make me relinquish Mr. Dingley's coat, and send me in the wake of the serving-man with almost a light heart.

He led me out of the sala, not by the curtained way through which we had

come, but by a door opening on a little entry, and from that up a stair, which was not at all like the stairway I had seen in the large entrance hall. I had never been in a house so bewilderingly built. I followed down halls that dwindled into passageways and so quickly did my guide move, so far he kept in front of me that even when my blue bow dropped from my hair pat upon the floor I dared not stoop to pick it up for fear of losing sight of him. I kept on ascending unexpected little steps; entered doors that opened abruptly as panels in the wall, branched off into yet narrower halls, and finally was ushered into what seemed a sort of anteroom, with only a few chairs furnishing it, and a great extent of polished floor stretching out in front of me to a curtain which hung across one whole side of it. There was a sweet though rather close odor, which wrought powerfully

not think well of him; he is perhaps repulsive to you?"

"Oh, no!" I whispered. There was a painful tightness around my heart, and my head felt on fire. It was not the Spanish woman but I who seemed to be telling the story.

She gave a quick nod, as if my answers thus far had satisfied her. "You do not believe him to be a murderer, you do not even think him unpleasant, and yet you will go into the court and swear away his freedom—perhaps his life?"

"I said I thought he did not look like a murderer," I desperately insisted, "but I can't help."

"I know, my child, just what you are going to say," she interrupted. "You are going to say the words they have taught you—that it is your duty and all that. Do you not know that the law is just a great machine of rules, and that this is one of them; that you must tell whatever you have seen, no matter how unjust, no matter what harm it does? It is for that reason I do not go to the law. I come to you, who are a woman like me, and have compassion. You say you do not know this man, but you have seen him. You cannot be quite blind to what he is. He has been rash and foolish, and it is true that he has made angry some very virtuous citizens"—she rolled out the last two words with a curl of her handsome lip—"but he is a most lovable and charming boy, and the most brave! Can't you see by his face that he could not do an evil thing? He was dragged into this affair as a matter of honor; the quarrel was a fair and open one."

A joyful feeling went through me at her words—the first really kind, saving words I had heard spoken of him. I almost loved her for them; and the expectation that the next moment I was to hear the explanation of their kind me, leaning forward in my chair, breathless. She made a little imploring movement toward me with her open hands. "It would be cruel, cruel for a gentle, tender-hearted girl like you to speak such words against him!" A faint color was beginning to shine in her cheeks, and her eyes had opened wide their wonderful blackness.

"But," I cried, "if you know something in his favor why don't you go in to court and tell them about it? If only you would speak to them as you do to me. I know they would believe you! They couldn't help it!"

She shot a quick glance at me, half suspicious, half fierce; but immediately it softened into a rather sad smile. "That is very generous of you, to speak so; but about the court do not make a mistake. The words I have, the things I know, are not those that speak to the mind but to the heart. All that the lawyers take count of are the facts; and for the jury, they would be more swayed by one word a little innocent-eyed girl would say, than by the most eloquent plea I could offer. It is you who will sway this balance of justice. Do not try to escape from that responsibility. Think, think, of how, when you saw him come out of the door, he looked at you, and with his eyes implored you to be silent!"

I stared at her, terribly wrought upon by the memory she had called up of that look; astounded that she had known of it, had even been able to translate its meaning for me.

"Yes," she said, smiling, "I know all about it. And then you ran home and told them. Her voice grew very earnest. "But that was in the moment when you had lost your head. Now that you have had time to think it all over, now that you know how much it means—oh, surely, you will not speak again! I beg you, in human mercy, not that you plead for him, not that you tell a false story, but only as you are a woman, keep silence, keep silence!"

I listened with increasing dismay, as the hot words poured from her lips; and, with the end, a revulsion of feeling took me, a loss of bewildered sense of being completely astray. It was not to tell anything she had called me hither, oh, quite the opposite—it was to try to close my lips. If I hadn't been so blinded by my obstinate hopes I might have thought of this before! I might have saved myself the ordeal; for I had felt the very heart in me weaken at the picture of him her words called up.

"If I could make myself believe as you do," I said, "that what I have to tell will condemn him, even though he is innocent, I should want, myself, to die. But I can't believe, I can't think, that God can be so unjust as to let him be condemned when he is innocent!"

She let her head drop back, and laughed a little. "You will find, my child, that it is men who control the affairs of the earth; and that if you believe any such fine things of them you will be disappointed. As for the lawyers, they will convict an innocent man as merrily as they will eat their dinner. It is only a popular cry is loud enough, and they can get enough of what they call their evidence against him. Do not expect any miraculous intervention on his behalf."

"I don't," I cried stoutly. "But some one must know the truth of what has really happened; and that person surely he knows before he will let Mr. Montgomery be condemned. Oh, if only I knew, nothing should keep me from saying it!"

She had drawn herself upright in her chair, her face whiter than her flowers, her clenched hands resting on either arm; and now she slowly rose to her feet. Standing there she seemed fairly to tower above me, and looking down with her eyes glimmering upon me "furious her lashes. "What if he is guilty?" she said slowly.

The room around me grew dreamy. My head felt light. All the things I had ever believed in seemed to have fallen far, far below me, tiny and inconsequent. I closed my hands hard around the arms of my chair. I clung to it as if it had been my last principle of faith. "I have given my word," I said, "and even if I had not, I should have to tell the truth. It is a question of honor."

She stood a moment longer with her hand still clinched and slightly raised, as if she were going to strike a blow myself, or her own breast. Then she let them fall limp, and lifting her shoulders with a superb little scornful motion, "Ah, I thought you were only a fool," she said. "I see, you are cold."

"Oh, no!" I murmured. Her eyes never left me. "But you do

not think well of him; he is perhaps repulsive to you?"

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# SOLVING THE SERVANT PROBLEM

By CHARLOTTE M. CONGER.

It was announced not long ago that there would be a civil service examination for stenographers, but that no women need apply. The officials who had asked for these clerks did not want women; did not want to be bothered with them; and they are not the only officials who do not want to be "bothered with women." In some of the office women clerks are not received, no matter what the circumstances or the influences brought to bear.

The prejudice against them seems to be growing, rather than diminishing, and it may eventually result in a falling off in the appointments of women to clerical positions under the government. Whether this prejudice is unfounded, whether women can do the same and exactly as good service as men, is not the question that will be discussed here, but what other avenues will be open to women when what some students of sociology believe is inevitable, the restriction of women in government employ makes it necessary for women to seek other fields of labor.

Ambitious to be regarded as the most democratic country in the world, American nurses some singularly undemocratic ideas, which result in the drawing of curious lines between the classes and establishing amusing standards. A young woman, for instance, would rather starve on a pittance of \$5 a week as a typewriter than she would to live in clover as a domestic servant. She would rather live on sardines and stale bread in the hall room of a top floor tenement as a clerk in some shop than she would to be comfortably housed, well clothed, and well fed in a gentleman's family. Domestic service is the hurdle that all women are born to balk at.

**Despise Domestic Service.**

The objection to what in other countries is regarded as honorable employment, is excused by the explanation that it is the American feeling of independence that prompts American girls to despise domestic service. What independence can a girl enjoy who works from 9 to 5 at a typewriter, dies, like as not, on a sandwich and a cup of tea; sleeps on a pallet in an ill-smelling tenement house, breakfasts on weak coffee and soggy bread, and lunches, perhaps, on ice cream soda? Ask a girl so placed to take a position in your family as parlor or nursery maid; explain to her that she will be given a comfortable room, the use of a sitting room; good, plain food; certain afternoons out, and \$5 a week, and note with what haughty scorn she will reject your offer. She wants her freedom, forsooth, will have her freedom—to starve, to degenerate.

All talk to her of the beauty of service, the dignity of labor, is lost. She is "as good, and better" than the woman who wants to hire her, and she will be no one's servant. To eat below stairs, no matter how agreeable the surroundings and conditions, seems to her the lowest degradation, which brings to my mind a story—a true story—that I heard years and years ago, but which still irresistibly appeals to my sense of humor.

A certain literary man in New York, noted for his rich wife and religious fervor, advertised in a newspaper for a governess "who loved Jesus and would not expect to eat with the family." One of the applicants for the position sent him a Roland for his Oliver. She certainly loved Jesus, she replied, and under the circumstances she would not care to eat with the family.

**Want Certain Privileges.**

It seems strange that other young women, to whom domestic situations are open, should not show the same spirit and have a like sense of humor. Few of them, naturally, are ambitious to eat with the family, but they insist upon other and oftentimes absurd privileges and conditions, which make it their importance. It is a difficult lesson learned when a woman comes to understand that nothing adds so much to her importance as work well done. Those whose minds are fixed upon the task in hand have no time to observe or consider the attitude toward them of the people with whom they are associated, unless it is studiously rude.

The most impatient government clerk I ever knew passed most of her time in complaining of the rudeness of the men in her office. This man had passed her in the hall without taking off his hat; that one had spoken to her with a cigar in his mouth; another had insisted upon having the window open for the sole purpose of giving her the rheumatism. So it is with the women in domestic employ. If they are constantly looking out for slights they will surely receive them.

There is no doubt of the rooted objection in this country to domestic employment among women who must be bread winners, especially among those women who have "seen better times," or believe they have seen better times, for one has no complaining from real genteel women who bear the change of fortunes with dignity and calm.

A friend employed in one of the departments tells me that he worked side by side with a woman whose father had been a member of a President's Cabinet, who herself had been born with a golden spoon in her mouth, and that he never heard her utter one word of complaint or dissatisfaction. It was once my good fortune to know a lady in New York who was the housekeeper in the home of a multimillionaire, who had not so very long before been at the head of her own household—a household of greater importance and elegance than that she was then presiding over.

The family whom she served would have been delighted to make her one of them; to have her eat at table and share in other privileges, but she refused on the plea that it would interfere with her work, and though I came to know her well, I never heard her allude to her former wealth and position; nor did I ever hear her complain of rudeness from the servants, tradespeople, or any other source. If she suffered any she had the ability to deal with it.

**Plenty of Room at the Top.**

It is character, of course, that counts, and when a woman has that she has an unquestionable weapon in no matter what position of life she is placed. The world is littered with incompetents that just escape being competent. Only a few in every profession are at the top of their professions, hence that old trite saying, "We all fall back on at times." There is plenty of room at the top.

Yes, there is plenty of room at the top, but many of those at the bottom are unable to reach the special top they are ambitious to attain, and so they stay forever near the bottom, whereas if they would abandon the work in which they have failed to advance, and try another

## Domestic Employment Need Not Be Menial, and Many Girls Could Find Greater Freedom in Homes than in Offices or Shops.

line they would doubtless soon find themselves at the summit.

If certain officials of the government will have no women stenographers about them, there is a good and sufficient reason for the stand they have taken outside of that of sex. The women who have served them have failed to measure up to the standard of the men who have served them. With that failure was not concerned, but to suggest that there are fields of employment other than clerical in which a woman can earn her daily bread and feed those dependent upon her without losing her self-respect or her friends—her real friends.

The world-wide cry is that the professions and trades are all overcrowded, but here in America there is one trade, at least, that is not overcrowded, and that is domestic service. The crying want of the day is good servants. Well-to-do people are declining housekeeping every day because they cannot find trained and responsible men and women to care for their households. Servants there are, but counting out a few—such servants! Untidy, ill-kept, undisciplined, inexperienced, who gauge the value of their labor by what they feel they should have to spend and by what the thoroughly trained, disciplined, and experienced servant imported from abroad receives.

A colored man who has done occasional chores for me threw up his position at \$25 a month the other day, and then came to me asking aid in procuring another. "But why," I asked, "did you leave Mr. Blank?" He seemed to be satisfied with you. "Yes," replied the man, "but I can't live on \$20 a month, and I can't live on \$15 a month, and I can't live on \$10 a month, and I can't live on it, leastwise me and Ella can't."

It never occurred to him to measure his labor by his worth to his master, but he insisted on receiving what he needed, which is very much like taking any commodity to a buyer and saying: "Here, this thing is worth so much, but I need a third more than that sum, so you must pay it." The buyer, of course, goes across the street and buys at the market price, and you are left with your wares on your hands, just as my negro friend is left without employment because he was not content with what his labor was actually worth.

**Too Hot to Work.**

The other day I chanced upon two colored "ladies" who were waiting, like myself, for a car, and while they waited discussed their summer plans. "No, ma'am," said one, "I wouldn't work for nobody this hot weather—not for no body." "But," said her companion, who seemed to be the more respectable of the two, "wasn't Mrs. Norman sorry to see you go? Won't it be hard for her to see somebody else this hot weather? And then those poor little children. Couldn't you have managed some way, Ella?"

"I didn't want to manage. I ain't a workin' for Mrs. Norman's lit' children; I'm a workin' for my money."

A third lady, who was an unusual one, and the law, as it is understood and followed, does not protect the poor Mrs. Normans at the mercy of unscrupulous servants who are apt to leave them in the terrific heat of summer without a women's notice, or to flounce out of the house in a snowstorm with little ceremony. Hence, with too few, inadequate, and unscrupulous servants housekeeping in America has become a problem. Some anxious housewives have not tried to solve it, but have abandoned their homes and gone to boarding, while others, home lovers, are still warring with it valiantly.

**Opportunities A-plenty.**

When I hear of a woman losing this position or that, being dropped for incompetency as a clerk, or suspended because there is a lack of work—when I hear of the sorrow and misery these dismissals and suspensions bring about, I find myself saying with some impatience, "Why don't these women turn their backs to do some of the things that are begging to be done?" I have, in fact, asked some of these unfortunate women why they don't try something else, why they don't definitely remove themselves from the government service and make themselves so valuable in other lines that they will be wanted instead of wanting?

"I would never consent to take a menial position," said a lady who came to me for help, when I suggested I could find a position for her in New York to take entire charge of a doctor's household—never in the world. It was too menial! If I could have assured her that she would have eaten at the doctor's table, and that he would have occasionally taken her to the theater, she might have accepted the offered position. As it was, she preferred to remain in Washington and talk about her former grandeur while she slowly starved; but then, she did not insist it menial to starve.

Another woman, who lost her position in the government service and who was looking for something to do, said the only thing she really understood was cooking. She loved it, and she had mastered it, "Then why not cook?" I asked. She almost fainted. She, a Woodwich, or Waldwich, or whatever her name was, cook! It was not to be thought of. Her father would turn over in his grave if he should know that his daughter was occupying a menial position. She would rather starve, and she deserved to expect that she had never been taught to think properly, to regard things in the right light.

**Might Be Good Cook.**

It never occurred to this lady of ancient lineage that it is much better to be a good cook than a poor clerk; to be an excellent anything, so long as the profession or trade is an honest one, than to be a poor something else, even though the something else is supposed to carry greater social prestige. No one who fails to feel this can be a successful anything. The most successful person is that person who finds and accepts his true vocation. It makes no difference that Mrs. Smith thinks that cooking is not genteel

From the Boston Traveler.

A worker in the Salvation Army tells the following:

"A down-and-out beggar came along an uptown street the other day where I was getting ready to hold a meeting. The man looked pretty much up against it, and I watched him to see what he would do.

He approached a bystander, shamefacedly, and muttered something. The man asked him to repeat it, and I heard the beggar say:

"Please, sir, will you give me 10 cents for a bed?"

"Certainly, certainly," the man replied, taking a dime from his pocket. "Where is the bed?"

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