WANTED--A CLUE.

[Chambers's Journal.]

CHAPTER I.

"Companion required for a young lady; must be cheerful, musical, and of good family; salary, £60 per annum."

Such was the advertisement my Aunt Margaret read out to me one morning as we sat at breakfast in her neat little house in London.

I am the orphan daughter of a missionary, and my aunt's was the only home I had ever known. For the past three years I had been resident governess in a wealthy family in Yorkshire, but my employers' purse-proud arrogance was too much for my self-respect, and I had to leave, resolving, if possible, to try and obtain a post as companion.

Tempted by the excellent salary offered I at once wrote to the address indicated. Promptly I received a reply from Mr. Foster, of Great Gorton Hall, Westershire. He stated that companionship was required for his stepdaughter, Miss Thorndyke, a delicate girl of eighteen, who resided with him and his widowed sister, Mrs. Morrell, her mother, his dear late wife, having died the previous year. He added that my acquirements and credentials were satisfactory, and requested to know whether I had ever been in Westershire, and if I had any friends or connections there.

I replied that I was an entire stranger to the county and to all the people in it, and in a few days I was overjoyed at receiving the nomination to the post, for I was unwilling to be a burden on my aunt's slender means.

Gorton Hall was a fine building of gray stone, standing in beautiful grounds on the outskirts of a pretty country village. I was shown into a spacious drawing-room where a middle-aged lady in black greeted me very pleasantly, introducing herself as Mrs. Morrell. She kindly bade me be seated and sent a servant in search of her brother.

Mr. Foster was a fine-looking man, with iron-gray hair and a keen and searching expression—a man whom I instinctively felt it would be dangerous to offend. His manner to me, like his sister's, was courtesy itself. He explained the duties expected from me. "And one thing more I must add, Miss Armitage," he said in conclusion, "although willing to concede everything reasonable, there is one thing I cannot permit in members of my household—gossiping with strangers concerning my family. I prefer that my daughter's companion should have no friends or acquaintances in this neighborhood; and I must request that during your residence here you discourage any intimacy which people at Gorton or any of the neighboring villages may seek to establish with you. I have seen so much mischief caused by gossip and tittle-tattle that I am obliged to request this."

The stipulation seemed a very reasonable one, and I readily acceded to it. Mr. Foster then went on to speak of his stepdaughter.

"Our darling Edith is not so strong as we could wish, and indeed is frequently confined to the sofa. The doctor orders her to keep early hours and avoid all excitement. She therefore goes but little into society, but we hope the companionship of a bright and lively girl will prove beneficial. Keep her amused and happy, Miss Armitage, and we ask no more from you."

I found my future charge in the drawing-room when I descended dressed for dinner. She was a fragile-looking creature, with light hair and large blue eyes. She greeted me very kindly. Her manner was childish, considering her age, but I was much relieved not to find her a fine fashionable young lady. She was still in mourning for her mother.

We had a musical evening. Mrs. Morrell and I executed several duets on the piano, accompanied by Mr. Foster on the violin, which he played very well. Edith kissed me very kindly as she said good-night, and before I went to rest I sat down and wrote to my aunt in glowing terms, saying that Gorton Hall was an earthly paradise.

Nor did I see reason to change my opinion for many weeks. I soon felt perfectly at ease in my new home. Edith was so gentle, so unassuming, and so considerate that it was impossible not to love her; and Mr. Foster and his sister were most kind. I was treated as a gentlewoman and an equal, and my duties were very light, being chiefly to drive Edith in a pretty pony carriage, to play duets, and occasionally to read aloud.

We did not mix very much in society, although Mrs. Morrell received a due amount of calls from the ladies in the neighborhood. A few quiet garden parties and dinners were the limit of our dissipations on Edith's account. I was always included in any scheme of pleasure, and Mr. Foster made quite a point of introducing me to all visitors.

There was a fine old church in the village, to which we all went on Sundays. It was a mile and a half across the fields; but we usually drove on account of Edith. I had been nearly six months at the Hall, when one fine Sunday morning in July it fell to my lot to go to church alone, for the first time since my arrival. Mr. Foster was in London, Edith had a headache, and Mrs. Morrell would not leave her, although she was urgent that I should go. The service over, I was returning across the first field, when I heard steps behind me, and a gentleman's voice said: "Miss Armitage!"

I turned round in surprise, to see a young man who was a perfect stranger to me. Lifting his hat politely, he begged for the honor of a few words with me.

I was both amazed and indignant, and somewhat loftily informed him that I was not in the habit of conversing with total strangers; so saying, I was walking on, when he interrupted me, and begged me to listen for Edith Thorndyke's sake.

"My father, Dr. Archer, was her father's oldest friend, Miss Armitage. My family is well-known in this neighborhood; and I live in the next village, Little Gorton, where I am in partnership with Dr. Selby. You are well known to me by name, and for some time I have endeavored to contrive an interview with you in vain. I could not come up to the Hall," he added, no doubt seeing amazement written on my face. "The fact is, Miss Armitage, I love Edith Thorndyke; but her stepfather considers my position inferior to hers and refuses to allow me to see her until she is of age. Doubtless you are aware that she will inherit a great deal of property."

"I strongly disapprove of discussing these family matters with a total stranger, sir," I said, trying to move away. "Also, Mr. Foster has absolutely forbidden it. Good morning."

"One moment!" he pleaded. "Edith Thornkyke's very life may depend upon it! Have you heard the terms of her mother's will?"

"They are nothing to me, sir."

"Oh, but please, Miss Armitage! I entreat you! Do listen to me! When Mrs. Foster's first husband died he left her some thousands a year, in addition to Gorton Hall and the estates, entirely at her own disposal. She married again, and died last year, when it was found that she had left her husband Edith's sole guardian until she should be twenty-one, when she would enter into the possession of the Thorndyke property. In case she died before attaining her majority one half of the property would devolve upon Mr. Foster and half upon relatives of the Thorndykes. Even the half is a very large sum, Miss Armitage—quite enough to tempt a man like Mr. Foster to—to—. In short, I sadly fear Edith Thorndyke will not be allowed to live until she is twenty-one."

"This is downright madness!" I exclaimed. "Mr. Foster is the kindest and best of men—quite incapable of harboring designs upon his stepdaughter's life."

"I know Lawrence Foster; you do not," he answered quietly. "I know him to be bold and cunning and unscrupulous. Edith believes in him and his sister; but she is sadly deceived. I hoped to be able to enlist you on my side, Miss Armitage, when I heard of your arrival at the Hall. I should be glad to feel sure that Edith has one disinterested friend in the house."

"But I ought not to speak to you at all," I said, feeling very uncomfortable. "Mr. Foster has strictly forbidden me to gossip with strangers."

"Because he is afraid that you might hear the truth."

"But if he is what you say, why does he have a companion for his stepdaughter at all? I must be a check on his movements. I see all that goes on; he never hides anything from me."

"Don't you see that your presence is an additional security for him? It disarms suspicion. Supposing Edith—well, died suddenly; people would say, 'Miss Armitage was there; she knows all about it'; and no comment would be excited; whereas it would probably seem suspicious—at all events to the Thorndyke family, who are by no means satisfied with the terms of the will—if Edith were to die while living alone with Mr. Foster and his sister. There can be no doubt that the money must be an immense temptation to him. He has nothing of his own. Ten thousand a year, and only one fragile girl's life in the way!"

I must say the speaker's earnestness and unmistakable sincerity began to make an impression upon me. I had fancied once or twice that Mr. Foster exercised an unusually close surveillance over Edith and me. Were Dr. Archer's words true, and was I merely a lay figure at Gorton Hall, to deceive the world? Had I been taken into society by my employers, and my praises trumpeted forth to all their acquaintances, merely in order that my presence should disarm suspicion? "You have made me very uncomfortable," I candidly confessed.

"Believe me, Miss Armitage, I would not have taken this course but that I was compelled by necessity. Edith's stepfather has such a complete ascendency over her that it is difficult to know what to do. Put you are always with her, and can watch over her."

"But I am only a paid companion, liable to dismissal at any time."

"True; but I hope you will try and stay as long as you can, for Edith's sake."

"I fear she is very delicate."

"She is delicate; she needs care. But, as she gets older, her health will probably improve. There is really no reason, humanely speaking, why she should not live for many years. But I fear—I fear many things, but chiefly poison, slow and secret. Mr. Foster is an accomplished chemist, and his antecedents—better known to me than to most people—give me little confidence in him. If you knew as much as I do about him, Miss Armitage, you would not wonder at my suspicions. But—be sure of this: there is danger. I have no proof against Mr. Foster, and therefore cannot interfere in any way. Promise, promise me, Miss Armitage, that you will inform me of everything suspicious that you may see from this time. Here is my address."

I hastily took the proffered card and gave the promise, anxious to return before Mrs. Morrell should be uneasy at my absence. She laughingly remarked that the sermon must have been unusually long, and in a casual manner asked what was the text. Luckily, I was able to supply chapter and verse, and a lengthy catalogue of my fellow-worshippers. It then struck me for the first time that if, by chance, I was allowed to go out alone, either Mr. Foster or Mrs. Morrell might find out, by skilfully-put questions, everything I had said, seen, and done.

Now that suspicion had once entered my mind, I saw grounds for it everywhere, as might have been expected. The most absurd fancies entered into my head. I persuaded Edith in secret to lock her door at night before retiring to rest, which she had never done before. I do not know what I expected to happen. The precaution was a senseless one; for the foes I was fighting against were far too clever and subtle to contemplate anything so foolish as commonplace midnight murder.

I will do my employers the justice to say that with all this I spent a delightful summer. They took Edith and me to Scotland for a two-months' tour, and I never enjoyed a holiday so much. A more charming *cicerone* than Mr. Foster could not be. Then we went back to Gorton, and settled down for the winter. For some time absolutely nothing of any importance occurred. I wrote occasionally a brief, reassuring, cautious note to Dr. Archer, but carefully refrained from speaking when we met, to avert suspicion. Edith and I grew daily more attached, and nothing could exceed my employers' kindness.

Edith had been decidedly better in health until she received a severe chill in November. Mrs. Morrell at once sent for the doctor, the same old family practitioner who had attended her from her birth.

Dr. Stevens was a worthy man, and once a skilful physician, no doubt; but when I saw him he was nearly eighty and quite past his work. Feeble, weak in sight and hearing, the old man seemed more fit to be in bed himself than to be employed in his professional capacity. I hinted as much to Edith, but she was quite indignant, and reiterated her assurances that she had more confidence in Dr. Stevens than in any one else, so I had to rest satisfied.

Miss Thorndyke's illness dragged on with fluctuating strength. She was too delicate to shake off anything easily, and she had frequent relapses, which sadly weakened her strength. Mrs. Morrell nursed her most assiduously, declining professional attendance, but permitting me to help her to the best of my ability. But although I was allowed to be in the invalid's room all day, if I chose, Mrs. Morrell would not permit me to exhaust my strength in night nursing. She had had her bed placed in a dressing-room communicating with Edith's room, and there she slept, ready, at the slightest movement of the invalid, to spring up and wait upon her. Edith spoke warmly of Mrs. Morrell's kindness and devotion, and certainly she spared no pains to humor the fancies of the sick girl.

About Christmas the disease assumed a new phase. Symptoms of stomach derangement set in, which Dr. Stevens attributed to the long-continued recumbent position and lack of exercise; and he set himself to combat the new evil by every means in his power. This was all discussed in my presence, for no mystery was made of the matter; and, indeed, I was usually accustomed to administer Edith's food and medicines when I sat in her room. This, however, never occurred in the evening; for Mr. Foster so pathetically pleaded his loneliness in the deserted drawing-room after dinner, when his sister always went to the invalid, that in common civility I could not refuse to play chess and cribbage with him, and occasionally accompany his violin on the piano.

But one night about 9 o'clock I slipped quietly out of the drawing-room and went up-stairs to Edith's room to see if she was awake. She had been worse that day, and I was beginning to feel rather anxious about her. For a wonder, Mrs. Morrell was not on duty, and I entered unchallenged. I had not been in Edith's room so late as this since the beginning of her illness, and was astonished to find it lighted up by eight large wax candles, dispersed about the apartment, although the glare was carefully screened from the invalid's face. I stooped over the thin face on the pillow and received a faint smile. I could not help remarking, "How light your room is! I wonder you can sleep in such a blaze."

"Mrs. Morrell likes it," was the languid answer. "She always burns eight candles like that all night. I don't mind them. O, Alice dear, I am so tired of lying here! and I'm always so thirsty, so dreadfully thirsty! Do give me something to drink!"

I poured out a tumblerful of a cooling drink from a handsome red glass jug on the table near me. She drank it eagerly and sank back on her pillow as Mrs. Morrell came into the room.

I fancied that an angry gleam shot at me from under the widow's black eyebrows; but, if so, she smoothed away her irritation before she addressed me. "Alice, my dear, it is most kind of you to be here; but I left my darling girl, as I hoped, to sleep. She is more likely to get a good night's rest if she is not disturbed by late visitors. After 9 o'clock, please, I must request you for the present, dear, not to come here again."

I apologized and said good-night, turning, however, at the door to ask if Mrs. Morrell did not think so much light might have a disturbing effect upon the invalid.

"Now, my dear Miss Armitage, that is not like your usual common sense," answered the widow sweetly. "Above all things, plenty of light is essential in a sick-room, where medicines have to be accurately measured out, and where at any moment the nurse may be summoned to her patient's side. I should be tumbling over the furniture in the dark if the candles were not kept burning. And now, my dear girl, I must really request that you go; Edith is nearly asleep. Good-night." So I ran down stairs, to be gently scolded by Mr. Foster for my long absence.

When a week went by and Edith grew worse every day I became seriously alarmed, and expressed my uneasiness in a letter to Dr. Archer, which I posted myself for fear of accidents. He sent me a brief note by a trusty messenger in reply which did not tend to allay my fears:

"Your account of her symptoms was most alarming. You say she is wasted and prostrate, and suffers from painful cramps and insatiable thirst. These are the symptoms of arsenical poisoning. You must contrive to secure portions of all her food and medicine, and bottle them securely and bring them to me. Be in the fir plantation at 4 o'clock to-morrow to meet me; it is a matter of life and death."

You may imagine how terrified I was; but luckily I had nerve enough to hide it. I looked out all the small bottles I could find, washed them out carefully, and determined to put them in my pocket one at a time, to fill as occasion should serve. At the same time I could hardly believe that Dr. Archer was right in his suspicions. I believed they could not poison Edith without my knowledge. I was in and out of the sick-room all day from about 10 o'clock in the morning until I was dismissed at 6 to dress for dinner, and at least half of her food and medicine I administered with my own hands. The medicine bottles I frequently opened fresh from Dr. Stevens's wrappings, and it was difficult to imagine that poison could get into puddings and jellies brought straight from the kitchen to the bedside. I could only conclude that at night must occur Mrs. Morrell's opportunity, if at all.

I felt like a conspirator as I contrived to secrete small portions of everything of which Edith partook. I secured the last drops remaining of the cooling drink which Mrs. Morrell had had to administer to the invalid during the night; also a portion of the farinaceous pudding which Miss Thorndyke had had for her dinner, a part of her sleeping draught, and a wineglassful of the mixture she was taking every two hours, and some of the beef-tea which Dr. Stevens had ordered for her. If poison were really being administered it must be present in one or the other of these. I chiefly suspected the remains of the cooling drink. I was young and unsophisticated, and my experience as a novel reader made me believe it quite possible that Mrs. Morrell should carry small packets of arsenic about in her pocket to mix in Edith's medicines and food, as occasion should serve. I can only smile at my credulity now.

It was a difficult matter to meet Dr. Archer in the fir plantation unobserved. Mrs. Morrell had first to be evaded, and then Mr. Foster, who manifested a most amiable and pressing desire to accompany me in my walk. I dared not linger, but hastily thrust the vials into the young doctor's hands, telling him I particularly suspected the cooling drink. He informed me that he was going to send them at once to an eminent analyst at one of the London hospitals, and that if they proved to contain poison he should instantly apply to a magistrate for a warrant.

I could not control my feelings that evening sufficiently well to prevent Mr. Foster remarking as he sat at chess: "Your walk to-day did not do you much good, Miss Armitage."

"I have rather a headache," I hastily answered. It was perfectly true. "I sat with Edith all the morning, and her room seemed to me very stuffy." Indeed, I had frequently noticed a strange closeness pervading it, especially when I first entered it in the morning; and I very often found my head the worse for a prolonged sojourn in it.

"As soon as Dr. Stevens will allow it she shall be moved into a larger room," he answered, as if he wished to evade a discussion of the subject.

CHAPTER II.

Another week passed by, Edith growing more and more prostrate each day, and I was very anxious to hear from Dr. Archer. At last arrived a letter, in a hand disguised as a lady's, on a girlish light-blue note-paper, with "Helen" stamped on it. These precautions would have made me smile, had I not known how necessary they were. All the letters which entered the house had first to undergo Mrs. Morrell's scrutiny.

"I am utterly baffled," he wrote in a very shaky hand. "The experiment from which I hoped so much has turned out an utter failure. All the substances submitted to me have been subjected to the most minute and delicate tests known to science without discovering in any one of them the slightest trace of arsenic or any other poison. I am in despair. I know that somehow my darling's life is being undermined by poison, and yet I cannot trace it. I am powerless to interfere. I have nothing but suspicion to go upon, and dare not apply for a magistrate's warrant. My only hope is in you, Miss Armitage."

I knew I was but a slender reed to trust to, and I went up stairs to the sick-room, feeling miserable to the last degree. Mrs. Morrell was seated by the bedside. Edith looked paler and thinner than ever. She moaned out, when she saw me, that she was "so thirsty," and had hardly been supplied with a cooling draught when the racking cramps from which she had lately suffered so terribly came on, and she writhed in every limb. I wiped the cold dews from her forehead, afraid at the moment that she was dying, the attack was so terribly severe, and seemed to exhaust her so much. By-and-by she fell into a doze, and Mrs. Morrell went out of the room. Feeling perfectly desperate, I commenced a thorough search through the apartment for anything suspicious, without finding the smallest thing which could serve as a clue. Probably I aroused the invalid, for, in returning to the bed-side, I found her staring at me with the fixed gaze of a sick person.

"Edith, dear, tell me, have you ever seen Mrs. Morrell—or anybody—put any powder or liquid into your medicine or your food? Have you ever noticed that it had a disagreeable taste, or a sediment at the bottom?"

"No, never," she answered, with evident surprise. Her brain was clear enough between the paroxysms. "Never, Alice!"

Just then a tap sounded at the door, and purblind old Dr. Stevens came tottering in, nearly upsetting a small table, and seeming scarcely able to hold his patient's wrist firm in his shaky old fingers. I watched him with the maddening feeling that if ever two unscrupulous poisoners had the very medical man most desirable in their case it was these two. Mrs. Morrell came into the room, as usual during his visits, and followed him down stairs.

I waylaid her later on in the day and asked her what Dr. Stevens had said. She replied that, unfortunately, their darling was very ill, but while there was life there was hope. Then, summoning all my nerve, I boldly asked that I might be allowed to sit up with Edith that night. She looked rather astonished; then, thanking me warmly for my "kind offer," declined on the plea of not robbing me of my rest. I replied that it was not fair that she should have all the night-nursing, but all I got was a very decided "No!"

I went away convinced that the danger, whatever it was, was reserved for the night. When the invalid was left alone with her traitorous nurse in some form the poison was administered.

"Does Mrs. Morrell sit beside you all night?" I asked Edith next time we were alone.

"Oh, no. She would if I wanted her, but I don't like it. It fidgets me to see her. Besides, I generally sleep pretty well the first part of the night. She puts on her dressing-gown and lies on the bed in the next room, ready to come if I call her."

The mystery only seemed to grow the more inscrutable the further I pursued it. I went thoughtfully to my room in search of a book I was reading aloud to Edith, promising to return immediately. As I stooped to lift the volume from a low shelf the one ring I wore, which had always been a great deal too large for me, slipped from my finger and rolled away across the floor, to disappear underneath the hangings of my large, old-fashioned bedstead. Much annoyed and anxious to recover it—for it was priceless to me as my dear mother's engagement-ring—I went down on my hands and knees and tried to find it, but in vain. The darkness under the massive draperies was complete, and I could see nothing in the shadow.

I looked round for a light. But there was no gas at the hall, and my candlestick was carried down stairs every morning by the housemaid to reappear no more until late in the evening, on the slab in the hall. I scarcely liked to stop for it, for my position disposed me to trouble the servants as little as possible. All at once I recollected that the candlesticks were never taken out of Edith's room, and that I could borrow one of hers. I did so, and lighted it, and sitting it on the floor, I soon found my ring.

"How badly that candle burns, to be sure!" I remarked to myself as I rose to my feet. "The wax cannot be good." The light was anything but pure, being of a peculiar reddish color; and the flame sputtered so much that more than once I thought it was going out. At the same time it gave off a fine white smoke.

I stood watching the spattering flame for some minutes, much puzzled, until I remembered that the invalid was alone all this time. So I carried the candle, still burning, back to her room. To explain my delay I pointed out what I had noticed, saying that I thought the servants must have substituted some inferior articles of their own for good wax candles, either from carelessness or dishonesty.

"The servants never meddle with my candlesticks," said Edith languidly. "They are not sent down to the kitchen; but when they want refilling Mrs. Morrell puts fresh ones in here. She keeps them in that cupboard; look, and you'll see."

I opened the cupboard for the first time—for I had never had occasion to go to it before—and there, sure enough, were three or four wooden boxes, which proved to be full of wax candles, thirty pounds' weight at least. Before I closed the door again Mrs. Morrell entered the room. I fancied that her face changed and she turned pale as she saw me standing by the cupboard; but if so she quickly recovered, and when I made some remark about there being a large stock of candles, composedly answered: "Yes; she found it best to keep plenty ready at hand, so as not to have to disturb dear Edith by leaving the room to search for lights in the middle of the night."

I made no further remark, as something warned me it was better to say no more, so I opened my book and began to read.

The next morning, as I was on my way to the invalid's room about 11 o'clock, I became aware of high voices in the hall, and came upon Mrs. Morrell and the housemaid, Jane, engaged in an altercation. Jane, who was generally a civil and obliging girl, was flushed with anger, while her mistress was paler than usual.

"Very well, then, ma'am, I'll go somewhere else where I shan't be called to account for every paltry little bit of candle," said the housemaid as I approached.

"You know perfectly well that it is not the candle I care about, but the disobedience to my express orders, Jane. A month to-day you leave my service."

"I'll go to-day, ma'am; I don't care if I do lose a month's wages," returned the girl independently.

"Very well. You need never refer to me for a character," said Mrs. Morrell, biting her lips, as she followed me to Edith's room. She said nothing to me in explanation, beyond merely stating that Jane had been very impertinent.

I found Edith in a terribly prostrate condition, and I could see that Dr. Stevens, when he came, had very little hope. I watched Mrs. Morrell as she hung over the invalid, and wondered whether I ought not to believe that she was the most tender, loving, and devoted of nurses; for I really almost thought that Dr. Archer might be mistaken after all, and that her guardians were as anxious for her recovery as I was. She herself evidently realized her danger, for she asked to have the Bible read to her, and would insist upon pressing a valuable diamond ring upon me as a keepsake. My gentle little friend so won my heart by her unvarying sweetness that I could not restrain my tears and retreated to my own room, where I could give free vent to my feelings.

By and by a knock came at my door, and opening it I confronted Jane in hat and jacket ready for departure. "You've always treated me well, Miss, and I thought before I go I'd like to tell you why I'm turned out like a thief, without a character, after being here three years!" began the girl in honest indignation. "Mrs. Morrell's sure to take care you hear her story; so, if you please, you shall have mine first!"

"But I would rather not. You know I am not my own mistress here. Mrs. Morrell might not like——"

"Oh, but please, Miss, do listen. It's all on account of the candlesticks in Miss Edith's room. You know, Miss, Mrs. Morrell never lets us servants touch them; they never go down to the kitchen. But this morning, when I went in at 8 to see to the fire, I noticed that one candle had been guttering awfully, and the wax had run down over the sides and made such a mess as you never saw! Mrs. Morrell wasn't there, and Miss Edith was asleep; so I took the candlestick down with me to clean it, meaning no harm. But I had the breakfast to get ready; and to tell you the truth, Miss Armitage, I forgot about it. By and by Mrs. Morrell came down stairs, looking reg'lar pale, and wanting to know who took one of the candlesticks away out of Miss Edith's room. I said I had. Then Mrs. Morrell went on at me awful, and wanted to know how I dared do such a thing, and I was to bring it back at once. Sarah had washed it; but when we came to look for the piece of candle that was in it, nowhere could we find it. I suspect Sarah threw it into the fire. I told Mrs. Morrell it was only a little piece, not so long as my finger. But if you believe me, Miss Armitage, she made as much fuss over losing that paltry bit of candle-end as some folks would over a diamond necklace. I really didn't think missis was so mean. I suppose my temper got up, and when she said I was impertinent and should leave, I told her I'd go to-day."

"I fear you have been foolish and hasty, Jane," I said reprovingly.

But she went on: "The queerest thing of all, Miss Armitage, is that when Mrs. Morrell first came into the kitchen she was as white as a sheet. I should have said she was frightened, only it seems ridiculous that any lady could ever be afraid of losing a candle-end! I can't make it out at all, Miss. She always is so mortally stingy with those candles of Miss Edith's. Do you know is there anything about them, Miss, that makes them more valuable than other candles?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Well, really, do you know, Miss, I've sometimes thought there must be something odd about them," said Jane, turning to go. "I know, for one thing, they're not bought with the rest from the grocer at Beecham, but come all the way from London; so perhaps that's why Mrs. Morrell sets such store by them. And now, Miss, I'll say good-bye."

I gave the honest girl a little silk handkerchief as a parting gift and sat down to ruminate on what I had just heard. A drowning man clutches at a straw, and in my terrible distress of mind I was ready to clutch at any theory, however absurd, for solving the mystery of Edith's illness. Jane's casual remark about there being something queer about the candles so lavishly burned in the sick-room had set me thinking whether after all there might not be something deleterious in them, intended to act injuriously upon the invalid. It was certain they burned very badly, as if there were some foreign substance incorporated in them. On the other hand, I had never in my wildest dreams imagined that there could be such things as poisonous candles. I had never heard of them before. The theory seemed to me at best a very wild one; but Edith's life was at stake, and I was bound to do my very uttermost to aid her. Mrs. Morrell's conduct about the candles seemed odd and suspicious all through. The jealous watch she kept over them her dread of losing them; her unwillingness to let me be in Edith's room by candle-light—surely all these extraordinary precautions meant something.

Feeling perfectly desperate, I went back to the sick-room. Edith was lying back on her pillows in utter exhaustion, and Mrs. Morrell was softly reading a chapter of St. John's Gospel. Seeing no other way out of the difficulty I said boldly: "Mrs. Morrell, if you will go down stairs into the dining-room I think Mr. Foster wants to speak to you."

It was an untruth, but I could not afford to be too scrupulous. Mrs. Morrell disappeared. I sprang to the cupboard and took two candles out of a box, and at once went to hide them in my room. When the widow came back saying she could not find her brother anywhere—I had seen him leave the house some time before—I apologized and professed to have misunderstood the message. She resumed her reading, while I slipped out of the room and hastily put on my out-door garments. I knew that in going out without leave at such a moment I risked losing my situation, but I did not care. I was in no mood to stand upon etiquette.

I made my way to the village to the cottage of a trustworthy man who was sometimes employed to do odd jobs about the hall. He readily promised to take my small parcel to Dr. Archer at once. Had the distance not been three miles I should have taken it myself.

I heard nothing from Dr. Archer during the whole of the next day, and in a perfect torment of doubt and apprehension I waited and waited, too agitated to eat or sleep, seeing Edith grow worse every hour, and fearing that after all she would die before the mystery of her illness could be solved. She was in a state of prostration fearful to witness. Restless and miserable, I sat in the sick-room or wandered about the house, and had the further trial of seeing that my behavior had at last aroused suspicion in my employers' minds, and that a quiet surveillance was kept upon my movements. Although I had no appointment, and scarcely expected to meet Dr. Archer, I endeavored to be in the afternoon in the fir plantation which had already been the scene of several interviews; but Mr. Foster so decidedly intimated his intention of accompanying me if I took a walk that I abandoned the attempt. I detected under the mask of grief so cleverly assumed by both brother and sister a subdued eagerness and restlessness, attributable, no doubt, to anxiety as to the success of their scheme.

I felt that all was as good as lost when, on entering the sick-room on the second morning, I found Edith pallid and almost lifeless, and learned that Mrs. Morrell, in real or pretended alarm, had already sent off a messenger for Dr. Stevens.

Sick at heart, I sat down by the bedside and watched the invalid, who was too far gone to recognize me, as she usually did. There came a tap at the door, and "Please, ma'am, you're wanted," in the voice of one of the maids, and the widow rose and noiselessly glided out of the room. My ears were quickened by anxiety, and my curiosity was intense at hearing a short sharp scream, a scuffle, and the sound of an authoritative man's voice on the landing outside. Edith was too languid to notice anything; and even when the door opened again and Dr. Archer and an elderly gentleman entered the room she never opened her eyes.

"My darling! Have the wretches brought you to this?" was the young Doctor's quick exclamation; and hurrying to the window, which Mrs. Morrell had always religiously kept closed, he opened it, and a stream of chilly but life-giving air came rushing in. The other doctor, who was, I afterward found, an eminent physician from London, bent over the patient, examining her pulse and administering restoratives. I glanced interrogatively at Dr. Archer and murmured one word.

"Those candles? Poisoned. Thoroughly impregnated with arsenic. A very few nights more of breathing the poisoned air and nothing could have saved her. I don't know how you came to hit upon the clue so cleverly, Miss Armitage; but I shall bless your sagacity all my life long."

"And Mrs. Morrell and her brother?"

"Are safely in charge of two policemen and on their way to the county jail. I analyzed those candles at once and then applied for a magistrate's warrant, telegraphing to Dr. Weston to meet me here. Two policemen in plain clothes were detailed for the arrest, and the affair was managed very quietly, so that even the servants do not know precisely what has happened. Mr. Foster was arrested in his study and made no resistance, although he assumed a high tone of injured innocence. Do you know, Miss Armitage, where the rest of the poisoned candles are kept?"

In reply I opened the door of the cupboard and pointed to the rows of boxes. He and Dr. Weston then carefully locked and sealed up the door, until the state of the invalid should permit a fuller investigation of the apartment. Dr. Archer then informed me that a nurse had been telegraphed for from the Nurses' Home at the county town, and that I need feel no apprehension lest Edith should suffer from the want of skilled attendance.

Nurse Mary soon after arrived, and proved invaluable. All her care and skill, however, were needed to counteract the effects of the poison upon Edith's delicate frame. For days she hung between life and death. Her convalescence was long and tedious; but at length she recovered sufficiently to leave Gorton Hall for the Isle of Wight, where the pure sea breezes soon brought back the color to her cheeks.

Investigation proved that the candles similar to those which had been burned nightly in the sick-room for over two months were highly deleterious. The wax was pure, but the wicks were impregnated by a strong solution of arsenic. The remainder were analyzed, and from them much of the poisonous drug was extracted. The closest research, however, failed to discover from whom they had been originally procured. Beyond the fact that the boxes came from London their origin remains a mystery to this day. The plans of the conspirators had been so cleverly laid that it was almost impossible to bring their wrongdoing home to them.

I wish I could say that both Edith's treacherous guardians received an exemplary punishment; but, unfortunately, punishment in this world does not always overtake the criminal. Mr. Foster maintained the assertion of his innocence to the last; nor was there one little of evidence, direct or indirect, against him. Ably defended by a most skilful advocate he escaped absolutely scot-free. Mrs. Morrell maintained the same line of conduct, and was merely sentenced to imprisonment for two years. Dr. Archer and I were aghast and bitterly disappointed at such an obvious failure of justice. But we had one consolation—that Edith's fortune was secured to her, and that the scheming adventurers who had risked all to grasp her gold were not benefited, after all their trouble, by one farthing.

The Thorndyke family interfered, and her affairs were placed in trustworthy hands until her coming of age. Her twenty-first birthday was also the day of her marriage to Dr. Archer, and they are indeed a united pair. I will not write down here all the expressions of gratitude I received from Edith, her lover, and her relatives, for my "courage" and "sagacity" in defeating her stepfather's murderous designs. I declined Edith's offer of a home with her, for I felt that married people are happiest by themselves; but, though still working for my living, I spend all my holidays with her, and little voices already call me "Auntie."

Their home is perfect in all its appointments; but one fact, which is never explained to casual visitors, sometimes strikes new-comers as strange—nothing will induce Dr. Archer to have a wax-candle in his house. They set it down as a fad and singular fancy; only Edith, he, and I know the truth.

After They Found Out.

[Detroit Free Press.]

A Petroiter, who was driving out on the Holden road the other day, came to a spot where the snow had badly drifted on each side of the track just as a woman driving a horse and pung entered the other end of the cut. As both held to the road, their horses soon came head on and stopped.

"Why didn't you turn out?" shouted the man.

"Why didn't you?" replied the woman.

"I've got seven miles to drive, but I'll stay here all winter before I'll turn out."

"And I've got five dozen eggs here, and I'll let 'em freeze as hard as rocks before I'll give an inch."

The man dropped his lines, lighted a cigar, and leaned back on his seat. The woman dropped her lines, lighted her pipe, and wrapped the old buffalo robe around her feet. Thus they sat for eight minutes, when the man grew impatient and called:

"What's the price of hogs out of your way?"

"Oh, you've got all the pork you want in your sleigh!" she answered.

"I'm glad I'm a widower."

"And I'm glad I'm a widder!"

"Eh? Are you a widow?"

"Sartin, and I own 225 acres of the best land in Greenfield. So you are a widower?"

"Yes'm. Madam, pray excuse me. I'll cheerfully turn out."

"Oh, don't mention it. I'm perfectly willing to hand into the snowbank."

"Oh! madam, allow me to hope that you will overlook my ——"

"Oh, certainly. Fine weather, but rather cold. Good-by."

"Good-by, madam. Hope you a safe journey."

BABY'S SKIN.

INFANTILE AND BIRTH HUMORS SPEEDILY CURED BY CUTICURA.

For Cleansing the Skin and Scalp of Birth Humors, for allaying Itching, Burning, and Inflammation, for curing the first symptoms of Eczema, Psoriasis, Milk-Crust, Scald-Head, Scrofula, and other inherited skin and blood Diseases, CUTICURA, the great Skin Cure, and CUTICURA SOAP, an exquisite Skin Beautifier, externally, and CUTICURA RESOLVENT, the New Blood Purifier, internally, are infallible. Absolutely pure.

MY OLDEST CHILD,

now six years of age, when an infant six months old was attacked with a virulent malignant skin disease. All ordinary remedies failing, we called our family physician, who attempted to cure it; but it spread with almost incredible rapidity, until the lower portion of the little fellow's person, from the middle of his back down to his knees, was one solid, rash—ugly, painful, blotched, and malicious. We had no rest at night, no peace by day. The physician did not know what ailed it, and does not know now, what it was. Finally we were advised to try CUTICURA REMEDIES. Without the knowledge of our physician I procured a box of CUTICURA and a cake of CUTICURA SOAP. The effect

WAS SIMPLY MARVELLOUS,

using the two together, first washing him thoroughly with CUTICURA SOAP, then anointing him with CUTICURA. From the first application a change for the better appeared. The doctor said we had no further need of him and ceased his visits. In three or four weeks a complete cure was wrought, leaving the little fellow's person as white and healthy as though he had never been attacked. In my opinion your valuable remedies saved his life, and to-day he is a strong, healthy child, perfectly well, no repetition of the disease having ever occurred. You are welcome to make any use of this you may deem best. GEORGE B. SMITH,

Attorney at Law and Ex-Prosecuting Attorney, Ashland, O.

Reference: J. G. WEIST, Druggist, Ashland, O.

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are sold everywhere. Prices: CUTICURA, 50 cents; RESOLVENT, $1; SOAP, 25 cents. Prepared by the POTTER DRUG AND CHEMICAL COMPANY, Boston, Mass. Send for "How to Cure Skin Diseases."

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ja 4-2m 406 and 313 east Broad street.

RAILROAD LINES.

PIEDMONT AIR-LINE.

RICHMOND AND DANVILLE SYSTEM.

SCHEDULE IN EFFECT JANUARY 3, 1887.

Train No.	Leave Richmond.	Train No.	Arrive Richmond.
50	*1:20 P. M.	51	*7:45 P. M.
52	*2:30 A. M.	53	*6:40 A. M.

Bon-Air Accommodation leaves Richmond 5:15 P. M.†; arrives Richmond 8:41 A. M.†; mixed train leaves Manchester 6:40 A. M.† for Burkeville, stopping at intermediate stations; arrives at Manchester 8:10 A. M.†

SLEEPING-CAR SERVICE.

On Trains 52 and 53 Sleeping-Cars are run between Richmond and Greensboro'. These cars are open at 9 P. M. for passengers. Sleeping-cars are also run on 52 and 53 between Danville and Montgomery, Danville and Aiken, Greensboro' and Raleigh. On Trains No. 50 and 51 Sleeping-Cars are run between Danville and Atlanta.

CONNECTIONS:

Train No. 52 makes close connection at Greensboro' for Raleigh, Goldsboro', and Norfolk City; at Salisbury for Asheville and all points in Western North Carolina; at Charlotte with Charlotte, Columbia and Augusta railroad for Columbia, Augusta, Aiken, Savannah, Charleston, and Florida; also, with Carolina Central railroad for Wilmington, &c.

Train 53 has Pullman Buffet Sleeping-Car from Danville to Aiken, making close connection for Charleston, Savannah, and