

Bossy, just as long as the day lasted; but when bedtime grew near he grew restless. He wanted his mother, and the loveliest woman in the country could not be the substitute for that dear, patient mother who waited for him. He wanted to lie on his mother's lap, cuddled up against her shabby old blue gown, and listen while she sang to him a little nonsense verse about a 'purple cow,' without which sleep was never successfully wooed. And so the car would have to be ordered, and the small man whirled off to the shabby little house that meant home.

But it was a state of affairs that began to annoy the imperious Mrs. Digby. She determined to leave no stone unturned to obtain complete possession of that beautiful dark child that she coveted. She tried to enlist her husband's sympathy; but the big, genial squire was aghast at the thought of asking a woman to give up her child to another.

'But, if she is willing to give him up?'

'That would be a different thing, Milley. But is she? I doubt it. They say she is wrapped up in her husband and children. A nice little lady she is, too. No, no, Milly, put that idea out of your head.'

'If Mrs. Crew is a sensible woman,' said his wife, with chagrin written largely on her face, 'she would see at once what a tremendous advantage it would be for the child himself. He would be treated exactly as though he were my own son. Oh, that he were!'

The big squire's face shadowed for a moment, then he stroked the dainty head that rested against his shoulder.

'If I judge Mrs. Crew rightly, she is not one to let ideas of that kind come between her and her children, Milly.'

'But they are as poor as Job, Duke, and those kind of people are much more mercenary than you imagine. She will probably jump at the suggestion—it will mean so much to the others. Also, for Bossy's sake. I should help them in every way, of course.' But she knew in her heart that what she said about the blacksmith's wife being likely to fall in with the idea was untrue.

The squire shook his head.

'Look here, Milly: let me write to Hogson. He's got something to do with the Foundling Home at his place, and he will be able to find you a child if you want to have a new plaything.'

But the spoilt beauty cried out in horror. It was Bossy she wanted, it was Bossy she would have, until at last her husband, who idolised the earth on which her dainty feet rested, could hold out no longer, and he allowed himself to be persuaded to do what he hated, and to make an offer, as he bluntly put it to himself, for the little fellow. It was to the father he spoke; not for worlds could he have been induced to refer to the subject in the presence of Mrs. Crew. But he told her of the squire's proposal when they were alone that night, and told her also how emphatically he had refused to contemplate such a thing.

His wife listened, and was moved to a sudden fit of anger that he had never seen before.

'Does that woman think that our children are merchandise that she would put a price on them?' she demanded passionately. 'No matter how poor we are, we mean to keep the children God has sent to us.'

The husband soothed her and reproached himself for having ever told her what the squire had said to him.

'Don't think anything more about it, love. You ought to feel proud, you little mother-hen, that one of your chicks has been singled out for such distinction.'

'It hurts me to think that anyone would dare to imagine that we could sell our children!'

And then she allowed herself to be soothed by her husband's tenderness, and she stole away to have a peep at Bossy as he lay sleeping in his cot with one little arm thrown above his head, and his dark face sweet with the visions of Dreamland.

And she knelt beside him and thanked God for her treasure.

When she came back to the tiny parlor, her sensible, tranquil little self again, her husband was sitting busily at the table reading, and the light of the lamp

beside him streamed full upon his face and showed up lines that care and work had furrowed there, and which until then she had not noticed. It seemed as though her heart stood still as she looked at him. Then she bent over her work hurriedly, but she could not see the little pinafore she was making for an instant for the tears that filled her eyes. Had she been thinking more of her children than of her husband? How was it that she had only seen the worniness of his tired face now?

All the next day she was unlike her cheery self. A strange shadow came beneath her eyes—her voice had a sad intonation. Often she stood to watch the children playing in the garden, but it was Bossy that she followed with her sad gaze. She felt that between this child and herself there was a closer bond. She had nearly died when he had been born; it was thought that she would have to give up her own life for this small one just flickering into existence; but God had been merciful, and the danger passed. This may have been the reason. These mysterious things are known to God alone. But now she had taken herself to task for this deeper love—it wronged the others, so she reasoned in her woman's way. She must sacrifice herself for the sake of her husband, for the sake of the other precious ones, and Bossy was her offering. If Mrs. Digby adopted him, he would never be her son again—he would be brought up in a position in which she had no part, but her sacrifice would benefit her husband. The squire had hinted so, and had spoken of a living in his gift that was soon likely to be vacant. The giving up of Bossy would make smooth the path of the others.

And so there came a day when the great green car whisked away a little laughing, excited boy. But there was no coming home again that night. There was an empty cot in the blacksmith's house, and a mother who lay with wide-open eyes the night long through, with a pain in her heart that nothing could assuage.

The next day she was up and busy among her children. She fulfilled all her duties, nothing was left undone. She never complained, but the change in her was patent to all. Something had gone from her—part of the essence of life.

The servants from the Hall brought down all kinds of tales. How the child had fretted for his mother till there was no doing anything for him. How for days he had refused to be comforted, and had to be continually watched lest he should find his way back to the little home that he had left forever. How bravely now he was bearing his baby grief, but that often at night he was heard to call for his 'mumsey' in a little sobbing whisper that might have softened the hardest heart.

'I'd send him back to his mummy, that's what I'd do,' said the fat cook, who had come to gossip in the village shop, wiping her eyes. 'But, there, the misses is that set on him she'd give him *gold* to eat; she'd give him everything but what he wants most. But she's never been a mother, and doesn't know their ways.'

'And his mammy's fretting for him,' said one of the women who had been listening to her. 'Terrible ill she's getting to look.'

'There's no good to be got taking a child from his own,' said another solemnly. 'Tis the way of the rich to want what their money hasn't sent them.'

All this was carefully kept from the mother. The most inveterate gossip in the place would have suffered tortures rather than let her know what was so freely circulated. But she *knew*, she *felt* it all: the intense love of the mother could understand.

Sometimes from her sitting-room window she would catch a glimpse of the great green car dashing past, and have a momentary peep of a tiny figure beside Mrs. Digby, and she would hold out her hands as though she would clasp him to her—and then remember that Bossy had passed out of her life, though he could never pass out of her heart.

Because the little fellow could not forget, Mrs. Digby determined to leave the Hall until the child's remembrance had grown less keen. Tender and yielding to every desire of his, she was as adamant to that greatest desire of all—to see his mother.