

(For the Canadian Illustrated News.)

IN THE TWILIGHT.

The banquet is over, the feasting is done.
We shall be alone ere long;
They are strolling out in the setting sun
To hear the nightingale's song.

You will not go, Amy? Take warning:
You must not risk the night air.
You coughed thrice already this morning;
I would not have you less fair.

You must cherish the delicate roses
That faintly of health dare to hint,
Like the sun's last gleam that reposes
On the lilies with tremulous tint.

Sit down at your harp, little angel,
Sing me the songs that I love,
Till your voice sounds as some sweet Evangel
That whispers of hope from above.

Sound as some loved one were standing
Without in the gloom and the cold,
And pleading, entreating, commanding
To be welcomed within as of old.

And I fancy that some one is knocking
At the gates of my desolate heart,
And the rusty wards are unhooking
And the hinges are groaning apart.

And in through the opening portal,
Rush balm-bearing sephyras of Love,
And with rustling of pillows immortal
The Lethean memories move.

I am happy, forgetting the blighting
Of Time and my pitiless fate;
And I heed not the awful handwriting
That flames on the wall—"Too Late!"

The old, old dreams are beginning—
Hark! the laughter of stripling and maid.
And again the Demons are grinning
That your voice had so nearly laid.

And the bars clang, looking and sealing
The well springs of Good in me.
Yet I worship this hour for revealing
That, Beloved, you hold the key.

ROBERTSON KEENE.

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TAKEN AT THE FLOOD.

A NEW NOVEL,

By the Author of "Lady Audley's Secret," "Strangers and Pilgrims," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XLIII. (Continued.)

Mr. Bain looked around him with unmixed surprise when he was ushered into Lady Perriam's boudoir the morning after his return. The change in her surroundings struck him curiously. It was as if some chrysalis of his acquaintance had suddenly developed into a butterfly.

Those apple-green curtains of lustrous silken damask, those snow-white rugs, so deep and soft that he felt it a kind of sacrilege to tread upon them; that ashwood bookcase to correspond with the bureau on the other side of the fireplace, that broad velvet-covered mantle-board gave a new character to the still simple room. The bureau was opened and littered with papers; two or three volumes of the poets, glorious in their green and gold bindings, lay on the little table by Lady Perriam's chair, and the mistress of the luxurious chamber lolled in her low arm chair, her beauty enhanced and set off by the blackness of her weeds.

Shadrack Bain halted in the middle of the room almost dazzled by this unexpected picture. She had lost no time in gratifying her tastes, and had begun to live immediately upon her husband's death, thought the steward.

Lady Perriam received him graciously, but with a certain distant manner which he felt was intended to keep him further from friendliness and familiarity than he had been during Sir Aubrey's life time. She begged him to be seated, but the chair which she indicated with a motion of her hand was remote from her own.

Mr. Bain expressed his regret for her loss, his sympathy with her grief. She listened gravely to his condolences, and thanked him for them, but she did not enter upon any exposition of her feeling. She allowed her sorrow to be taken for granted, symbolised in her widow's cap, as Mr. Bain's grief was symbolised in his hatband.

"I have not allowed the will to be read," she said, presently. "I thought it only right that you should be the person to read it, as you were Sir Aubrey's chosen counsellor."

"Sir Aubrey honoured me with his confidence," answered the steward, "I trust I may be also favoured with yours. Left so young in a position of no little responsibility you will need a faithful adviser."

He was thinking how lovely she was in that sombre dress, with the ruddy light of the fire playing among the red gold of her hair, reflecting itself in the deep hazel eyes, so dark, so inscrutable, when she turned them upon him with their steady gaze. She was not afraid to look him in the face, even if she feared him. Whatever the peril that threatened her it was in her nature to meet it boldly.

"I am not particularly fond of advice, Mr. Bain," she said, "and young as I am I feel quite capable of treading any path I may choose for myself, without leading strings. But so long as you serve the Perriam estate faithfully, you will find me ready to place the fullest confidence in you—as my son's landsteward."

Mr. Bain fully understood the meaning of this speech. He was to be relegated to his proper position as collector of rents, and maker of leases and agreements, overlooker of improvements, and so on. He was no longer to exercise an influence over the life of Lady Perriam herself.

She felt no gratitude for the liberal supplies of money which he had obtained for her, no gratitude for the influence which had always been exerted in her behalf. She took the first opportunity to emancipate herself from the bondage of his interference.

There was a brief interval of silence, during which Shadrack Bain sat with his eyes fixed upon the carpet, and a clouded brow. For once in his life the landsteward was taken thoroughly by surprise. He had not been prepared to find

Lady Perriam take this decisive tone, assert her independence so boldly. He thought the restraints of her married life had schooled her into submission, that finding herself suddenly standing alone in the world, on a height that should have made her giddy, she would have naturally turned to him for counsel and assistance. He had done his utmost to prove himself her friend; yet she now treated him as if he had shown himself her enemy.

"She is not a woman to be swayed by kindness," he thought. "She must be ruled with an iron hand. Easy enough to rule such a woman if one had but a hold upon her."

"When do you propose to read the will, Mr. Bain?" Lady Perriam asked, after that pause in the conversation, "Whenever it may be most convenient to yourself, Lady Perriam."

"It cannot be too soon for me. I wish to know my exact position in this house."

"I do not think there can be any doubt as to your position; nor do you seem to have entertained an uncertainty upon the subject," said Mr. Bain, with a glance round the room.

"You allude to my additions to the furniture of this room," returned Sylvia, interpreting the look. "I can easily remove these things if I have no longer any right to inhabit this house."

"There is no reason why I should affect a mystery upon the subject of Sir Aubrey's will, Lady Perriam. The only will that I know him to have made was drawn up by me. It leaves you sole mistress of Perriam during your son's minority. Had you been a childless widow, you would have had only five thousand and a year under your settlement, and two out of those five thousand you would have owed to my influence. Sir Aubrey proposed to settle only three thousand. But he was more liberal to the mother of his child than he was inclined to be to his wife, and in the will, which he executed in my presence, he left you the full use of Perriam Place during your son's minority. The infant heir must be made a ward of chancery, and the Lord Chancellor will no doubt allow you a handsome income for the maintenance of Perriam, and on Sir St. John's education: say, five thousand a year, which with the income of your settlement would give you ten."

A handsome income for the schoolmaster's daughter, who had so often sighed vainly for half-a-crown to buy a pair of gloves, for whom the middle class comforts of genteel life at Hedingham had seemed as far off as the joys of Paradise. Sylvia's countenance which had worn an inscrutable look during this interview with Mr. Bain changed ever so little at this announcement. The oval cheek grew paler than before, and a sudden light flashed into the hazel eyes. Transient was this indication of emotion; nothing could be calmer than Lady Perriam's tone when she replied to Mr. Bain's announcement.

"Sir Aubrey has been only too good to me," she said. "Can you read the will to-morrow morning? I dare say there are legacies to some of the old servants, and they will be anxious to learn their fates."

"To-morrow at twelve o'clock, if you please, Lady Perriam. Will you go with me to Sir Aubrey's room to look for the will? I know where he kept it." Lady Perriam's cheek, so pale a few moments ago, grew ashy white now.

"I have a horror of that room," she said; "but if you like I'll go with you," nerving herself for the ordeal, and rising from her luxurious nest by the fire.

She took some keys from the drawer in the desk, and left the room, followed at a respectful distance by Shadrack Bain. They went along the west corridor, across an open landing at the top of the grand staircase, and into the east corridor, which led to Sir Aubrey's apartments. Sir Aubrey's no longer. They now belonged to desolation.

The door of the dressing room, which the baronet had used as his sitting-room of late, was locked. There is something awful in those locked doors of deserted rooms which have lately been inhabited by the dead. Lady Perriam turned the clumsy key with a steady hand, and went in, still followed by the steward.

The room had been cleaned and aired since Sir Aubrey's death; all traces of his existence thrust away. The chairs were ranged against the wall, everything in its place, the window was open to the bleak March sky, as if in obedience to that Jewish tradition which counsels the opening of casements to assist the escape of the departed soul.

The desk which Mr. Bain had to examine was not in the dressing room. He opened the door of communication between the two rooms, but on the threshold of the bedchamber Sylvia drew back with a scared look.

"Is it in there?" she asked with a shuddering glance at the tall funeral bed, that bed which, at its best, had reminded her of a catafalque. The blinds were down, and the shadowy room made darker by the deep brown of the oak panelling. The wide and lofty fireplace looked like the entrance to a cavern.

"Come in, Lady Perriam," said Mr. Bain, looking back at her, wondering at this show of weakness in one who had seemed so firm. "I want you to be present when I open Sir Aubrey's desk."

She followed him into the room, shivering in spite of herself, and drew near the table on which the desk stood. It was close beside that awful bed.

"So, my lady," thought Shadrack, noting her look of horror, "I have found out your weak point, have I? This aversion to be reminded of his death looks like remorse for some wrong done to your husband during his life."

He opened the desk with the key given him by Lady Perriam, found the will in a sealed envelope, endorsed, and bearing the date which Mr. Bain remembered as the date of its execution. He looked through the papers carefully, and found no other will, not so much as a codicil.

"And now, Lady Perriam," said the steward, turning to her as he looked the desk, "tell me a little about my kind employer's death. I have heard nothing yet beyond the one fact that we have lost him."

"I can tell you little more, except that his death was sudden, awfully sudden. I went to his bedside and found him dead."

"At what time?"

"A little after midnight."

"You were up late that night then?" said the steward wondering. Midnight was an unholy hour in the sight of the respectable inhabitants of Monkhampton.

"I am always late," answered Lady Perriam. "I am not a good sleeper, and sit up late in my dressing room reading; I have been reading rather late than usual that night, and went into Sir Aubrey's room to see that he was quiet and comfortable, as I always did, before I went to bed."

"And you found him dead?"

"Yes. Pray don't ask me to enter into details. The shock

was too dreadful to be forgotten. The horror of that moment haunts me day and night."

"Is that why you have changed your rooms?" asked Mr. Bain. He was not afraid of questioning her now, not even of pressing home questions, now that he had found the weak spot in her armour.

"Yes, the association was too painful."

"Was no one with Sir Aubrey at the time of his death?"

"No one. Mrs. Carter left him for the night about an hour before I went into the room."

"Where was Chapelain?"

"He had had an attack of the gout, and was confined to his room."

"Did any one go for the doctor?"

"Yes; we gave the alarm at once, and one of the grooms went for Mr. Stimpson, who came before morning. He said Sir Aubrey's heart must have been affected."

"There was no coroner's inquest."

"No. Mr. Stimpson did not consider it a case for an inquest, though death came unexpectedly at last. Sir Aubrey had been so long ailing that it could hardly be considered a sudden death. Mr. Stimpson gave the proper notice to the registrar. He was very kind and took all trouble off my hands."

CHAPTER XLIV.

"I DO BELIEVE YOU; AND I KNOW YOU TRUE."

The tidings of Sir Aubrey Perriam's death made a profound impression upon the people of Hedingham. They had been but rarely favoured with the sunshine of his countenance at the best of times, and for the last year he had never been seen beyond his own grounds, nay, his very existence had dwindled to a tradition. Yet now that he was really dead it seemed to the people of Hedingham as if a light had gone out; as if there were one star the less in their sky; as if things never again could be quite what they had been in the past.

Perriam Place abandoned to an infant and a young widow of doubtful extraction. It seemed a disruption of social order. People speculated upon the life Lady Perriam would lead now that she was her own mistress.

"I dare say she'll give dinner parties after the first year of her mourning," said Mrs. Toynbee, who had not forgotten Sylvia's ungracious reception of her only visit.

"I should think she would go up to London and have her box at the opera, and ride in Botten Row," said Miss Toynbee.

"That's what I should do if I were a rich young widow."

"The question is whether she is rich," remarked Mrs. Toynbee, with an oracular air. "We have heard nothing about Sir Aubrey's will yet."

"I suppose we shall hear of it," said the daughter, with natural curiosity.

"I should think so. Mr. Vancourt is most likely to hear, and I dare say I shall be able to get it out of him. And it will be in the *Illustrated News* most likely after a day or two."

Mr. Bain read the will at noon on the day after his first visit to the widowed Lady Perriam in the presence of Sylvia, Mr. Stimpson, and all the servants except the two nurses, Mrs. Carter and Mrs. Tringfold, who could not possibly be interested in a will made before their advent to Perriam.

The reading took place in the dining-room—dreary at the best of times, but more than usually dreary to-day when the nature of the ceremonial suggested all sad and gloomy thoughts. The servants sat in a row against the wall, dressed in their new mourning, guiltless of the slenderest thread of white to relieve its dense blackness. Lady Perriam sat in an arm-chair by the heaped-up fire, which was the only cheerful thing in the room.

Sir Aubrey's will showed some thoughtfulness for his dependents, though he had taken care not to impoverish the estate by too liberal legacies. He left small pensions to each of the older servants, and a rather larger pension to Jean Chapelain, but pensions they were only to enjoy when superannuated. To every servant who had been a member of his household for the period of ten years he left fifty pounds, to those who had served him over five years he left five-and-twenty pounds in recognition of the merit of prolonged service, said the will. There was also a bequest of five-and-twenty guineas to Mr. Stimpson for the purchase of a mourning ring.

To Mr. Shadrack Bain he left the sum of one thousand pounds, to mark his high estimation of services ably and conscientiously rendered during a period of many years.

To his "dear brother" Mordred Perriam, Sir Aubrey Perriam left his collection of gold and silver snuff boxes and one thousand pounds, and he further desired that his widow, or his children, should continue to the said Mordred Perriam all advantages and privileges which he had hitherto enjoyed as an inmate of Perriam Place—that he should still occupy those rooms now tenanted by him, and reside at Perriam free of all charge, for the natural term of his life.

Finally, to his beloved wife Sylvia, Sir Aubrey left all his personal estate, which, with the income she would enjoy under her settlement would amply provide for her maintenance. But in the event of his death happening before the majority of his eldest son, Sir Aubrey left his wife guardian of the infant, with the privilege of residing at Perriam during his minority.

Sir Aubrey's personality included money in the funds, which would make a considerable addition to Sylvia's income.

The additional lands, tenements, and hereditaments which had been acquired within the last fifty years, and constituted Sir Aubrey's independent estate, were to be equally divided among his younger children, after the death of Lady Perriam, her interest in the estate under the settlement being only a life interest.

It will be seen, therefore, that the schoolmaster's daughter found herself handsomely provided for, in the hour of her widowhood and independence.

Rumour was not slow to spread the contents of Sir Aubrey's will among the gossips of Monkhampton and Hedingham. Mr. Stimpson, who did not consider his devotion recompensed by the trumpety bequest of a mourning ring, took no pains to keep the particulars of the will secret. It was sure to be published in the newspapers by-and-by, and he might as well have the satisfaction of communicating the news to his patients. Thus it became known in Hedingham that the widowed Lady Perriam had inherited all Sir Aubrey's personal estate, which added about two thousand a year to her income under the settlement. This, exaggerated by rumour, soon swelled to ten, fifteen, or twenty thousand, according to the fancy of the narrator.