

princely suite of apartments. But this splendour evoked no admiration from Mrs. Tringfold. "The rooms are 'andsome enough," she said to Celine, who happily understood English, "but they're not 'omely. I feel a something wanting in them."

Breakfast was served for my lady in the solitary grandeur of the saloon. For Tringfold and Celine in a smaller apartment, which did duty for the nursery. Tringfold brightened a little at sight of a beefsteak and fried potatoes, which she confessed was more unsophisticated than she could have expected from foreign food. "But I shouldn't wonder if it was horse flesh, for all that," she added dubiously. Horse flesh or ox flesh, however, Tringfold ate, and with an appetite. She had been prostrated with sea-sickness during the passage, and her inside, as she informed Celine, was nothing but emptiness.

Lady Perriam's breakfast was a briefer business. She ate a little piece of roll, drank a cup of coffee, and then went to her bedroom to renovate her toilet before going to the Hotel Peter Paul in quest of Edmund Standen.

She was feverishly impatient for their meeting, fearing lest some evil hazard should prevent it. He might have left Antwerp, without waiting for a reply to his letter. Swiftly as she had hastened to answer his question with her own lips, she might be too late. Fate had been against them heretofore.

"How haggard I look," she thought, as she arranged her bonnet before the strange looking-glass.

Strange mirrors are no flatterers. They are apt to give a green and sickly hue to the human countenance, like that despondent view of life which obtains in some minds. Lady Perriam's deep mourning intensified the pallor of her tired face. The large hazel eyes had a heavy look. It was still perfect beauty, but not the fresh young loveliness that had smiled upon Edmund Standen in the half-light under the chestnut tree.

"Love will make me beautiful again when I am with him," she said to herself.

She ordered a fly, and drove off to the Hotel Peter Paul, a large and somewhat gloomy-looking hostelry, not far from the famous Rubens house which travellers go to see. Here she asked for Mr. Standen.

Yes, there was an English monsieur of that name in the hotel. He was at that moment writing his letters in a private room. Would madame desire that he should be summoned, or would she go to his apartment?

Madame said she would go to his apartment. The waiter led her up a slippery staircase to a room on the first floor, a room fronting the big empty square which wakes into spasmodic life only on market days. How Sylvia's heart beat as she followed the man up the stairs, along the corridor, till he stopped to knock a cautious, respectful knock, to which came the brief answer in a voice she knew, "Entrez."

It was not the waiter, but Sylvia, who entered. Edmund was writing at a table near a window, with his back to the door, and did not even look round, or lift his head, expecting no one but the waiter. Sylvia went close to his chair, and touched him lightly on the shoulder. At that light touch he started to his feet, saw the lovely face looking at him pleadingly, and clasped her in his arms.

"Sylvia, is this your answer?" he cried rapturously. Forgotten his dishonour, his broken promise, his mother's wrath, Esther's sorrow: all forgotten in that one blissful moment.

"What other answer would you have?" she asked, half reproachfully, looking up at him with tear-dimmed eyes. "Haven't I told you that I never ceased to love you. What better answer could you expect to the most foolish question that was ever asked. I am yours, Edmund. Yours to the end of life. Why did you run away from me?"

"I did not run away from you, but from my own disgrace. I have behaved like a scoundrel. I execrate myself for my folly in ever believing that I could forget you, or live without you."

"Yes, that was a mistake, certainly," replied Sylvia, with a serene smile. She felt now that the world was her own. Cleopatra, with Antony at her feet, could not have felt a more complete sense of sovereignty, or a greater contempt for Octavia, than Sylvia felt for Miss Rochdale.

"A mistake that caused pain to another," said Edmund, self-accusingly. For him, conscience would never be silent, not even at this supreme hour, when he had Sylvia's bright brown head lying on his breast, Sylvia's eyes looking up at him, radiant with triumphant love.

"Bah! It was Miss Rochdale's own fault if she was deceived. She knew how fond you had been of me two years ago. She should have known that you had no heart to give her."

"She believed in my honesty of purpose, Sylvia. She did me the honour to trust my word, only to discover that I had lied to her. She will never know that I lied to myself as well."

"Go back to your Miss Rochdale," cried Sylvia, snatching herself from his arms. "It is clear you care more for her than for me."

"You know I do not, Sylvia. You know that I tried to care for her—tried to set her in your vacant place—to look forward hopefully to a future shared with her; but I could not. Your spell held me too strongly."

"Did it?" cried Sylvia. "I'm glad of that. Do you believe in the power of one mind over another? I do. Often and often, in those slow, wretched days at Perriam—after—after Sir Aubrey's death—when I hoped you would come to see me and you did not come, I used to fold my arms upon my breast, and close my eyes, and try to send my will to rule yours; 'Edmund, come to me,' I used to say; 'Edmund, be true to me; Edmund, I love you, give me love for love.' Did the charm work?"

"It did," he answered, clasping her to his heart again. They were lovers once more—betrothed—all in all to each other—standing alone in their own narrow world, as in the old days under the chestnut tree. "The charm did work, Sylvia, but it was the old charm—the same spell which bound me that spring day when I saw you first in Hedingham Church. I was never released from that sweet thralldom; I only fancied myself free."

"You are my prisoner for ever more," said Sylvia, clasping her arms lightly round her lover's neck, as he bent his head towards hers. "And now, Edmund, let us talk of the future," she went on, releasing him from that gentle bondage, and seating herself in the chair by the open window, below which lay the sleepy old square, white in the noontide sun. "There is no fear of poverty now—no terror of a stern parent disinheriting us."

"No," said Edmund, rather moodily, "you are rich enough."

"And you are poor—poor for my sake—and you scorn to owe wealth to me? Is that it, Edmund? I made myself

disagreeable once because there seemed a chance of your being poor, and now you are going to make yourself disagreeable because I am rich."

"No, Sylvia, I am too happy to be disagreeable. What welcome can I give you glad enough, my brave girl, for having come to your lover? We will care nothing for any world but our own world; and if other people despise your husband you will never scorn him, will you, Sylvia?"

"Scorn you!" she echoed. "You know I have always considered you the best and noblest of men. Yes, even when I treated you so hardly."

"We will forget all past sorrows, Sylvia. And now tell me how you came here. I have been too surprised and too happy to ask the question any sooner. How did you come to Antwerp? Not alone?"

"No, not alone."

"Your mother, perhaps, came with you. The mother for whom you sacrificed yourself. She has need to be fond of you, and to cling to you."

Sylvia looked embarrassed.

"No," she said; "my mother is not with me."

Was he going to use his right as her betrothed lover, and ask all manner of awkward questions? She looked away from him uneasily; looked down at the broad sunlit place, with eyes that hardly saw the tall white houses, with their quaint gables and shining windows, and little mirrors stuck out to catch the rare reflection of vehicle or pedestrian.

"Where is she then, darling? She should have been with you at such a time as this. Does she doubt my friendship for her? My Sylvia's mother would be sacred in my mind."

"She has endured so much sorrow, and shrinks from strangers. By and bye, of course, it will be different. She is staying near London with old friends. You need not trouble yourself about her, Edmund; she is amply provided for."

"I have no doubt of that. But you said you did not come to Antwerp alone."

"I had my son and his nurse with me. My own maid as well."

She saw the little shiver he gave at the mention of her son—an involuntary expression of that lurking jealousy with which he had ever regarded the heir of Perriam. Here was a claimant for Sylvia's love who could never be thrust aside—whose claim would strengthen and widen year by year, till by and by her natural pride in her firstborn might make her almost indifferent to her husband. Maternal love must needs be an absorbing passion. And Edmund had sacrificed too much to his mistress to endure the thought of sharing her affection, even with her child.

"Oh, the little boy is here," he said, with rather a blank look.

"Yes, Edmund. He is to be your son henceforward remember."

"I cannot help loving him for his mother's sake, if ———"

"If what, Edmund?" asked Sylvia, when he hesitated.

"If you do not love him too much."

"You need not be afraid of that," she answered, with her cold smile, "I am not a model mother."

The phrase jarred upon him somehow, although but this moment he had been jealous of the child's claim upon her love.

"You shall love him as much as you like, darling," he said. "I don't mean to be a cruel stepfather. The little one shall be as dear to me as if he were my very son. Is he not yours, and should not that be an all-sufficient title to my love? Ah, Sylvia," with a sigh, "you little know what fond day dreams I used to weave about your first child—our first child."

"Never mind the past, Edmund, we have the present and the future."

"Yes, darling, happiness has come to us at last."

"And now show me Antwerp—and all the famous pictures."

"Let me seal my letters, and then I am at your service."

"You have been writing to your mother, I suppose?"

"No, I wrote yesterday to tell her my whereabouts, in case she should care to write to me. But I hardly expect a letter. I am an outcast from Dan House."

"For my sake? Well, Perriam Place is at your disposal till St. John is twenty-one. Twenty long years to look forward to. We shall be tired of mansions perhaps by that time and glad to fall back upon the comfortable old house which is mine by my marriage settlement. But to whom have you written that long letter, if not to your mother?"

"To my chief at the Bank, telling him that I can never return to Monkhampton, and he must get me a post elsewhere."

"Tear up your letter then—or add a postscript to say that you have done with banking altogether."

"No, Sylvia. If we are to live at Perriam Place, I shall simply cancel this letter, and write to tell the directors that with their permission, I shall resume my duties a month hence."

"What, you mean to stick in an office—to earn some paltry pittance of a few hundreds a year—when I have an ample income for both of us?" said Sylvia, indignantly.

"I mean to be—so far as possible—just the man I was when I first loved you, Sylvia, and not less independent. Do you think I could know an hour's happiness if I felt myself a pensioner upon the wealth your first husband left you? No, dearest, let me but earn my living—my habits are simple—my wants few. Let me earn my five hundred a year, which will more than suffice for my own maintenance—and though I may live among splendours that are not my own, I shall feel myself not the less an honest working man—not unworthy of your love."

"Do as you please," said Sylvia, offended, but stifling her anger, "I see you intend to be my master."

"No, dearest, only the master of my own independence. In all reasonable things I will be your slave."

CHAPTER LVIII.

SHADROCK BAIN AT FAULT.

Mr. Bain arrived at Antwerp the day after that meeting between Lady Perriam and her lover. He had been detained at Ostend for some hours—arriving in the early summer dawn when only a melancholy waiter with half shut eyes was to be found astir at the hotel where Mr. Bain sought shelter and refreshment. There would be no train to carry him on to Antwerp till eight o'clock. The slumberous waiter took Mr. Bain into a *salle-a-manger*, looking into a dismal court-yard, with three long windows, curtained with white muslin. Here, on a

narrow table, appeared those pasteboard piles of fruit and those bouquets of painted paper flowers which beautified the daily meal for the patrons of the hotels. These decorations seem never to be removed by night or day, since there they were at five o'clock in the morning.

The traveller seated himself at one end of the table, and after waiting about an hour was rewarded with a breakfast of coffee and rolls, and a cold fowl. This despatched he perambulated the silent town—and the sea wall, thinking his own thoughts, and but little moved to admiration by the novelty of the scene around him.

"Shall I be in time to find them?"

That was the question which he was perpetually asking of fate—and "them" meant Sylvia and Edmund.

Little by little shutters were opened, shrill-voiced maid-servants appeared and began with vigorous mops to splash and purify the thresholds of doors. Ostend gradually awoke to life; and at last, after a delay that had sorely vexed the soul of Mr. Bain, the Antwerp train started, and joggled along the sandy country at the leisurely pace of Belgian trains in general. Such a stunted apology for a train as it seemed to Mr. Bain, who was accustomed to the West country express, with its long line of carriages and screaming engine, rushing arrow-swift across the face of the country. This train travelled at a foot pace.

"I could have walked faster," thought Mr. Bain impatiently as he looked at his opposite neighbour, a fat little priest, whose breath sent forth odours of garlic as he read his breviary; a stalwart matron sat beside Mr. Bain; brawny youths and damsels filled the remaining seats, and stuffed the carriage with warm humanity. The Belgian trains contain no more carriages than can be filled to repletion.

Never had Mr. Bain endured such a wearisome journey. The innumerable little stations, the dust, the heat, the country women who assailed the travellers with baskets of fruit, the everlasting talk and screaming at every halting place, the getting in and getting out. His patience had been sorely exercised by the time the train rumbled into the gloomy Antwerp terminus.

The sun seemed at its hottest as Mr. Bain drove through the streets, everything glared whitely at him. Happily the drive was short, and he found himself at the door of the Peter Paul Hotel.

"There is an English gentleman staying here, I believe!" he began, in rather awkward French, "Anglais reste ici, nommé Standen."

"Mr. Standen was here, sir, this morning," answered the waiter, in very fair English. He was a German waiter, a wanderer on the face of the earth, and a linguist. "He left this morning."

"Left! At what time this morning?"

This was a death-blow. If Edmund Standen had left Antwerp, Mr. Bain felt little doubt Sylvia had also left the city. She could but have come here for one purpose. To join her lover. He gone, she must have gone too.

"You are sure, Mr. Standen left Antwerp?" he asked the waiter, "sure that he did not go to another hotel?"

"Quite sure, sir. He drove to the railway station before eight this morning."

"Do you know where he was going?"

"No, sir, not exactly. But when he first arrived here he told me that he was going on to Cologne. It is possible that he may have changed his plans, but he said nothing to that effect."

"Have you had an English lady staying at this house, yesterday for instance, Lady Perriam?"

"There has been no English lady staying in the house, sir. But an English lady came here yesterday at about noon to see Mr. Standen, and they went out together. Mr. Standen was absent all day."

"Was the lady young and in deep mourning?"

"Precisely, sir. Young, in mourning, and extremely pretty."

"That will do. Have you any idea where the lady was staying?"

"It was most likely at the hotel St. Antoine, since Mr. Standen had said he had dined at that hotel when he came in last night."

Mr. Bain rewarded the waiter and drove off to the St. Antoine, there to discover that lady Perriam had been there, had taken the principal suite of apartments with the intention of occupying them some time, as the manager supposed, and had departed with bag and baggage, *femme de chambre*, child and nurse, the morning at eight o'clock, for Cologne, the manager believed.

Mr. Bain started for Cologne by the first train that would convey him. He snatched a hasty savourless meal at the buffet of the railway station, and departed without rest or respite, sorely tormented in mind. They had the start of him, and there was no knowing how long they might keep the advantage. There was only one thought from which he could derive comfort. Certain preliminaries must be gone through before Mr. Standen could marry Sylvia—certain papers procured, certain notices given, before the knot could be tied. These preliminaries would require time for their fulfilment. And before the time could elapse, Mr. Bain would have overtaken the lovers.

It was night when he arrived at Cologne, too late for inquiries that must needs occupy considerable time, as he had no clue to help him in his search. He did what he could. He questioned the custom-house officers as to any English travellers who might have arrived at Cologne that night. But the custom-house people told him that swarms of English travellers arrived at Cologne by every train, that almost all travellers were English or American, which came to the same thing. They had no power to distinguish one particular group among the herd of autumnal tourists.

Mr. Bain began his quest at eight o'clock next morning, and pursued it till noon. He had made his inquiries at every decent hotel in Cologne, and even at boarding houses, but had learned nothing definite. No one could tell him of any party answering his description, and as to name, travellers were for the most part nameless. They came and went, and the hotel keepers knew no more of them than of the swallows that flew over the housetops. Mr. Bain ceased from his endeavours thoroughly disheartened, knowing not which way to go.

From Cologne they might have taken one of many routes. He took the most frequented, and went up the Rhine in a steamer—stopping at every landing place—everywhere pursuing his search, and always vainly.

To be continued.