

REMEMBRANCE.

(Andersen)

I think of thee
When the soft voices of the nightingales,
In sweet and plaintive warblings to the night,
Ring through the vales.
When thinkest thou of me?

I think of thee,
By the cool waters of the shaded fountains;
While in the shimmering rays of twilight glow,
Glisten the mountains.
Where thinkest thou of me?

I think of thee,
With many tender hopes and anxious fears.
Passionate longings for the one I love.
And burning tears.
How thinkest thou of me?

O, think of me,
Until we meet again some happier day.
Till then, however distant my feet may roam,
Still shall I think and pray
Only of thee!

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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 XLI.

SYLVIA ASKS A QUESTION.

That feeble lamp of life which burned in the sick chamber in High street, Monkhampton, survived the gloom of deepest winter, now sinking almost to extinction, now flickering faintly back to life, now brightening so visibly that the anxious children began to hope for their mother's recovery. They might have her with them a few more years even yet, they thought. Early in February Mrs. Bain had improved so much as to come down stairs once more, and occupy her accustomed place by the household hearth, but she was not strong enough for the resumption of the domestic keys, or the economical housewife's duties. All she could do was to instil principles of thrift into Matilda Jane, to impart old secrets of good management, wise saws that had been handed down to her by her mother, look over the butcher's book now and then, and sigh plaintively as she noted how the weekly totals had risen since her illness.

"I told cook what you said, mother," answered Matilda Jane, "and she said it was the gravybeef for your beef tea."

"My dear, the bills could hardly have been heavier if she'd boiled down a bullock. I'm very much afraid the servants have been eating meat suppers."

Delighted with this obvious improvement in his patient, and sincerely anxious to preserve the cherished wife for the anxious husband, whose devotion was a fact patent to all Monkhampton, Mr. Stimpson told Shadrack Bain that now was the time for his wife's removal to a milder climate.

"If you can yet get her out of the way of our east winds we may have her strong again by the summer," said Mr. Stimpson, cheerily.

There was just a shade of uneasiness in Shadrack Bain's expression as he reflected on the doctor's suggestion.

"I thought our climate was pretty nearly as good a one as you could have," he said, "I didn't see much difference between Monkhampton and Cannes."

"Perhaps not, my dear sir. In robust health like yours one is hardly conscious of change in temperature. Had you consulted the thermometer you would have found that Cannes is six or seven degrees higher than Monkhampton."

"Very likely. If you think Mrs. Bain ought to go she shall go, though it could hardly be more inconvenient than it is just now for me to take her. But she has been a good wife to me, and I wish to do my duty."

"Everybody knows that," replied the doctor with feeling. He had attended Shadrack Bain's family from the very beginning, had ushered the children upon the stage of life, and conducted them safely through all their infantile ailments, and was sincerely attached to the household.

"If she goes to Cannes and improves as you think she will, is there any hope of her being spared for some years to come?" asked the anxious husband, with a watchful eye upon the practitioner's countenance. "I should like to know the truth. Patching a person up is one thing, and curing them is another. Have you any hope of a cure in this case?"

The doctor shook his head regretfully. Mrs. Bain had been one of his best patients—a small annuity to him for the last five years. Would that she could have lasted for ever, and been handed down in reversion to his sons.

"My dear Mr. Bain," he said, overflowing with sympathy, "your dear good lady's malady has long been chronic. There can be no such thing as cure, but by escaping our cold spring we may carry her safely into the summer."

"To lose her when winter comes again. A poor hope, at best."

"We are in the hands of Providence. We can but do our uttermost. There is but one thing to be done, removal to a more congenial climate."

"And that you consider essential?"

"Most decidedly."

"Then it shall be done," said Mr. Bain. "However inconvenient I'll take her over to Cannes myself. No one in Monkhampton shall be able to say I did less than my duty."

"Bravely spoken, my dear sir. We all honour you for your devotion to your most estimable lady; a devotion equally creditable to you and its object," said Mr. Stimpson, as if he had been making an after-dinner speech.

Mr. Bain, who held, like Macbeth, that whatever was well done when done should be done quickly, announced his intention of starting with the invalid on the next day but one. The girls made haste to pack their mother's trunks, tearfully, yet not without hope. Cannes to their minds meant restoration to health. Matilda Jane was to stay at home and keep house, and rule the boys, a hardy race of grammar-school students with indescribable appetites. Clara Louisa was to accompany her mother as nurse and companion.

"After all," thought Mr. Bain, "I don't see that anything can go wrong in my absence. Sir Aubrey is likely to hold out in his present condition for some time to come, and if there were any appearance of a change Chaplain would write me word of it."

Chaplain, the valet, had a profound respect for the land steward, whom he regarded as the actual master of Perriam Place. Sir Aubrey since his illness was but the shadow or eidolon of his former self. Lady Perriam had but little power, and what little she possessed she seemed to hold at the pleasure of Mr. Bain. The valet told himself therefore that Shadrack Bain was the idol before which he must bow down, if he desired his service to be a profitable one. Chaplain had reason to accord Mr. Bain even more subservience than is usually given by a time-serving domestic to the powers that be, for he was conscious of failings which if once discovered by the steward might lead to his swift doom and downfall. It may have been the joyless monotony of Perriam Place, or it may have been some inherent weakness in the man himself, but, whatever the cause, it is certain that since Sir Aubrey's illness Jean Chaplain had acquired the habit of taking more alcoholic liquid than was good for himself, or for the household in which he served. He had always liked his comfortable glass, but had kept the propensity tolerably well in check so long as he feared Sir Aubrey's scrutiny. But of late, since his master's eyes had grown dull and unseeing, Jean Chaplain had given the reins to his favourite vice, and had allowed that fatal charger to carry him very near the verge of ruin.

The Perriam cellars were too well guarded by the faithful white-headed old butler, who had held the keys for the last twenty years, for Mr. Chaplain to indulge his dangerous propensity at his master's cost. He had a certain allowance of beer and wine, and a liberal one, for servants, however faithful, are not apt to stint one another. They take a large view of servants' hall rations. But anything for which Mr. Chaplain craved beyond this ample allowance he had to provide for himself, and he did provide himself with some of the vilest brandy ever extracted from potatoes, brandy which was guiltless of grape juice, but which added the valet's brain, with a somewhat agreeable obfuscation, and took possession of his feet and legs, where it tortured him under the name of gout.

Little by little, tortured by the gout, and solaced by the brandy which produced the gout, Jean Chaplain fell away from his duties in Sir Aubrey's rooms.

The baronet, though apt to be peevish, and at times exacting, was not a very troublesome invalid, and there were few services he required which Mrs. Carter could not perform to his liking. He had taken a wonderful fancy to the sick nurse. Her quiet unobtrusive manner, her soft voice pleased him—even the subdued colour of her garments, and her pale refined face were agreeable to him. Sometimes when his mind was a little weaker than usual he would take her for his wife, address her as Sylvia, and remain unconscious of his error till Lady Perriam entered the room, when he would look wonderingly from one to the other.

Thus it happened, the sick nurse being always on duty, that no one complained of Jean Chaplain's inattention. He dressed his master in the morning, but was very often out of the way when Sir Aubrey went to bed at night. On these occasions the gout furnished him with an ever ready excuse.

"My legs have martyred me the evening," he would say to Mrs. Carter, in his curious English, "and I could not to descend. I hope the Old did not ask me."

"The Old was Mr. Chaplain's name for Sir Aubrey."

Mr. Bain left Monkhampton with his wife and daughter about the middle of February—nearly a year after Sir Aubrey's paralytic seizure, and about seven months after the birth of that baby heir, who had been baptized without pomp or splendour of any kind at the little church in the dell. At the baronet's express desire, repeated many times, without variation, his infant son had been christened St. John Aubrey, the more surely to perpetuate that friendship which had obtained between Sir Aubrey's ancestor and the brilliant statesman.

The child had grown and flourished in the dull old house, a vigorous sapling. The servants were never tired of praising him. He had Sir Aubrey's blue eyes, or such eyes as Sir Aubrey's had been when they too looked joyously and ignorantly on life's glad morning. He had not inherited those wondrous hazel orbs of his mother's, and indeed bore no resemblance to Sylvia, either in feature or expression.

That interview with Mary Peter had told Lady Perriam very little about her lost lover, but when Miss Peter brought home the dress that had been entrusted to her for manufacture, the talk between the dressmaker and her patroness again fell upon Mr. Standen's affairs.

"I think it's a settled thing now, my lady," Miss Peter remarked, as she tried on the dress, and settled a fold here, and pinched a trimming into place there.

"What is a settled thing?" asked Sylvia.

"Between Mr. Standen and Miss Rochdale. I met them out walking in Hedingham yesterday, quite like sweethearts."

"How do you mean like sweethearts?"

"Well, I don't know. He had such an attentive way with him, and was carrying her waterproof. Besides it's in everybody's mouth at Hedingham. Alice Cook got it from her father, and her father had it from Mr. Vancourt himself, and he'd be likely to know."

Sylvia said nothing, but suffered the business of trying on as quietly as if she had been a statue.

"They say it's to be in the spring, as soon as Mrs. Sargent leaves off crape. She'll have worn it more than a year and a half by that time."

"Unfasten the dress," said Sylvia, imperatively; "you've almost strangled me."

Her breath came thick and fast, as if the dress had indeed been tight enough to throttle her.

"Yet it isn't a bit tight about the throat," said Miss Peter, as she unfastened the body; "thirteen inches—your old measure."

After that day there came a restlessness upon Lady Perriam which she strove in vain to conquer. Were those two going to be married? That was the question which tormented her, the question which was perpetually repeating itself in her distracted mind. There were times when her own release seemed so near, when she believed that Sir Aubrey's hand ran low in the glass of Time. Yet what avail widowhood and liberty, if he whose love she counted upon regaining were to wed another before the day of her freedom.

She could not sit quietly at home to consider this question, but ordered her carriage, and told the man to drive to Cropley Common, a drive which must take her past Dean House and through Hedingham.

Nurse Triugfold and baby went with her, the customary companions of her drives; but to-day she took less notice than usual of the infantine St. John's endearing ways. She

wrapped herself in her own thoughts, and sat looking out of the window with a gloomy brow.

They passed Dean House, but the untenanted windows looked blankly down at her, telling nothing of the interior. They drove through Hedingham without meeting a creature whom Sylvia knew, and thus on to Cropley Common, a noble stretch of unbroken ground, clothed with furze and heather, commanding the distant sea, and far to the left the little sandy bay, and white walled town of Didmouth.

Here, even in winter, it was pleasant to walk on the close cropped turf, though not on the loose ragged gravel road up which the horses struggled with their load. Half-way up the hill the coachman stopped at a wind of the road where there was a bit of level which served as a landing stage for vehicles, and here Lady Perriam and the nurse alighted for a walk on the Common.

To-day Sylvia—never fond of the nurse's company—was particularly indisposed to be social. She walked on rapidly, with her light footstep, winding in and out among the hill-tops and furze bushes, and leaving nurse Triugfold in the distance, trying to pacify the complaining baby, who was afflicted by an obstinate bottom tooth.

How bare and desolate the landscape looked in the bleak winter. The day which had been bright enough when they came, was now darkened by a cloud which threatened rain. Distant Didmouth gleamed whitely against a storm-charged sky. But Lady Perriam was singularly indifferent to that ominous darkening of the heavens. She had walked about half a mile away from nurse Triugfold and the carriage when she was awakened from a profound reverie by big drops of rain.

She had neither cloak nor umbrella, nor was there any nearer shelter than the carriage; not even a gipsy encampment or a hawker cart within view.

Sylvia looked round her helplessly, not very much minding the rain, but with a sense of desolation at being thus alone and unprotected.

The sky had darkened almost to night. They had started for their drive directly after luncheon, yet it seemed evening already.

While she was thus looking around, a dark figure came between her and the sombre sky, a figure armed with that indispensable companion for a west country pedestrian, a large umbrella.

"Let me take you back to your carriage, Lady Perriam," said the pedestrian. It was that one man whose voice Sir Aubrey's wife most feared, most longed to hear.

The sound of that voice coming suddenly upon her took her breath away. That he should speak to her at all seemed wonderful. To her mind—remembering that bitter look in the churchyard—it would have appeared more natural that he should pass her by and leave her to battle with the elements alone. But he had spoken to her, and she determined that she would not part from him till she had resolved the doubt which tortured her.

"You are very kind, Mr. Standen," she answered with well assumed indifference. "Yes, I shall be very grateful for the shelter of your umbrella. This kind of downpour is rather overwhelming."

Edmund Standen held his umbrella over Lady Perriam's head, but did not offer her his arm. He had not desired such a meeting—nay, would gladly have avoided it; but he could hardly leave his sometime love to be half drowned on Cropley Common. There was nothing romantic in their encounter. Indeed that umbrella shared between them savoured of the ridiculous.

"Where did you leave your carriage, Lady Perriam?" asked Mr. Standen. He seemed to find a pleasure in giving her the benefit of his title.

"At the bend of the road, half way up the hill, I can hardly see my way back to it."

"You may trust yourself to my guidance. I know Cropley Common very well indeed. I often come here for a lonely ramble."

After this he could hardly avoid offering Sylvia his arm. The ground was rugged, and slippery with the rain; her feet stumbled now and then.

She felt that the time was short. If she wanted to speak she must speak quickly, no matter how abrupt her questioning might seem.

"I wonder you have any time for lonely rambles," she said, "I hear you are very much occupied."

"With the business of the bank? Yes, I work rather hard there sometimes. However, I like the work."

"But, I heard that you had another and pleasanter occupation for your time, in the society of a young lady to whom you are engaged to be married."

"Pray who is that young lady?" Edmund asked coolly.

"Miss Rochdale."

"And from whom did you hear the report?"

"From common rumour."

"Common rumour is a common liar. I am not engaged to Miss Rochdale."

"Nor likely to be?"

"I will not say as much as that. There is no knowing when a man, who has missed his first chance of happiness, may seek a milder form of joy in a second venture. There is only one summer in a man's life, but autumn is sometimes a warm and genial season. There is that serene and beautiful autumn which is called an Indian summer. I may have my Indian summer yet."

"With Miss Rochdale, I suppose," said Sylvia.

"Why not with Miss Rochdale? She is a girl who might make any man's happiness, one would think—pretty, amiable, refined, intellectual, unselfish. What more can a man ask for in the wife of his choice?"

"I see rumour has not been false, Mr. Standen."

"Why do you trouble yourself about my fate now, Lady Perriam? It gave you very little concern a year and a half ago when you married Sir Aubrey. As you did not think about my happiness then, you need hardly consider it now. I live, you see; that is something. Here we are at your carriage."

The footman opened the carriage door. Edmund saw the baby, splendid in purple and fine linen, fast asleep just now and therefore a picture of infantine serenity. He touched the round, soft cheek gently with his finger, unseen by the mother, whose eyes, gloomy and despairing, were cast down.

Lady Perriam hardly thanked him for the shelter of his umbrella, hardly replied to his courteous "Good evening," and was driven away through rain and darkness with a gnawing pain at her heart.

To be continued.