

A Prayer.

My weary head hath lain a weary year On these hot pillows, and most fearful fears Have made my eyes acquainted with such tears As lie to utter sadness very near.

No coverlid, with borders like the spring When roses come, and up and down o'er spread With golden lilies, maketh fair my bed, But only darkness is my covering.

No daybreak gladness cometh with the day— No pictured saint, so sweet, and so divine, Maketh the corners of my room to shine When evening falleth round me, cold and gray.

Steps, eager once, have taken a listless fall— And eyes that seemed to give me tender grace Have found their pleasure in another face— Only its echo answers back my call.

Some dread enchantment, all against my will, Hath wrought this cruel charm against my life, And vain are all my struggles, vain my strife— Hear me, my Master! hear, and help me still.

Thou, who to light immortal life didst bring, Rising from death, to walk and talk with men, And teach the lesson, all unlearned till then— The gain of loss, and cross, and suffering—

Let not my sinful soul forsaken be! This is my prayer all night and all the day, What is there I have heavier need to say? My very hopes are only mine through Thee!

Brother and friend, the dear familiar face, The eyes beloved—let each and all depart— Nor shall I yet be sad, or sick of heart, So thou but have, and hold me in thy grace.

SELECT STORY.

Bought With a Price.

[CONTINUED.]

LILLY IS TOLD A SECRET.

We will wait, Neville, till you do succeed. I want you to be something great in your profession.

Ah, you are ambitious for me, my darling. I am glad of that. I will tell you something which I had intended keeping from you till the battle was won.

But your love and sympathy will inspire me; I feel I shall succeed. Your dear presence will be ever before me, urging me to success. In truth, had not this stroke of good luck been mine, I hardly should have found courage to make known my love to you.

How could I have thought that so peerless a being would accept a poor briefless barrister? There are few so unselfish as you, my darling. But I trust your generosity will not be put to too great a test.

Even now the clouds are breaking. By this morning's post I find that I am retained for a case which will need all my intelligence and energies. If I succeed, my fame will be great and my name will be known.

It is the turning point in my career. Let your love, my Estelle, be the talisman to gain me the victory. It is the opportunity of proving my powers for which I have long panted.

You will not, then, refuse to share my fortunes, though they may not be great at first? There will be no fear, the barrier being once passed. We will talk of that another time, dear Neville. But must you, indeed, leave me to-morrow.

It is absolutely necessary, my love. I cannot bear the idea; though I comfort myself with the thought that my very absence will be hastening the time of our next meeting. I shall have to content myself with writing as often as possible. How I shall treasure the lines which your dear hand has traced.

Neville, you must not write to me, cried Estelle, in dismay. I could not bear all the gossips in Ashton to be talking of our engagement. It must be a profound secret till your position is established.

Was the mercenary nature of the girl asserting itself? Did she fear the public recognition of Neville's claim to her? She scarcely knew herself why she so

objected to their engagement becoming known, but Neville found her none the more yielding in consequence. He used all his eloquence, but to no purpose. Not even the vicar was to be told.

It was not till she found she was tightening the cords too severely, that she gave in so far as to consent for Lilly to be told. But on this point Neville was as firm as herself. He would not consent to have every loophole stopped of hearing from Estelle. But she would consent to no letters being sent, even through Lilly.

He attributed her refusal to excess of delicacy, and though it pained him to accept this secret engagement, he could not but consent. It was hard for him to leave his treasure, as it were, unprotected, for any one to attempt to take from him, but he consoled himself with the thought that Ashton was a safe place. Few visitors ever came there, and the inhabitants were not likely to stand much chance.

It was a drawback—a wee cloud in his otherwise roseate sky, but he was still intoxicated with the great happiness. Ashton was a gossiping place, no wonder Estelle shrank from being a topic of conversation.

So Lilly alone was told this mighty secret. She was delighted, but puzzled at Estelle's wish for it to be unknown. She herself would have gloried in having won the love of such a one as Neville.

But Estelle would relent when her brother was gone. Surely she would not be content to receive no letters from him.

Chapter IV.

THE MANOR HOUSE.

The Manor House at Ashton was a fine old property, embracing many acres of richly-wooded lands. The house itself stood in a hollow, and had once been surrounded by a moat. Beyond this was a garden domain of considerable extent, made musical by numerous fountains. Its limits reached a noble English park, containing trees of venerable growth, massed about in large lumps, affording shelter to the deer, and adding to its beauty. A beautiful lake also occupied several acres of land.

The owner of this house, the squire, as he was always called, had been the chief personage in Ashton. The prosperity of the place depended in a great measure upon the squire's pleasure.

But for some time this house had been empty, and its squire a sojourner in strange lands. Sometimes tales reached quiet Ashton of the reckless life he led, so that few were surprised when it became known that he was a ruined man, that his ancestral home had passed into the hands of his creditors.

Estelle had felt some interest in this house, when she first came to Ashton. The vicar had entrance to the grounds, and Estelle had rather liked wandering there, and would picture to herself what her life should be as its mistress. It was just the home in which she would have gloried to live, and dispense its hospitalities to the neighbouring families. But that her day-dreams would ever come true she never calculated upon. In fact, she had heard that these broad acres were deeply mortgaged, and that their owner was comparatively a poor man. If he married it must be an heiress, who would claim them from their creditors. So Estelle had put all such hopes from her mind. She had no intention of living in solitary grandeur.

After Neville was gone, this Manor House seemed to exercise peculiar fascination over her. Most of her time at first was spent wandering in the park, or viewing the picture gallery, which had some fame in the country.

After these visits, Estelle became more and more dissatisfied with herself. Then she decided that she would remain away from it. There was no good in longing after the unattainable. Had she not, in her folly, thrown away the chance of ever becoming the mistress of such a home as this?

Estelle, now, that Neville was no longer near to charm her with his presence, bitterly regretted the engagement into which she had entered.

Her mercenary nature appeared to have acquired new force from the check it had received for a time. She despised herself for having given her heart to Neville.

Lilly was dismayed. Estelle refused even in the solitude of their own room, to allow her engagement to Neville to be spoken of. The very mention of it made her appear vexed.

Lilly was almost afraid to give her the loving messages sent through her by Neville.

Surely this was a strange bride her brother had chosen, she told herself, saw.

Estelle had appeared to love Neville; but now she was even more distraught than when she had first come among them.

Lilly could not bear to sadden her brother by her own doubts, so she filled her letters with what she knew would please him best—accounts of Estelle; and so worded it that he little knew that Estelle never sent any answers to his loving inquiries.

But an event was to occur which would even rouse Estelle from her discontent of herself.

The vicar, one day, brought home the news that the Manor House had been bought by a millionaire, who was coming to take up his abode there.

Estelle and Lilly were both eager in their inquiries. Was he married? Had he any family? Was he young, or old? were only a few of the numerous questions which the vicar was called upon to answer.

He laughingly told them that he knew no more than he had already related. Coombs, the agent, had told him the news, and he had asked no further.

But the two girls were not long before they knew more. It was the most important topic in Ashton for many a day.

The inhabitants were excited beyond measure, that a millionaire was to be the squire.

It was soon known that the new owner of the Manor House had acquired his wealth by trade.

He was, in fact, a retired cotton spinner. This was considered of little consequence, owing to his fabulous wealth.

There was one other fact, however, which raised the interests of the marriageable portion of the fair sex to its culminating point.

The new squire was a bachelor; but intended, as soon as he could find one to his choice, to renounce his bachelor state and become a benedict.

How this became known was a mystery; but it tended to add to the general excitement about the coming squire.

Lilly was quite delighted that at last Estelle was becoming interested in the neighbourhood. She was quite curious to gather all the news respecting the Manor House, and even went to one or two muffin parties, things which she had formerly despised.

The Manor House was rapidly undergoing a marvellous change. London decorators and upholsterers had possession of the house, whilst the grounds were in the hands of the first horticulturist of the day.

Already the magician's golden wand had produced effects wonderful to behold. The inhabitants longed all the more to see the man whose wealth had such power.

Estelle was more excited than Lilly had ever seen her. She spent most of the day in watching the improvements in the grounds of the Manor House, and even when at home, could talk of little else.

She learnt another fact that increased her interest. Only one wing of the house was being prepared for the use of the squire; but even this was large enough for him to entertain his neighbours, if he should feel inclined; the rest of the house was to be left till the future mistress should give her decision upon it.

Lilly knew that Estelle meant nothing. It was only an amusement to her to plan out how best this part of the house could be arranged. It occupied her thoughts and pleased her; therefore Lilly was content.

Not so Margery; she had not been blind to what was going on, and little as Estelle imagined her secret unknown to any in Ashton, except to Lilly, it was pretty well guessed at by the old servant. When she saw Estelle all eagerness about the Manor House, she was shrewd enough to guess what was the secret of all this interest.

The crafty, heartless mixx will throw over Mr. Neville, if this millionaire will have her. She intends to set her cap at him. It will be a lucky day for Mr. Neville if she jilts him, though I suppose he will not think so. I am sorry she ever came to the vicarage, with her town airs and haughty ways. She treats me as if I were the dirt under her feet. I wish Miss Lilly did not think her of so much account. It will break her tender heart when she finds out how heartless she is.

Then they were closed, and it was known the owner was coming to take possession. All this time he had never made his appearance. He had skilled workmen, and he intrusted everything to their care. He could hardly have chosen a line of conduct more likely to raise the public curiosity and interest to the highest pitch, had he wished to do so.

Then one day, without any warning he came among them. A grand travelling carriage, with postilions, dashed through the village of Ashton, and entered the gates of the Manor House.

Nothing more was known for a few days, except that the trades people received large orders, and that the Manor House held a large staff of servants, all brought from town. Some of these, in grand liveries, were seen in Ashton, but little more could be learnt from them, more than the Ashtonians already knew. There was one circumstance however, that had been unknown. The squire had brought with him a widowed sister, who would do the honors of his house till a permanent mistress was established.

The very servants appeared to know that the present mistress was only a temporary one.

The squire's appearance at church was agreed upon as the signal for his neighbours to call upon him, therefore everyone was looking anxiously forward for the following Sunday.

It was found necessary, on that day, that each fair maiden in Ashton should perform her devotions in a new bonnet, so the milliners reaped some benefit from the squire's presence.

The vicar, too, should have been gratified. Never before had the parish church held such a congregation! Even the tabernacles and Ebenezers were forsaken for the established Church, this day. Perhaps the vicar pretty well guessed the attraction, and was not deceived in believing that his parishioners had all at once found his sermons interesting.

Then his congregation instead of coming in late, as some of them were in the habit of doing, much to his annoyance, had improved also in this respect on this day. They were all in their seats at a remarkably early hour.

It was fortunate for them that the squire would be obliged to come out in full view of the congregation before he could reach the Manor House pew.

Presently the pew-opener, who was waiting at the door, was seen to give a low bow, and then proceeded to marshal the new-comers to their seats.

At last the man of millions was before them. Let us hope they were satisfied.

Whatever halo surrounded his wealth, certainly none pertained to his appearance.

The Ashtonians saw a man considerably past middle age—large and pompous in his manner, as if he would here proclaim, behold me, the man owning millions of money! His features were common-place, and "parvenu" was written plainly on his countenance. Had it not been for his wealth, the people of Ashton would not have given him a second thought. His sister was almost overlooked, so little interest did she excite. Her brother's pompous bearing was a powerful contrast to the shrinking little woman, who followed so meekly in his wake.

Chapter V.

ESTELLE IS SATISFIED WITH ASHTON, The squire's giants in plush had a hard time of it the next week or two. The gravel on the carriage drive was quite ploughed up with the number of carriages which made their way to the Manor House.

Families within a large circle of Ashton, were quite eager for an introduction to this mighty millionaire.

The squire was pronounced delightful. His low braiding was so well covered with his gold, that no one seemed to be conscious of it.

He was vulgarly pompous and ostentatious in proclaiming his wealth, and yet no one was disgusted. He was flattered and received everywhere. Those who had marriageable daughters were quite eager for his notice, and invitations without number poured in upon him.

His unpretending sister was quite amazed at the attentions she received for the first time in her life, and even she began to pluck up a little courage, and talk largely of her brother's wealth.

It was very little, however, of that wealth which had fallen to her share. It had not been until her brother was in want of someone to place at the head

of his establishment, that his poor neglected sister had been thought of.

Fortunately for him she was a widow, and in indigent circumstances, so he soon made a bargain with her to stay with him until he was married; not that she was by any means the style of woman whom he would have chosen but then, as he was a bachelor, it would be better for a sister to be at the head of his establishment.

Then, too, he could bully her, which was no small consideration with the man of gold.

He was rather given to make those feel their dependence who were unfortunate enough to be in his power.

His sister's insignificance would be fully made up by his own importance. He could carry off the honours of his house so well, that no one would think of troubling about her.

Now Ashton had always been rather a slow place. The inhabitants had been in the habit of giving solemn dinner parties, where everything had been of the most hideous solidity. They made calls of ceremony in the same ponderous state. In truth everything was dull and stagnant. No wonder Estelle had wearied of it all, after the life she had been accustomed to.

But these worthy Ashtonians never thought of doing other than their fathers before them. They had been dull, and therefore their successors were dull. But this wonderful transformation of the Manor House, which had formerly been as sombre as the rest of Ashton, rather startled them from their habitual dullness. One and another made some alterations to their houses and grounds, which had pleased their fancy about the Manor House.

Estelle, who had become more sociable with many of them, was asked for her opinion on different improvements, she being considered an authority, having lived in the very place whence came those wonderful architects who were making such changes at the Manor House.

Estelle had recommended a croquet lawn, and when the game was understood to be particularly favourable for coquettish maidens to beguile the hearts of susceptible bachelors, the idea was declared excellent. Croquet lawns became the rage, and Estelle was called upon to teach the game, so that when the new squire came, they would be ready with their artillery of attack.

The croquet lawns laid down, Estelle further recommended archery grounds, and forthwith the fair Ashtonians donned the woodland green, and became each a representation of the fair Marion in Robin Hood's days. So that when squire Hodges, or the squire as he was called—Hodges being dropped by general consent—came among them, the Ashtonians were prepared to perform prodigies in the way of entertainments.

Fortunately it was summer, so there could be none of those hideous vapour baths called dinner parties.

A retired merchant, very wealthy, with six marriageable daughters, all ambitious to become the mistress of the Manor House, gave the ball a toss, which his neighbours took up and carried on with reckless abandon.

They seemed intent on making up for lost time. Each tried to out rival the other in the matter of entertainments.

Anyone coming to Ashton at this time would have pronounced them a pleasure-seeking set, all intent upon one idea, of making the days pass in one round of pleasure.

Lilly was young enough to enjoy the change in her usual life. She had never before joined in any pleasure greater than a tea party, and perhaps a carpet-dance. It seemed very pleasant to her, but Estelle rather pitied her for the delight it was to her!

You unsophisticated child, she said, so this place seems Arcadia to you? You should have a season in London, Lilly, and then you would know what life really is. When I am rich, Lilly, and have a town house, as my father had, you shall come to me, and I will initiate you into some of the mysteries of real enjoyment. You will wonder how you have stagnated so many years of your life.

That will be, dear Estelle, when you are married to Neville, I suppose. I hope he will be rich some day, for your sake, though that will not make you love him more, I am sure. You are very good to promise the amusements, but I shall long more to see you and Neville together. What a happy couple you will be! You will not think of troubling much about pleasure when you and he are together. It will be on my account you will wish to get out, but I shall not be selfish enough to permit it.

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