

of a Ulysses is weak to break from. My dearest girl I think that I must have fallen in love with you that afternoon in the orchard; for your face has haunted me from that hour to this, and I know that life henceforward must seem barren for me if you refuse to brighten it."

Sylvia gave one wide look that took in all the splendour of Perriam. She had turned her back to the church in the dull, and the mansion stood before her, a little way off, in all its solemn grandeur,—the smooth lawn shining like the still bosom of a lake between the Italian garden and the broad stone *perron*. This was offered to her—this, the finest house she had ever seen, by the grandest gentleman she had ever heard of. There was no one in Hedingham whose mind was wide enough to conceive greatness beyond the greatness of Sir Aubrey Perriam.

There was a choking twitch in her throat. Her eyes filled with tears. The tears of pride and triumph. Only in a dream had she ever felt this swelling sense of victory until to-night. She turned to Sir Aubrey and tried to speak, but no words would come. That overpowering sense of gratified ambition stifled her. In that moment Edmund Standen was absolutely forgotten.

Sir Aubrey perceived her agitation and was deeply touched by it. Had she been unmoved, he would have thought her unworthy of his love. This emotion bespoke a chord which trembled in unison with his own deep feeling. He was not without the power to touch that fresh young heart.

"Sylvia, will you be my wife?" he asked briefly, not being practised in the arts of a lover.

"It would be too great an honour for me, Sir Aubrey," she answered, her voice trembling a little. She was thinking of those Hedingham fine ladies, who had looked her down with their cold repellent stare, who had condemned her unheard. Could Fortune really mean to raise her to a pinnacle from which she could crush them with her scorn. The mere fact of her elevation would be a supreme revenge. She thought of the homage Hedingham would offer to Lady Perriam, and Edmund Standen remained absolutely forgotten.

"What would the world say, Sir Aubrey?" she asked.

"What would the world say, except that I was happy in winning so peerless a wife. I have been, perhaps, too much the slave of social rank, but you have broken my bonds. Beauty such as yours would make any man a radical. The world! What need I care for the world if I am happy? A man's home is his world. That uneasy tormenting sense of what the world outside his home may be saying of him is the weakest of all the vanities that ever civilization inspired in the human mind. Let my house be isolated as the wigwam of the savage, so long as it be happy. Sylvia, is there any hope that I can win your regard?"

"How can I do otherwise than admire you, when you are so generous and noble?" she asked softly. A very little while ago she had called Edmund Standen noble and generous because he was willing to surrender a fortune for her sake. But Sir Aubrey, who was able to make her mistress of Perriam Place, seemed still more generous and noble.

"Will you be my wife, Sylvia?" pleaded Sir Aubrey with deepening earnestness. "I am willing to trust to time to give me your love. I do not think one so gentle and innocent can long withhold her heart from a husband who must adore her. If I can trust the future, dearest, to bring us both happiness, will you not trust it too?"

"Yes," she answered, not withdrawing the hand he clasped, but with her gaze still fixed on yonder mansion, upon whose smooth facade the shadows of the cedar branches looked like funeral plumes.

It was Perriam Place she accepted rather than Sir Aubrey. "Better for poor Edmund than that he should make himself a pauper for my sake," she thought, as her lover's image cast a sudden gloom athwart this brilliant prospect. And for the moment she really believed that in accepting Sir Aubrey's offer she was acting generously to Edmund Standen.

And that solemn promise by the tomb of the de Bossineys, that promise so firmly believed in by her absent lover? Lighter than thistle-down weighed that sacred vow in the balance that held the wealth of Perriam, and all the pride and power that went along with it.

Sir Aubrey held that little hand in his, wondering vaguely at himself, and the change in his scheme of life. He had not intended to take this desperate plunge. His plan had been to make himself thoroughly acquainted with Sylvia and her father before committing himself in any manner. And lo, it had needed but the magic of night and star-shine to betray him into this foolish precipitation. He felt that he had been rash almost to madness; he felt that he was exquisitely happy.

"Sylvia," he said gently, "if you can but give me one tithe of the love I feel for you we ought to be the happiest couple in the west of England."

Sylvia thought that as lady Perriam it would be impossible otherwise than happy.

Mr. Carew and Mr. Perriam had perambulated every walk in the Italian garden by this time, the bookworm still prosing about that wonderful Venetian edition of Horace—a book which was really the veriest dirt in the eyes of accomplished bibliopoles, but which poor Mordred deemed a treasure above price. The schoolmaster listened patiently to the particulars of this bargain—how Mr. Perriam's eye had been caught by an advertisement in *The Bookseller*, how he had written to the second-hand dealer, and how the dealer had written to him—all related at much length, and with numerous discursive additions. Very patient was Mr. Carew, for he had an eye upon those two figures by the stone vase, yonder; and he felt that his time was in no manner wasted.

But when the stable clock chimed the half-hour after nine it seemed incumbent upon him to make some movement. So he reminded Mr. Perriam how late it was, and the two gentlemen bent their steps towards yonder group.

"My dear Sylvia, have you any idea of the hour?" asked Mr. Carew. "This beautiful garden, and Sir Aubrey's kindness, have beguiled you into forgetfulness. We have a longish walk before us."

"The carriage is ordered for ten," said Sir Aubrey. "I could not think of Miss Carew walking home. Come in and take some refreshments, Carew."

He gave Sylvia his arm, and they went back to the house, which now shone upon them with a cheerful light in its lower windows; not the vivid brightness of gas, but a subdued and mellow radiance of lamps and wax-candles.

The saloon which Sylvia had only seen dimly in the dusk was now illuminated by a pair of moderator lamps, innovations which Sir Aubrey had submitted to under protest, and half-a-dozen yellow wax candles in a pair of silver candelabra of the Corinthian column design.

By this soft light the room looked its best; no colour predominating where every hue was mellowed by time, pale grays and sombre crimsons melting into each other, doors of darkest Spanish mahogany—such a room as a painter loves. Sylvia felt somehow that Sir Aubrey's saloon, lacking all the luxurious inventions of modern upholstery, was yet infinitely more splendid than Mrs. Toynbee's brand new drawing-room, upon whose decoration as the lady exultingly informed her friends, no expense had been spared. There must have been a rood of looking-glass in Mrs. Toynbee's room. Vast pannels of glass from floor to ceiling, reflecting all the distracting twists and convolutions of the gilded chairs and tables, the brassy modern buhl, the French china, the Bohemian glass, the crimson satin, the mother of pearl, photograph albums; a room which gave visitors a headache, while in the Perriam Place saloon the eye reposed as in the shade of summer woods. Once in a fit of condescension, or in that expansiveness of spirit which seizes some women when they have a new acquisition to display, Mrs. Toynbee had asked Sylvia to come and see her drawing-room, and Sylvia had reluctantly accepted the patronising invitation. She had surveyed those brand new splendours, and wondered from what wild chaos of the artistic mind, upholsterers had evoked the designs for those serpentine chairs, those ricketty coffee tables and plaster of Paris pedestals for flower pots, which looked like gilded lamp-posts. Sylvia had duly admired the Toynbee drawing-room, and had been regaled with a stale maccaroon and a glass of sherry, which tasted of cayenne pepper. She had not forgotten the room, nor the condescension which had prompted its exhibition. She thought of both now, with a curious smile.

"When I am Lady Perriam I will ask Mrs. Toynbee to come and see my drawing-room," she thought.

There was just time for some light refreshment of wine and biscuits, and a certain poundcake, upon which the Perriam housekeeper prided herself, before the carriage was announced. There had been time too for Sir Aubrey to engage his new friends to dine at Perriam on the following Tuesday.

"Sunday is a leisure day with you, I suppose, Carew," he said, meditatively. He had been thinking that the Sabbath would seem long and dull to him if he could not see Sylvia.

"No, Sir Aubrey. I am not my own man till late in the evening. I have to take the school to church."

"Dear me, yes, to be sure," said the baronet, a little startled. That school business was decidedly unpleasant. He had almost forgotten it while he was talking to Sylvia in the starlight.

He escorted his guests to the carriage, an old-fashioned lemon-coloured chariot, in which his father and mother had ridden. But the vehicle, though ancient had been carefully preserved. The drab damask lining was spotless, the cushions luxurious. Never before had Sylvia sat in such a carriage.

"Good-bye," said Sir Aubrey, holding Sylvia's hand with a lingering pressure, while the coachman looked round to see how long his master meant to stand at the carriage door. "Good-bye, I shall call upon your father on Monday."

The chariot drove away, and Sir Aubrey went back to the house slowly, thoughtfully. The glamour of Sylvia's presence was hardly gone from him when he awoke to the consciousness that he had done a desperate act. He did not altogether regret the step which he had taken. He was proud to think that Sylvia had accepted him. But he had a dimly doubtful feeling, like that of a purchaser who has just bought something he is not very sure of wanting. The object was a bargain, perhaps, and yet the buyer might have been as well off without it.

"What will Mordred say?" he asked himself, as he went back to the saloon. And beyond Mordred was that outside world which he had affected to despise, a little while ago, on yonder terrace.

Mordred sat near one of the lamps, turning over the leaves of a Quarterly, and utterly unsuspecting. He looked up as his brother came into the room, and in his mild dreamy face there was no indication of curiosity.

"A very intelligent person, that Mr. Carew," he said, "rather superior to his position."

"Rather superior! I should think so, indeed!" returned the baronet, almost testily. "Any one can see at a glance that the man is a gentleman by birth and education."

"I wonder how he comes to be a village schoolmaster," remarked Mordred in a speculative tone.

"Because the man is evidently a fellow of your stamp. One of those dreamy intellectual Sybarites who would be content with any position in which they are not required to exert themselves. What would become of you, do you suppose, Mordred, if you hadn't an income, and Perriam to live in? Do you think you could attain any higher position than Mr. Carew has secured for himself?"

"I daresay not," answered Mordred meekly; "but it must be tiresome teaching boys. Thank Providence, I'm not obliged to do it."

"What do you think of Miss Carew?" asked Sir Aubrey, from the shelter of his arm chair at the other end of the room.

"The young lady!" said Mordred, as if he had just remembered the fact of her existence; "the young lady who came with Mr. Carew. Rather a pleasing young person, I should think."

Pleasing! His goddess of beauty—his Madonna after Raphael—summed up in the rapid epithet "pleasing."

After this Sir Aubrey was in no humour to tell Mordred anything. Better, perhaps, to keep his secret till he and Sylvia were actually married. Let people be as much astonished as they pleased afterwards. They could be married quietly some morning by special license, giving no one more than a few hours' notice of the fact. And they could be in Paris before people began to wonder. Sir Aubrey was particularly anxious to escape the wonderment which this somewhat eccentric marriage was likely to occasion.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MRS. STANDEN IS INCONSISTENT.

Sylvia said not a word to her father about Sir Aubrey's offer during the drive home. Nor had Mr. Carew the faintest suspicion that the affair had reached a crisis. He had been supremely satisfied to note the main fact, that Sir Aubrey admired his daughter, and had trusted that time might ripen admiration so decided into love. But that the Lord of the Manor would offer his hand and fortune to this obscure maiden after having seen her only four times, was something beyond Mr. Carew's wildest dream. And here the schoolmaster may

have shown himself somewhat deficient in knowledge of human nature. For, to give Sir Aubrey time for the ripening of his fascination, would have been also to give him time for those prudent reflections which must occur to the matured mind of middle age. It was only while the glamour was upon him that Sir Aubrey was likely to forget rank and race for the sake of this new fancy. And the glamour was strongest while the fancy was newest.

Satisfied with what he deemed the steady progress of Sir Aubrey's flame, Mr. Carew forbore from questioning his daughter. They drove home almost in silence, and Sylvia left her father in the parlour with a brief good night.

Once safe in her own little room, she flung herself beside the bed, where her wretched mother had knelt two nights before, and for the first time in her life wept a flood of passionate tears. The sense of her treason had come upon her in all its fullness during that silent homeward drive. She felt herself the basest and falsest of women. She was half inclined to think that all the splendour this earth could give would be worthless to her without Edmund. Yet, through all, she never contemplated the possibility of retracing the step which she had taken—of asking Sir Aubrey to give her back the rash promise of to-night.

No—she wept for her absent lover, and wept for her own infidelity—but she meant to be Lady Perriam all the time. Remorse gnawed her heart, but she held steadily to the new purpose of her life. She would reign in triumph over the people who had slighted her. She would win all that made life worth having.

Broken and feverish were her dreams that night, during briefest snatches of slumber. One moment her lover's reproachful face was before her, and in the next the stately front of Perriam Place. She was standing in the Italian garden, under a starlit sky, but it was Edmund Standen, and not Sir Aubrey, who stood beside her.

She awoke from such a dream as this, with an iniquitous thought. "Sir Aubrey is almost an old man. He may die before many years are over, and I may marry Edmund after all."

What pride, what happiness, to make Edmund lord of Perriam? She forgot that family estates are apt to be entailed. She fancied herself sole mistress of Sir Aubrey's lands and wealth, giving all to her first lover. And cradled by this bright dream, Sylvia sank into peaceful slumber just as the birds were beginning to sing.

She awoke in a frame of mind that was almost cheerful, though that haunting image of her jilted lover still pursued her. "After all, it was better for him," that was the argument with which she strove to pacify the Eumenides of conscience. "He may marry Miss Rochdale," she said to herself once, but that idea was too keen a torment. She could not entertain it.

"No, he will be in no hurry to marry," she thought, "but he will live with his mother, and be a country gentleman. He is made for that. To reduce him to a clerk's position would be shameful cruelty. It would be selfishness in me to accept the sacrifice his generosity rates so lightly. And how can I doubt that our marriage would result in unhappiness. He would regret the sacrifice when it was too late. And after an absence of three months his love will have cooled a little perhaps," she reflected, with a regretful sigh. "Altogether what has happened must be better for both of us, however dearly we may have loved each other. Papa is right. Fortune comes to a woman only once in her life. She must be worse than foolish if she rejects it."

It was Sunday. Sylvia hated Sundays. The perpetual church and Sunday school had no charm for her. She knew the Bible history by heart, and was beyond measure weary of those Bible stories whose unsurpassable grandeur is somewhat lowered in the minds of those who hear the sacred volume droned through Sunday after Sunday by the harsh voice of school children, in a level high-pitched bawl. And then Sunday exposed Miss Carew to some mortification from the exhibition of new gowns and bonnets on the part of young lady teachers. Those young ladies seemed to have something new every Sunday. If they could not dazzle the gaze with a new bonnet, they could generally exhibit a neck ribbon, a pair of cuffs, a parasol, or a collar, which had been on view in Ganzlein's window a day or two before. Sylvia only saw those splendours from the outside of Ganzlein's plate glass. For her Sunday never meant new clothes.

But to-day how different would be her feelings when those insolent Hedinghamites flounced past her in their Sabbath finery. How proudly she would return their scornful looks, strong in the thought of the new dresses that she would wear as Lady Perriam. Looked at from this point of view, her elevation seemed almost too bright a dream ever to be realized. In the face of that little Hedingham world she became altogether worldly. The Eumenides ceased to torment her with Edmund Standen's image. She thought of nothing but her triumph over Hedingham.

It was on this subject that her thoughts ran all through the morning service—the dresses she would wear, the parties she would give, her Continental tours, all those glories of rank and state which might be hers as Sir Aubrey's wife. The service, which generally seemed long to this impatient spirit, seemed brief to-day, so splendid were those visions of the future.

"I shall come to Hedingham Church on Sunday morning when I am married," she said to herself. "It is all very well to have a church of one's own, in one's own park. But I should like the Hedingham people to see my dresses."

A little thrill of remorse or compunction stirred her heart at sight of the Dean House pew, where she had been wont to see her lover's tall figure and handsome head every Sunday. Many a look had she stolen in that direction in the Sabbath days that were gone; many a tender thought had she sent towards that faithful lover; and now her love was a thing of the past. With one sudden wrench she had plucked it out of her heart. But even in the first flush of triumph her heart seemed empty without that banished love.

(To be continued.)

MADE CLEAR BY ILLUSTRATION.—We overheard the following between two bell-boys at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, recently: "Pat a les Mike, 'What's this suspension of the banks?' " "Hist ye!" "Ike replies, 'I'll tell ye. Suppose you have five cents.' " "Yis." "Leave it wid me." "Yis." "Next day ye want it, and ye ax me for it." "Yis." "I tell ye, 'No, sir, I've used it myself.'"

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