

MY DARLING.

Do you hear the spring birds trilling in their gladness?
O my darling, are you listening to their song,
Whilst you wander, now so lonely, in your sadness;
Never meeting with the one who waits so long?

Do you hear the blackbird calling to his mate, love?
Hear you now the sweet response his mate returns?
So I've called to you from dawn of life till late, love;
But my heart for your response yet madly yearns.

Do you see the sunshine gladdening the earth, love?
Do you feel the breath of spring upon your brow,
As it calleth bud and blossom into birth, love?
Are you yearning for a kindred spirit now?

When the twilight shades are lengthening on the meadows,
When the sun is slowly sinking in the west,
Comes to you no spirit-yearning with the shadows,
No responsive thrilling from another's breast?

In the silence of the even, do you wonder
Where the footstep is that lingers far, as yet,
Keeping hearts that should be mated far asunder?
Is your pillow in the midnight stillness wet?

Shall I never feel your breath upon my cheek, love?
Never feel your heart 'gainst mine at wildly beat?
Must I wander still, and never hear you speak, love?
O my darling, shall we never, never meet?

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PUBLICANS and SINNERS

A LIFE PICTURE.

BY MISS. M. E. BRADDON,

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BOOK I.

CHAPTER XVI.—Continued.

Lucius began his task without another word; he could not trust himself to speak yet awhile. He unfastened the clumsy folding-doors of the cabinet, with a hand that trembled a little in spite of his effort to be calm, and opened the drawers one after another. They came out easily enough, and rattled loosely in their frames, so shrunken was the wood. Outer drawers and inner drawers, and papers in almost all of them—some were mere scrappy memoranda, scrawled on half sheets or quarter sheets of letter paper; other documents were in sealed envelopes; others were little packets of letters, two or three together, tied with faded red tape. Lucius examined all the doors and minute cupboards, designed, one would suppose, with a special view to the accumulation of rubbish; emptied them of their contents, tied the papers all together in his handkerchief, and gave them into the custody of Lucille. The light had faded a little by the time this was done, and the corners of the loft were wrapped in deepening shadow—a gruesome ghostly place to be left alone in by this half light. Lucille looked round her with a shudder as she turned to leave it.

They were on the perilous staircase—Lucius in front, Lucille behind him, half supported by his uplifted arm, both obliged to stoop to avoid concussion with the low sloping ceiling—when Lucius saw and heard something sufficiently startling.

In the half dusk of the landing below them, he saw the door of one of those empty rooms which Lucille had declared to be locked opened—ever so little way—and then close again—quickly but softly, as if shut by a careful hand. He distinctly saw the opening of the door; he distinctly heard the noise of the lock.

"Lucille," he said, in an eager whisper, "you are wrong. There is some one in that room—the door exactly facing these stairs. Look."

He pointed, and her eyes followed the direction of his finger. For a few moments she stood speechless, looking at the door with a scared face, and leaning upon him more heavily than before.

"Nonsense, Lucius! you are dreaming. There can be no one there; the rooms are empty; the doors are all locked."

"I am quite certain, dearest," he answered, still in a whisper, and with his eyes fixed upon the door that had opened, or seemed to open. Don't be alarmed; it may be nothing wrong. It is only old Wincher prowling about this floor, I daresay, just as he prowls about the down-stair rooms. I'll soon settle the question."

"I tell you, Lucius, the doors are all locked,"

cried Lucille, in a tone far louder than her wonted accents—a voice of anger or of alarm.

Lucius tried the door with a strong and resolute hand—shook it till it rattled in its time-worn frame. It was locked certainly, but locked on the inside. The keyhole was darkened by the key.

"It is locked on the inside, Lucille," he said; "there is some one in the room."

"Impossible! Who should be there? No one ever comes up to this floor. There is nothing here to tempt a thief, even if thieves ever troubled this house. I keep the keys of all these rooms. Pray come down-stairs, Lucius. My grandfather will be impatient about these papers."

"How can that door be locked on the inside if you have the key of it?"

"I have not the key of that particular door. There is a door of communication between that room and the next, and I keep one locked on the inside. It saves trouble."

"Let me see the two rooms; let me satisfy myself that all is right," he said, stretching out his hand for the keys."

of his life? Or could he mistrust the judgment of one whose calm good sense was one of the finest qualities of her character?

Had it not been for Homer Sivewright's alarms, that strange story of noises heard in the dead of the night, he could have dismissed the subject far more easily. As it was he lingered for some time; listening for the faintest sound that might reach his ear, and hearing nothing but the scamper of a mouse within the wainscot, the fall of a dead fly from a spider's web.

He found Lucille waiting for him in the gallery below, very pale, and with an anxious look, which she tried to disguise by a faint smile.

"Well," she asked, "you have kept me waiting long enough. Are you satisfied now?"

"Not quite. I should very much like to have the keys of yonder rooms. Such a house as this is the very place to harbor a scoundrel."

The girl shuddered, and drew back from him with a look of absolute terror.

"Don't be frightened, Lucille. I daresay there is no one there; a strange cat, perhaps,



"CONFIDENCE."

"I will not encourage any such folly," answered Lucille, moving quickly towards the staircase leading to the lower story. "Pray bring those papers, Lucius. I could not have imagined you were so weak-minded?"

"Do you call it weak-minded to trust my own senses? And I have a special reason for being anxious upon this point."

She was on her way down-stairs by this time. Lucius lingered to listen at the door, but no sound came from the room within. He tried all the doors one after another: they were all locked. He knelt down to look through the keyholes. Two of the rooms were darkened by closed shutters, only faint gleams of light filtering through the narrow spaces between them. One was lighter, and in this he saw an old bedstead and some pieces of dilapidated furniture. It looked a room which might have been used at some time for a servant's bedroom.

After all, that opening and shutting of the door had been, perhaps, a delusion of his overwrought mind. Only a few minutes before there had been a noise like the spinning of a hundred Manchester cotton-ooms in his brain. The horror and anguish of that hideous discovery in the loft still possessed him as he descended those stairs: what more likely than that, in such a moment, his bewildered senses should cheat him?

And could he doubt Lucille's positive assurance as to the condition of those rooms? Could he doubt her whose truth was the sheet-anchor

at most; yet cats don't open and shut locked doors. There may be no one; only in such a house as this, so poorly occupied by two helpless women and two feeble old men, one cannot be so careful. Some notion of your grandfather's wealth may have arisen in the neighborhood. His secluded eccentric life might suggest the idea that he is a miser, and that there is hoarded money in this house. I want to be assured that all is secure, Lucille; that no evil-intentioned wretch has crept under this roof. Give me your keys and let me search those rooms. It will be only the work of a few minutes."

"Forgive me for refusing you anything, Lucius, she said; "but my grandfather told me never to part with those keys to any one. You know his curious fancies. I promised to obey him, and cannot break my promise."

"Not even for me?"

"Not even for you. Especially as there is not the slightest cause for this fancy of yours. That staircase door is kept always locked, the keys locked up in my grandfather's desk. It is impossible that any living creature could go up to that attic floor without my knowledge. Nor is it possible for any one to get into the lower part of the house unseen by me or by the Winchers."

"I don't know about that. It would be easy enough for any one to get from the wharf to the garden. There are half-a-dozen doors at the back of the house, and more than a dozen places

in the stables and outhouses where a man might be hidden, so as to slip into the house at any convenient moment."

"You forget how carefully Mrs. Wincher turns all the keys, and draws all the bolts at sunset. Pray be reasonable, Lucius, and dismiss this absurd fancy from your mind. And instead of standing here with that solemn face, arguing about impossibilities, come to my grandfather's room with those papers."

Never had she spoken more lightly. Yet a minute ago her cheek had been blanched, her eye dilated by terror. Lucius gave a little sigh of resignation and followed her along the corridor. After all it was a very foolish thing that he had been doing; raising fears, perhaps groundless, in the breast of this lonely girl. Her grandfather had studiously refrained from any mention of his suspicions lest he should alarm Lucille. Yet he, the lover, had been so reckless as to suggest terrors which might give a new pain to her solitary life.

Mr. Sivewright received the bundle of papers with evident satisfaction, and turned them over with hands that trembled in their eagerness.

"Documents of no moment," he said; "a few old records of my business life, put away in that disused piece of lumber up-stairs, and half forgotten. But when, at the gates of the tomb, a man reviews his past life, it is a satisfaction to be able to try back by means of such poor memorials as these. They serve to kindle the lamp of memory. He sees his own words, his own thoughts, written years ago, and they seem to him like the thoughts and words of the dead."

He thrust the papers into a deep drawer in the little table at his bed-side.

"You have been better to-day, I hope?" said Lucius, when Lucille had left the room in quest of the old man's evening meal.

"No; not so well. I don't like your new medicine."

"My new medicine is the medicine you have been taking for the last five weeks—a mild tonic, as I told you. But you are tired of it, perhaps. I'll change it for something else."

"Do. I don't like its effect upon me."

And then he went on to state symptoms which seemed to indicate increasing weakness, nausea, lassitudes, and that unreasonable depression of mind which was worse than any physical ailment.

"It seems like a forecast of death," he said despondently.

Lucius was puzzled. For some time past there had been a marked improvement, but this change boded no good. The thread of life had been worn thin; any violent shock might snap it. But Lucius had believed that in supreme rest and tranquillity lay the means of recovery. He could not vanquish organic disease; but he might fortify even a worn-out constitution, and make the sands of life drop somewhat slower through the glass.

To the patient he made light of these symptoms, urged upon Mr. Sivewright the necessity of taking things quietly, and above all of not allowing himself to be worried by any groundless apprehensions.

"If you have a notion that there is anything going wrong in this house, let me sleep here for a few nights," said Lucius. "There are empty rooms enough to provide lodgings for a small regiment. Let me take up my quarters in one of them—the room next this one, for instance. I am a light sleeper; and if there should be foul play of any kind, my ear would be quick to discover the intruder."

"No," said the old man. "It is kind of you to propose such a thing, but there's no necessity. It was a nervous fancy of mine; I daresay, the effect of physical weakness. Say no more about it."

Lucius went home earlier than usual that evening, much to the amazement of Mrs. Wincher, who begged him to give them a "toon" before departing. This request, however, was not supported by Lucille. She seemed anxious and restless, and Lucius blamed his own folly as the cause of her anxiety.

"My dearest," he said tenderly, retaining the icy-cold hand which she gave him at parting, "I fear those foolish suspicions of mine about the rooms up-stairs have alarmed you. I was an idiot to suggest any such idea. But if you have the faintest apprehension of danger, let me stay here to-night and keep guard. I will stay in this room, and make my round of the house at intervals all through the night. Let me stay, Lucille. Who has so good a right to protect you?"

"O no, no," she cried quickly, "on no account. There is not the slightest occasion for such a thing. Why should you suppose that I am frightened, Lucius?"

"Your own manner makes me think so, darling. This poor little hand is unnaturally cold, and you have not been yourself all this evening."

"I am a little anxious about my grandfather."

"All the more reason that I should remain here to-night. I can stay in his room if you like, so as to be on the spot should he by any chance grow suddenly worse, though I have no fear of that."

"If you do not fear that, there is nothing to fear. As to your stopping here, that is out of the question. I know my grandfather wouldn't like it."

Lucius could hardly dispute this, as Mr. Sivewright had actually refused his offer to remain. There was nothing for him to do but to take a lingering farewell of his betrothed and depart, sorely troubled in spirit.

He was not sorry when the old iron gate close