

INLAND.

"Here rosy snow peaks out the twilight heaven,
And boundless green savanas roll below,
New stars look down from dewy skies at even,
And unfamiliar flowers in splendour glow!
Where is the sea?"

Strange boughs wave round me, bright with fruitage
golden,

Lithe dusky forms look kindly on my way,
And wondrous cities, mythical and olden,
Open their glittering gates, to lure my stay!
Where is the sea?"

Oh! for the sounds of rushing wind and ocean,
The mingling, many-voiced, bewildering sea,
The light, the power, the tumult and the motion,
The air that is the breath of life to me!
Where is the sea?"

Oh, for the stretch of brown and shingly beaches,
Where dreaming childhood played the livelong day,
For the bright water's wide and changeful reaches,
The strong salt breezes, and the blinding spray!
Where is the sea?"

Ye glorious mountains! wonderful and lonely,
I bow before your majesty divine!
But oh, forgive! if I remember only
Beyond you lies the sea for which I pine!
Where is the sea?"

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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 XLV.—(Continued.)

"There is something," thought Shadrack Bain, "some secret between these two women. I could read as much in Lady Perriam's face to-day, when it paled at the mention of Mrs. Carter's name. Is the link the secret of the remote past, before Sylvia was Sir Aubrey's wife? Or has it something to do with the time I was away, just before Sir Aubrey's death? There was a strangeness in Lady Perriam's manner when I first saw her after her husband's death which I have never been able to explain to myself. I have not forgotten her look of horror when we went into Sir Aubrey's room. A woman's natural aversion to the gloom of death, perhaps. Yet she seems of too stern a metal for weak fears such as those. There is something—a secret—a mystery somewhere, and that woman Carter knows all about it. Why should I puzzle my brains to unravel it? Whatever it is I'll make it work into the web of my own scheme, or I am something less than Shadrack Bain."

Not many weeks after this, before the summer was old, all Monkhampton was startled by an event which scandalized a considerable portion of the community. Shadrack Bain seceded from the Baptists and entered the Church of England. Without a day's notice he left his family to worship alone in the square deal pew in the Water-lane Chapel, and transferred himself to one of the oaken benches of the Parish Church.

"Let my children still sit under their favourite minister," said Mr. Bain. "I don't want to disturb their convictions, however my own opinions may change."

CHAPTER XLVI.

SYLVIA WRITES A LETTER.

Very sweet was that summer tide to Esther Rochdale. The old, commonplace life went on at Dean House. Esther's mornings were still devoted to Ellen Sargent's children—she taught them—played with them—petted them—was, in fact, a second mother to them; while the languid widow, spoiled by the tropical luxuries and indolences of her life in Demerara, lolled upon sofas, dawdled through the last new work from the library, and lamented her "dear George." Esther had her mead of praise and gratitude from mother and grandmother, but the duty itself was pleasant to her, and the love of those impulsive little ones a noble recompense for all her trouble. Esther's life was full of occupation. She had her music, which she cultivated assiduously for Edmund's sake; she had to read the books he recommended her, sometimes books which required all a feminine intellect to understand. She had her district, her sick and poor, by whom she was tenderly beloved, and whom she never neglected.

But with evening, and Edmund's return from the Bank, came Esther's holiday. Mrs. Sargent, after resting all day, was equal to the fatigue of sitting in the nursery, while the children were being got ready for bed, and of even hearing them say their prayers, though this, she complained sometimes, made her head ache. Esther had Edmund all to herself of an evening, for Mrs. Standen, with a mother's unselfishness, was never happier than when these two were absorbed in each other, and forgetful of her. The dearest wish of her life had been gratified when she saw them united, for now, she told herself, Edmund must have forgotten that wicked Sylvia Carew. Nothing less than her son's engagement to Esther would have convinced Mrs. Standen upon this point, but apart from this, she had years ago planned such a union. It had been in her scheme of the future, when Esther still wore diaphanous, with lace frills round the neck and arms, and broad scarlet sashes, and shoulder knots. She was a pretty child, and would grow up a pretty girl, and Edmund must inevitably fall in love with and want to marry her, thought the mother; forgetting that young men rarely wish to marry young ladies whom they see every day of their lives, or at least not until they have been led astray once or twice by less familiar charms.

But now all was well. Edmund had been foolish, and was cured of his folly. There is no better wisdom than that of the man who knows he has been fooled.

There had been no talk yet awhile of wedding day, or even of the trousseau. The lovers were happy, and in no haste to change these light bonds for the heavier fetters of matrimony. Whenever Edmund touched upon the question of when the

marriage was to be, Esther put him off lightly, and could not be induced to prolong the discussion.

"I want to be very sure of you before we are married, Edmund," she said, "and for you to be very sure of yourself. I believe in long engagements."

They had many a walk and ride together in the summer evenings, and the news-mongers of Heddingham were not slow to find out that this time it really was an engagement between Mr. Standen and Miss Rochdale.

"I had it from Mrs. Standen herself, my lady," said Mary Peters when she told Lady Perriam the news on a sultry morning late in August. It might be the heat which made Sylvia so deadly pale just at that moment, Miss Peter thought; or it was just possible that she did not quite like to hear of her first lover's intended marriage.

"But she couldn't have cared for him very much, anyhow," reflected Mary Peters, "or she wouldn't have cast him off as cool as she did."

"When is it to be?" asked Sylvia, in a tone of indifference that imposed upon the artless mantua-maker.

"Not just yet, but it's quite settled. Miss Rochdale wants it to be a year's engagement, Mrs. Standen says, if not longer; and I don't wonder at that. There's something so nice in courting, and when people are once married they so soon settle down, and it's all over and done with; and after the first six months they might just as well have been married ten years, for any difference one can see in them. I know I should like a long engagement, if I was keeping company with anyone. I'm to have some of the dresses to make, Mrs. Standen says, so I shall know a good bit before the wedding, and I can let you know all about it."

"Let me know!" cried Lady Perriam. "Do you suppose I care whom Mr. Standen marries, or when he marries?"

"No, of course not, my lady," said Mary Peters, afraid she had offended. "I hope you don't think I've taken a liberty in mentioning such a thing; but I thought you might feel a little interested in Mr. Standen, after having been engaged to him yourself. I remember what pleasant walks we used to have of an evening—you and me, and Alice Cook, and how we used to meet Mr. Standen promiscuous, and how he always seemed to wish Alice and me away. To think of my making your wedding clothes, and believing it was for Mr. Standen all the time, when you was going to marry Sir Aubrey, and be made a lady of title. What a wonderful life yours has been, Sylvia—I beg pardon, my lady!"

"A wonderful life," repeated Sylvia, with a sigh; "yes, it is a wonderful life. I wonder what will be the end of it."

"And a happy life too, I should think," said Mary. "In this beautiful house, and with these lovely rooms furnished according to your own fancy." Mary cast an admiring glance round the bright-looking boudoir which Lady Perriam had embellished. "And that dear boy, in that lovely bassinet, with white lace curtains over pink silk. Mrs. Tringford was kind enough to let me have a peep at the pretty dear as I came past the nursery door. And quite your own mistress, too."

"Quite my own mistress," echoed Sylvia. "Yes, there was never anyone more free than I."

She dismissed Mary Peters, and then began to pace the room with quick, impatient steps. The dark eyes glittered angrily, the full under lip was held in by the small white teeth.

This was the end of it all, then. This was what came of her liberty. She had been a widow more than five months, and in all that time Edmund Standen had made no sign. She had waited with a sickening heart for some token that the old love was not utterly dead; that to know her free was to love her once again. He had loved her so well of old—was it possible that such love could die? In her breast it lived and burned still, a deathless flame. Why should he find it easy to forget when memory had such power over her? He had seemed to love the best in those old days. He had been ready to sacrifice so much for her sake—to lead a life of poverty and toil even.

The days went by, the dreary days, whose length was an almost intolerable burden, and brought no indication of surviving regard in Edmund Standen's heart. She tried to think that he kept aloof from delicacy. Her widowhood as yet had been brief. Her former lover dared not approach her. For him to cross the threshold of Perriam Place would be to set a hundred tongues wagging.

But he might, at least, have written a few lines of sympathy, with the old imperishable love lurking between them, felt but unexpressed—how such a letter would have cheered Sylvia Perriam's solitude, breathed of hope and future happiness. No such letter came, and a desperate, half angry, half despairing feeling was kindled in that passionate heart. She tried to hate the man whose coldness thus tortured her, tried to forget him, but in vain. Her love had been fostered in loneliness, she had never honestly striven to thrust it out of her heart. At her best, when she was most dutiful as a wife, she had always cherished one dream, a dream of the day when Sir Aubrey's death would leave her free, and Edmund Standen would come back to her.

She was free, but Edmund did not return.

Until this news of Mary Peters', she had still hoped. Building much upon her knowledge of Edmund's high principles, she had comforted herself with the idea that he was only waiting till a decent period of mourning should be past, and he could approach her with a good grace. This announcement of to-day was a death blow. All that day and all the next she spent in the solitude of her own rooms, shunning even the nursery and the garden, where her child, now a fine little fellow of a twelve months' growth, beguiled the long summer's day with his baby sports. She looked so pale, and was so silent that her maid thought she must be ill, and said as much to Mrs. Carter, who went to Lady Perriam's room soon afterwards, full of solicitude.

"I heard you were ill," she said, "and came to see if I could be of any use."

Sylvia was in no humour for sympathy, even from Mrs. Carter.

"You can be of no use," she answered. "If I wanted you I should send for you."

The nurse drew back with a pained look.

"It's hardly kind to speak to me like that," she said

"I cannot study my manner of speaking to you. You should not come to me unless you are sent for," returned Sylvia, impatiently. She was sitting in her easy chair by the open window, in a listless attitude, gazing straight before her at the dark line of the avenue, and the distant hills beyond that boundary.

"Sylvia," said Mrs. Carter, bending over the weary looking figure, "You are unhappy, and I have a right to be near you—

not the right of motherhood alone, I may have forfeited that for ever—but the right of having served you at the sacrifice of my own peace. God knows I have never known an hour's peace since I did you that fatal service."

"What am I the better for it?" cried Lady Perriam, turning fretfully from the eyes that looked at her with such mournful tenderness. "I wish it had never been done. Would to God it could be undone."

"That can never be till some of us are dead," answered Mrs. Carter, in a tone of deepest despondency. "I told you at the time, Sylvia, when I tried to dissuade you, on my knees, that it was an act which once done was done for ever. Remorseful tears, agony of mind, can avail nothing now. The thing is done."

"Will your preaching mend matters, do you think?" cried Sylvia, angrily. "Why do you come here to torment me? I want comfort not torture."

"If I only knew how to comfort you," said the mother, regretfully.

"There is no such thing as comfort for a grief like mine. I have lost the only being I ever cared about. He is lost to me for ever."

"You mean Mr. Standen?"

"Who else should I mean? He is the only person I ever cared for, and now he is going to marry Esther Rochdale."

"Are you quite sure of that?"

"Quite sure, it is a settled thing. His mother has persuaded him into this engagement, I daresay, but the fact remains, he is engaged. I thought that when he heard of Sir Aubrey's death and knew that I was unfettered, his heart would turn towards me again. He cannot have forgotten me. My love for him is the same to-day as it was two years ago."

"But you can hardly expect him to believe that, or to forgive you for having broken faith with him. Perhaps if he knew how you repented that falsehood, he would turn towards you again. But even if he did—"

"Well, what then?"

"You could hardly marry him," said Mrs. Carter, in an awestruck whisper. She looked at her daughter with a curious expression—half horror, half pity—as if she wondered at having given birth to so relentless a being, yet clung to her with all a mother's love.

"What other motive had I for wishing to be free?" asked Sylvia.

Mrs. Carter covered her face with her hands, to hide the tears she could not keep back—tears of shame and agony. She had felt the sting of shame for herself, drained the cup of self-abasement, but this shame which she felt for her only child seemed even more bitter.

"You had better go back to your charge," said Sylvia, coldly.

"I am going," answered the mother. She tried to clasp Sylvia's hand, but was repulsed impatiently.

"You always make me miserable," said Lady Perriam.

"You are such a bundle of weakness. Had I any one of strong mind and steady purpose to lean upon I might leave this hateful house. But how could I trust to you to watch over my interests while I was away? It would be leaning upon a reed."

"I am sorry you consider me so despicable," said Mr. Carter, with a touch of bitterness in her quiet tone; "I have been faithful to you against my own conscience."

"Go," said Sylvia, "and before you prate of conscience try to remember that I took you out of the gutter."

The shot went home—Mrs. Carter's face, always pale, grew deadly white at this savage taunt. She left the room without a word, and Sylvia Perriam was alone. She rose and paced the room in a fever of excitement.

"He may not know that I am sorry," she said to herself, pondering on her mother's suggestion; "He may not know that I loved him even when I was false to him, loved him with all my heart when I deserted him. But he shall know it! he shall know this wretched heart before he marries Esther Rochdale. Having risked so much to win him, why should I shrink from one more hazard. He despises me already. If I fail in this last effort he can but despise me a little more. He shall know that I am at his feet, and then let him abandon me if he can."

She seated herself before the ashwood writing table, with its blue velvet cover and ormolu fittings, strangely different from the battered mahogany desk on which the schoolmaster's daughter had been wont to write her letters. She wrote a few hurried lines with a hand that was somewhat tremulous, though the characters looked firm enough upon the paper—wrote to Edmund Standen, for the first time since that fatal letter which was to dissolve their engagement.

"Will he think this step wanting in womanly feeling, or will he be glad?" she wondered; and then with a little bitter laugh she murmured, "Womanly feeling! I bade farewell to that when I jilted the man I fondly loved to marry Sir Aubrey Perriam."

CHAPTER XLVII.

"THE FAULTS OF LOVE BY LOVE ARE JUSTIFIED."

Was Edmund Standen happy? He tried to believe that his lot was life's consummate felicity. He was prosperous, successful as a man of business, appreciated by directors and shareholders; the master spirit of the Monkhampton Branch of the Western Union Bank. His home was pleasant, his womanly worshipped him; he was betrothed to a woman he admired and respected, who loved him with devotion, and whose handsome income would do much to swell the sum of his own prosperity. He ought to have been happy. He had youth, health, independence, the knowledge that work need not for him be the monotonous toil of a lifetime but only the congenial employment of his prime, to be given up at any hour should it prove wearisome to him. He knew that the bulk of his father's fortune was now securely his own, for his mother had shown him her last will, in which she left Ellen Sargent only the savings of her widowhood, and all the rest to her son.

"I am not likely ever to alter this will, Edmund, or to threaten you with loss of fortune," said Mrs. Standen, who was positively enraptured with the present condition of affairs. She would fain have hurried on the marriage, but she found Esther averse to haste, and Edmund somewhat indifferent.

"After all, mother," he said, "if Esther likes a long engagement why should we worry her to give up her fancy? We are very happy as we are."

"If you are happy, Edmund, that is all I care for. And I am not afraid that Esther will change her mind."