

through a secret gimlet bore. He has not seen the money, but is patient and remains late on the shingles. He discerns fragments of the purloined old corset.

Next day Rosa Myther dresses the child in best clothes, and packing the rest for a journey, says:—

"Lucy, I may be arrested on charge of stealing that old rag of a corset. Take this parcel of money, four thousand pounds sterling, all but a hundred and ten. Go to Hamilton by the next train, to Brockville by the mail boat, to Perth by train, and out to Lanark to Squire Clinkengraith, the old Foot Guards' military veteran. Give him the money for safe keeping. Tell him I have found Lady Lillymere's satin corset. Stay there until I come."

To be continued.

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## HILDA; OR, THE MERCHANT'S SECRET.

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[Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.]

### CHAPTER XXXVII.

#### A STRANGE DISCOVERY.

It is the evening before the sale. Stephen Osburne sits in his lonely home for the last time. What an air of desolation around him! His mother gone, Blanche lost to him too! Never again will that home re-echo her joyous laugh or his mother's gentle voice. That is hushed and silent in the grave, and Blanche's smile is no longer for him.

What an overpowering feeling of loneliness oppresses the unhappy man! How the storms of agony which had swept over him on hearing of his bereavement—lulled for a time in the necessary duties of preparing for his departure—rushes over him again, prostrating him in the depths of contrition. If he had not erred, if he had not placed himself in the power of the law, his mother's fond heart would never have been crushed by Mr. Berkeley's heartless refusal. She would still be in life, and his home would now be cheered by her presence.

What bitter self-condemnation did this thought awaken! What vows of amendment were uttered in the solitude of that lonely room!

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, he opened his mother's work-box, which he had placed on the table beside him, and began to inspect its contents. Accidentally touching a spring, a secret drawer unrolled, Stephen had never seen it open; he did not know it was there. Reverently he examined what it disclosed, some mementoes of his mother's early life.

There was a locket with a tress of brown hair and a small packet of letters tied with faded ribbon; but what fixed his attention was the miniature of a handsome young man which reminded him of some one he had seen. Yes, he was sure it looked like Grant Berkeley! He opened one of the letters, which was addressed to Mrs. Osburne. It was written in an impassioned style. The writer addressed her as 'dearest Bessie,' and signed himself Lewis Tremayne.

He opened others; they were all in the same style, with the same signature. In one of the letters was a piece of folded paper, which Stephen found to his astonishment was a certificate of his mother's marriage with this same Lewis Tremayne. The date was thirty-two years before; then Mrs. Osburne's second marriage must have taken place when he himself was about three years old. Of that other marriage Stephen had never heard her speak. His earliest recollections carried him back a period of thirty years, when he and his mother were living in England.

He imperfectly remembered a handsome house surrounded by trees, but what had made the deepest impression on his childish mind was a pond in the grounds where his nurse used to take him to sail his tiny boat. There was, however, no recollection of a stepfather. His own, he knew, had died shortly after his birth.

Then came a break in his child's memory, and he was on board a ship, going with his mother he knew not whither. Afterwards came the remembrance of a large city and a pretty suburban cottage, where his boyish days were spent.

Then there were days of adversity in consequence of the loss of some American bank. It was during these days Blanche had come to live with them. She was his mother's niece, the daughter of an only brother, a village doctor, who had died in Wales, appointing Mrs. Osburne her guardian, and sending the orphan girl to her care. Blanche had taken their name, living with them ever since as the idol of their household.

"How well did Stephen remember her in her childish beauty! How well did he recollect the passionate love with which he had regarded her even in her girlhood, and all that love was wasted, was worthless in her eyes, compared with the boyish passion of Mark Berkeley! How full of bitterness was that thought. How the strong man shivered with the agony of his feelings.

He was only eighteen when she became the chief support of his mother and cousin. Blanche had a small sum left her by her father, but this was chiefly expended on her education.

Mrs. Osburne had sometimes spoken of her former residence in England when Stephen's early reminiscences introduced the subject, but never had she adverted to her second marriage, the certificate of which was now in his hand.

The reason she had given for leaving England was being obliged to sell her property there on account of the knavery of one who had the management of her money. Who that was she had never mentioned, and Stephen had always understood he was an agent, the person who managed her affairs. Might it not have been this man, Lewis Tremayne, who had then deserted her?

There was a mystery in this matter which Stephen wished to investigate, and late into the hours of that night he sat lonely and miserable, pondering the strange affair.

Why should his mother bear the name of her first husband all through her life, instead of calling herself Mrs. Tremayne? and who was this man? If that miniature was his, how handsome he must have been! and how singularly like Grant Berkeley he looked.

A sudden recollection flashed through the mind of Stephen. Lewis Tremayne was the real name of Mr. Berkeley. So he had heard from an old clerk in the counting-house, who had been in the employment of the late Mr. Berkeley of Quebec, when Lewis Tremayne was taken into the firm. This clerk, old Armstrong, as he was called, knew all about his present employer's early life in that city—the fortunate circumstance at the five years ago which had brought him into notice and won the favour of the former Mr. Berkeley. This old man, Armstrong, had often remarked the strong resemblance that Grant Berkeley bore his father.

This would thus account for the miniature resembling him, and it must be a likeness of his father, Mr. Berkeley, alias Lewis Tremayne, taken when he was a young man.

What a strong light did this discovery throw on this strange affair! In it he saw distinctly the true cause of Mrs. Osburne's death. It was the shock of amazement, caused by the mutual recognition, not the merchant's refusal to pardon her son, which caused that fatal swoon.

What a relief did this revelation bring to the heart of Stephen, tortured by the idea that he had been indirectly the cause of her melancholy end, for such was the plausible tale Mr. Berkeley had got up to shield himself from suspicion.

How little did people dream of the tragic scene which must have preceded Mrs. Osburne's death! But the unprincipled man, bearing so high a place in the opinion of the world, should be unmasked and his character shown in its true light! Then his family must suffer. The pride of the Berkeley's would be laid low. How would Mark feel when the tongue of scandal was busy with his mother's fame spreading the tale of their dishonour from house to house!

How Stephen exulted in that thought! His mother's wrongs and his own bitter disappointment seemed to turn his heart to stone. How he delighted in his power to crush the heart of his rival by the revelation he intended to make. To-morrow's sun would not set till he had bruited his strange discovery through Montreal, till he had avenged his mother's wrongs and published the true cause of her pitiable death.

So great was the excitement of Stephen, that it completely banished sleep, and through the long winter night he sat brooding over his sorrows and watching impatiently for the coming dawn. At length it broke grey and misty into the desolate-looking room, mixing with the yellow glare of the unextinguished gas-light.

Starting from his deep sad reverie, Stephen Osburne replaced the locket and the letters in the secret drawer, and, putting the miniature and certificate in his pocket, prepared to go out on his mission of just vengeance, intending first to call at the house of old Armstrong before he went to the counting-house, and show him the likeness, expecting he would at once recognize it for Mr. Berkeley's.

And now we will relate a few incidents in the early life of Mrs. Osburne and Lewis Tremayne, which will help to throw some light on "The Merchant's Secret."

### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

#### LEWIS TREMAYNE.

A QUIET little watering-place on the coast of Devon, a quaint old town in the distance, marine villas peeping out from luxuriant groves, a tiny bay closely shut in by tall

cliffs, their grey summits crowned with rows of neat white cottages for the accommodation of those whom health or pleasure attracted to the place during the watering season.

Below these picturesque dwellings at the base of the cliffs stretched a sandy beach upon which the white crested waves broke with a pleasing monotonous sound. Seaward appeared several white sails glistening in the sunlight as they glided through the calm waters while columns of vapor floating up into the blue heavens pointed out the rapid course of some steamer outward or homeward bound.

Such was the scene that presented itself to the eye of Lewis Tremayne on a beautiful summer evening some thirty-two years ago, as he descended a zigzag path cut in the rock leading from the brow of the cliffs to the strand below. There was another less precipitous descent at a little distance, which at the same moment a lady in widow's weeds was leisurely pursuing. Leaning against a projecting ledge of rock half way down the cliff Lewis stood for some minutes drinking in the sea air so refreshing after his hot walk from the distant town, and listening to the music of the waves as they came and went on the yellow beach below, while his eye wandered admiringly over the scene before him. His fine figure standing out so picturesquely against the dark cliffs behind caught the eye of the lady in black as she gained the beach, and she strolled purposely in his direction. Soon the attention of Lewis was attracted towards her, and he continued to watch her furtively as she approached. Not however from admiration, but from a feeling of surprise that one so remarkably homely should have been married, for married she had been, as her particular style of dress declared. Her slight figure was not ungraceful, but the face was disfigured by a dark red mark almost covering one cheek. As the lady passed at the foot of the rocks where Lewis Tremayne stood looking down upon her, he caught an upward glance, and there was something so pleasing in the expression of the mild grey eye that Lewis began to think there might be other attractions in a woman beside those of beauty. He was still pondering the subject when a little scream was heard, and he saw the widow hastily retracing her steps as if frightened at the approach of a large Newfoundland dog which was dashing towards her barking loudly. There either was alarm or a very pretty affectation of it, and in a moment Lewis had descended the rest of the cliff and placed himself at her side to defend her, if necessary. But the dog passed quietly on, he was evidently in pursuit of some boys who were wandering among the rocks at a little distance.

Laughing at the needless alarm the lady thanked Lewis in the sweetest voice possible, declaring she had an unconquerable dread of dogs. It really was foolish, she knew, but it was a weakness she could not help. The young man strongly suspected that the widow's fear of the dog was merely assumed—a ruse to get up an acquaintance with himself. The idea was very flattering to his vanity, he only regretted that the lady was not more attractive, this little incident would then have more interest in his eyes. Politeness required him, however, to offer himself as an escort during her stroll along the beach, as the formidable looking animal was still roving about. The offer was graciously accepted and the pair who had not known of each other's existence half an hour before, walked on together, conversing familiarly as young people will talk even on a short acquaintance, of sentiment, poetry, literature, and other interesting subjects.

Mrs. Osburne, such was the lady's name, congratulated herself on making so agreeable an acquaintance. So pleasantly did time pass that sunset had crimsoned the picturesque features of the scene, and twilight was beginning to fall, ere Mrs. Osburne thought of leaving the beach. Such a sudden intimacy with a stranger would have been considered highly imprudent in a young lady, but in a widow it was quite allowable—widows being privileged beings, so at least thought Mrs. Osburne. Up the steep broken road she had descended, Mrs. Osburne now returned to the heights above, accompanied by Lewis Tremayne. There they found a handsome pony carriage waiting.

"Yonder is my home," was the widow's observation as she pointed to an antiquated villa crowning a wooded slope about two miles distant. "Whenever you feel disposed to call, I shall be happy to show you that painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds we were talking about. Then gathering up the reins she bowed gracefully and drove off, leaving Lewis gazing thoughtfully after the handsome equipage, and wondering how this little adventure might end. The encouragement given him by Mrs. Osburne was certainly flattering to an obscure individual like himself, a penniless clerk in a bank in the neighbouring town, and the acquaintance thus romantically commenced might turn out to his advantage.

On enquiry Lewis learned that Mrs. Osburne was the widow of a rich eccentric old man, who had married her chiefly from gratitude, she having nursed him through a lingering illness with which he had been attacked during a temporary stay at a pleasant village in Wales, where she resided with her brother.

This brother—the village doctor—had taken Mr. Osburne to his home in order that he might have better attendance, and in this way the marriage of plain Bessie Rutherford to the rich old owner of Seaview, one of the prettiest little estates in the beautiful county of Devon. Mr. Osburne did not long survive his marriage. At his death he left his fortune to his young wife and son, the whole to revert to him on his mother's death, who was left his sole guardian. By this arrangement it was evident the eccentric old man did not contemplate the possibility of his widow marrying again; perhaps from the paucity of her attractions he thought there was little probability of such an event. He forgot that golden charms are powerful to subdue the heart of man.

The acquaintance with Mrs. Osburne, Lewis Tremayne thought was worth cultivating. A sun-gilded prospect was opening before him. A marriage with the rich widow seemed very possible. She was evidently captivated by his appearance. Lewis, like most young men, was not wanting in vanity. He would try for this matrimonial prize. His only regret was Bessie's want of beauty, but her money would make amends for her undeniable ugliness, for notwithstanding the sweet expression of her grey eyes she was exceedingly homely, and Lewis was a great admirer of beauty in woman. Such were the interested motives that induced the poor bank clerk to follow up the acquaintance thus commenced, and to present himself a frequent visitor at Seaview.

The courtship was not long, the young widow, as Lewis had conjectured, had fallen desperately in love with him, and contrary to the advice of her friends she joyfully accepted the offer of his hand. Once married his wife's money gave him ample means of enjoyment, for she allowed him unlimited credit at her banker's.

Some months passed on. On various pretences Lewis frequently left home, spending his newly-acquired wealth in fashionable dissipation in London, or on the continent. Too late the neglected wife awoke from her dream of bliss, to find out the miserable mistake she had made in bestowing herself and her money on one who regarded her with indifference if not contempt. They had been married about half a year when Lewis, after a considerable absence, returned unexpectedly to Seaview to be nursed, and recover strength in his luxurious home, after a severe illness which had been brought on by dissipation during a residence in Paris.

An orphan cousin was now living with Mrs. Tremayne, one to whom she had kindly given a home when left destitute by the death of her father. Fanny Rutherford was two years younger than Mrs. Tremayne, and extremely attractive. What a contrast between the cousins in appearance, in manner, in every thing. Fanny's figure Juno-like, her face the Anglo-Saxon style of beauty—the rounded cheeks displaying the colouring of the rose, the soft brown hair, the fair complexion, and the blue eyes. How the eye of Lewis loved to linger on that lovely face, contrasting it with his wife's, and full of bitter repining that fate had not given him the bewitching Fanny for a companion through life. He felt now that he had sacrificed his happiness by marrying Mrs. Osburne. The affluence he had acquired by an union with her seemed worthless in his eyes. If he only were again poor and unmarried, he might hope to gain the hand of Fanny Rutherford! He regained strength slowly, his constitution was much broken by his late dissipation. During his convalescence he had many opportunities of enjoying the society of his wife's cousin, who did all in her power to amuse the invalid, reading to him his favourite authors, and by the charming gaiety of her manner, enlivening the dreariness of his sick-room.

Mrs. Tremayne was almost always present, occupied with her work, during these interviews. She seemed intuitively to feel there might be danger in this pleasant familiar intercourse. Her idolatry for her handsome husband inclined her to jealousy. She was aware of her own want of beauty, and she dreaded the influence of the very attractive Fanny. She regretted having taken the young girl into her family, and she would have sent her away were it not for the dread of exposing herself to ridicule.

Lewis detected the presence of "the green-eyed monster." His observant eye saw the jealous fears agitating Bessie's mind, and he was very careful to do nothing which would give her reason to think her fears were well founded. And yet, in spite of her close surveillance, he contrived to make Fanny Rutherford understand the nature of his feelings towards her, and, by the impassioned language of the eye, she became aware of the impression she had made.

This conquest was very flattering to the vanity of the young girl. She felt a very strong admiration for her cousin's husband. He was well educated, and seemed intellectual, because he was deeply read in the light literature of the day, and could converse well on such subjects. And Fanny had been brought up in retirement, having received only a plain education. To this feeling of admiration was added one of interest from the moment she first saw him brought, pale and languid, to Seaview, and both these feelings were deepened