

## UNFINISHED STILL.

A baby's boot and a skein of wool,  
Faded, and soiled, and soft,  
(Odd things, you say, and I doubt you're right,  
Round a seaman's neck, this stormy night,  
Up in the yards aloft.

Most like 'tis folly; but, mate, look here;  
When first I went to sea,  
A woman stood on yon far-off strand,  
With a wedding ring on the small, soft hand  
Which clung so close to me.

My wife, God bless her! The day before  
She sat beside my foot,  
And the sunlight kissed her yellow hair,  
And the dainty fingers, deft and fair,  
Knitted a baby's boot.

The voyage was over; I came ashore,  
What, think you, found I there!  
A grave the daisies had sprinkled white,  
A cottage empty and dark as night,  
And this beside the chair.

The little boot, 'twas unfinished still.  
The tangled skein lay near:  
But the knitter had gone away to rest,  
With the babe asleep on her quiet breast,  
Down in the churchyard drear.

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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 LI.—(Continued.)

"Will you give me some kind of answer, Lady Perriam?"  
"Can you expect me to answer such a startling question very quickly? Give me time to think, and I will answer you."

"My confession has not shocked you very much!"  
"Why should it shock me? You are my equal, as you say; and if you are twenty years older than I, may as naturally consider that a trifling objection, since I married a man who was thirty years my senior. Let me have time to think, Mr. Bain."

"I shall not press you for a speedy answer, if you will only give me permission to hope."

"I should not refuse that if I were better convinced of your sincerity. You say you are my friend—devoted to me—yet you come here and worry me about poor Mr. Perriam."

"I only repeat slander which you ought to hear, in order that you may protect yourself against people's malice."

"And you are really my friend?"

"I am more than your friend—I am your slave."

"Shall I test your fidelity?"

"Yes, put me to the test."

"Help me to get rid of all the difficulties about Mr. Perriam. I begin to think that you—or the Monkhampton gossips—are right. He ought to be placed under restraint. His presence here is a source of anxiety to me. If his state doesn't improve soon I shall send for a mad doctor, and get him removed to an asylum."

"Whenever you make up your mind to that step, you may command my services."

"Do you know of any asylum where he would be safely cared for, or of any doctor who would take charge of him?"

"Why not consult Mr. Stimpson on that point?"

"I have no opinion of Mr. Stimpson's discretion. I would rather consult a stranger—some one unconnected with Monkhampton."

"I know of a man in London who might, perhaps, serve your purpose," said Mr. Bain, after some moments' thought, "and enable you to get rid of the difficulty quietly. But I should like to see Mr. Perriam, and judge for myself before I advise you any further. After all there may be nothing amiss but a little harmless eccentricity, which would hardly justify us in consigning him to a madhouse."

"There is more than eccentricity. At times he is subject to delusions."

"What—thinks himself the Pope, or the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I suppose?"

"Not exactly; but he has strange fancies—harmless enough—but sufficient to prove him insane. You shall see him in a few days, when he is at his best, and judge for yourself."

"Thanks," said the steward, "that looks like confidence. And now tell me, Lady Perriam, may I hope?"

"Yes," answered Sylvia, giving him her hand, "it would be hard to deny you hope."

She smiled, and Mr. Bain thought that the airy scaffolding he had put together that day in his office—when first he heard of Sir Aubrey's intended marriage—was in a fair way to become a substantial building. He had been prepared for indignant rejection. He had some vague sense of power over Sir Aubrey's widow, but he had thought it quite possible that she might defy him. His hints and veiled threats were but so much groping in the dark. The intensity of her agitation had taken him by surprise, and he had gone further than he had intended—ventured to reveal his ultimate hope.

He escorted her back to the house, went with her to the nursery, where the infant baronet expressed the strongest objection to Mr. Bain, and hid his face in his nurse's breast, turning now and then to steal an angry look at the custodian allotted to him by the Court of Chancery.

"We shall be the better friends by-and-by," said Mr. Bain, quietly.

He dined with Lady Perriam that evening, at her invitation, and though there was nothing of the accepted lover in his manner, he began to think the future was secure, and that in less than a year he might sit at that board as master.

He did not stop long after dinner, not wishing to make his presence an infliction; but before he went away Lady Perriam asked him the name of the London doctor he had mentioned.

"Mr. Ledlamb, of Jager-street, Bloomsbury," answered Mr. Bain.

"Is he a celebrated man?"

"Not at all. But I don't think you want a famous doctor to take care of Mr. Perriam. You want a man who will hold his tongue. Isn't that it?"

"I don't want Mr. Perriam's affliction to be talked about."

"Of course not. Joseph Ledlamb is the very man. His chief practice is in Bloomsbury, but he has a house on the Great Northern line, not far from Hatfield, where he receives two or three patients; a retired spot, quite remote from observation. A highly respectable man—poor, but clever."

"Are you sure that Mr. Perriam would be well treated in this gentleman's care?"

"As sure as I could possibly feel about his treatment, put him where you may. You might put him in the charge of a more distinguished doctor than Ledlamb. But in a larger and grander establishment he would be much more at the mercy of nurses and underlings than with such a man as Ledlamb, who receives a limited number of patients, and has them under his own eye, as it were."

"But he must be away a great part of his time, attending to his Bloomsbury practice," suggested Lady Perriam.

"I don't know how he manages about that. He may have a partner."

"Is he a friend of yours?"

"Hardly a friend, but an old acquaintance. He belongs to this part of the country, and he and I went to school together. Fifteen years ago he tried to get a practice in Monkhampton, but the old established doctors were too much for him, and he speedily collapsed. He had not long married, poor fellow, and had a hungry looking wife, and one sickly child. He gave up Monkhampton as a bad job, and went up to London to try his luck there. I've seen him occasionally when I've been in town for a few days, and we've had a quiet evening together. I know the man is clever, and I think," Mr. Bain said this with curious deliberation, "he is just the kind of man to suit your purpose, Lady Perriam. A man who will not talk about his patient, come what may."

"I shall not forget your recommendation," said Sylvia, with her easiest manner. All traces of agitation had vanished long ere this. "And if poor Mr. Perriam should get much worse, which I trust will not happen, I'll send for Mr. Ledlamb."

This conversation occurred after Mr. Bain's horse had been ordered. He had no further excuse for lingering, but took his leave with a subdued tenderness, too unobtrusive to offend, yet enough to remind Lady Perriam that he had asked her to be his wife, and that he expected an answer.

Scarcely had the door closed behind the departing agent when Sylvia looked at her watch, and then rang the bell sharply.

"Just nine. I wonder if it is too late to telegraph," she said to herself.

She went to a side table where there were writing materials and wrote the following telegram:—

Lady Perriam, To Joseph Ledlamb,  
Perriam Place, Jager Street,  
Near Monkhampton. Bloomsbury.

"Please come immediately to consult upon an important case. Fee no consideration—loss of time dangerous."

The bell had been answered before her message was written, brief as it was. A footman stood at ease, awaiting her orders.

"Let this message be taken at once to Monkhampton railway station," said Lady Perriam, giving him the paper in a sealed envelope. "Send one of the grooms on a fast horse."

"Yes, my lady."

"If Mr. Ledlamb responds promptly to that message I can defy Shadrack Bain," thought Sylvia, as she flung herself into a chair, worn out by disappointment and anxiety. "But if not—if I cannot get rid of my incubus—what is to become of me? I can see no prospect of relief—I can see no hope of freedom."

"Oh, Edmund, Edmund, is this your love? Last night a slave at my feet—to-day far away from me in my bitterest hour of need."

## CHAPTER LII.

## THE FRIEND OF THE MENTALLY AFFLICTED.

It was not often that Mr. Ledlamb, of Jager-street, was informed that the amount of his fee was no consideration. To Dr. Crow such telegrams as Lady Perriam's were common enough. At the magic name of Crow people became as lavish of gold as if they had been so many Killmanseggs.

But the patients whom Mr. Ledlamb attended were wont to consider their fees very closely. Indeed so scrupulously considerate were they of this question that sometimes they changed their minds about it altogether, and did not pay him anything at all.

At first Mr. Ledlamb was inclined to look suspiciously at Lady Perriam's telegram, doubtful whether it were not a hoax. But he knew enough of the neighbourhood of Monkhampton to know that there really was a seat called Perriam Place within half-a-dozen miles of that market-town; and this fact decided him. He would hazard a second-class return ticket to Monkhampton, in quest of the unlimited fee so liberally offered.

"I might charge as much as ten pounds, and, deducting two for my ticket, that would give me eight for my day's work, besides future contingencies," mused Mr. Ledlamb. "But what on earth could induce Lady Perriam to send for me? I didn't do so well while I was in Monkhampton that people should hunt me up fifteen years after I turned my back upon that miserable hole."

Mr. Ledlamb had bachelor's quarters in Jager-street; a sofa bedstead in the parlour behind the surgery, where he bivouacked now and then when it was his fancy to spend the night in London rather than return to the rustic shades of his lodge near Hatfield. Thus it happened that Lady Perriam's message reached Mr. Ledlamb while he was lounging over an unpretending breakfast of Epps's cocoa and a toasted buster, prepared by his own hands.

He consulted a dog's-ear Bradshaw. Yes, there was time to catch the 9.45 down train from Paddington. He could be at Monkhampton by three o'clock that afternoon.

In the simple phraseology of the neighbourhood, Mr. Ledlamb "cleaned himself"—a brief operation—put on his best suit of professional black, took up his rolled shyn, his umbrella—good to look at while neatly rolled up, but not worth much when opened—and set forth. He was fain to indulge in the luxury of a Hansom cab, paid the driver his minimum fare, calmly endured the threat of a summons, and reached the platform, ticket in hand, just as the train was going to move.

"As near as a touch," muttered Mr. Ledlamb, breathing hard after the rapidity of his proceedings.

He threw himself back into a corner of the carriage, bought a *Daily Telegraph* as the train was leaving the station, and abandoned himself to an hour's quiet enjoyment between London and Swindon.

"I wonder whether the advertisement's at the bottom of that telegram?" he thought presently, not able to concentrate his attention on the leaders in the popular journal, so puzzled was he by that inexplicable message.

He turned to the advertisement sheet, where he was accustomed now and then to insert his own small requirements. Of course, he was too wide awake a man to put forth his desire crudely among the "Wanted's." He insinuated himself into public attention as a benefactor to his species—one who from pure benevolence was ready to relieve others of their burthens.

To the Friends of those Mentally Afflicted. Privacy, Security, Home Comforts. These, with medical treatment, may be obtained in the domestic circle of an experienced practitioner, who resides in a retired and rustic locality in Hertfordshire. For terms, &c., apply to X. Y., Post Office, Jager-street, Bloomsbury."

If the telegram were the result of this advertisement, it ought naturally to have been sent to the post office; though, perhaps, no one would be so demented as to telegraph to a post office.

"No," decided Mr. Ledlamb, "the advertisement can have nothing to do with it. Clearly Lady Perriam must have heard of me."

At half-past three o'clock that afternoon Mr. Ledlamb was being driven up the long avenue at Perriam in a close fly. He had chosen a close fly despite the sultry heat of the day, because it looked more professional. A cab and a fly in the same day. Mr. Ledlamb winced as he looked into his empty purse, and thought what the expedition had cost him. If the telegram should prove a hoax after all?

The grandeur of the long avenue, the wide-spreading park, the palatial house struck awe to Joseph Ledlamb's soul. It seemed hardly possible that the inhabitants of yonder pile could have sent for him, when London was full of famous doctors.

"It must be some wretched mistake," he said to himself, "and I shall be all my expenses out of pocket. No, if they've made a blunder in sending for me I'll make them pay my travelling expenses."

He was at the door by this time, and the flyman had rung a loud pealing bell, and let down the steps.

"Now or never," thought Mr. Ledlamb, and put on a bold front. "Is Lady Perriam at home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Please to take her my card."

"Step this way, sir, you are expected," answered the footman, and Mr. Ledlamb found himself ushered up a wider staircase than he had ever ascended in a private dwelling, along a dimly-lighted corridor, and then into a room whose brightness and perfumes—the scent of stephanotis and lilies, Palma violets, gloire de Dijon roses, all manner of choicest blossoms—almost bewildered his unaccustomed senses.

A lady was seated in a low chair by the open window, shaded from the sun by a half-closed Venetian shutter, a lady who struck him as more beautiful than any woman he had ever seen.

She received him with a somewhat haughty inclination of the head, pointed to a distant chair, and began at once, in a business-like manner.

"I have sent up for you, Mr. Ledlamb, because I have been informed that you are a person upon whose discretion I can safely rely."

"That is quite true, Madam. May I ask who recommended me to your notice?"

"I had rather not tell you that. Be satisfied with the knowledge that you have been recommended. It is my misfortune to have a near relative—by marriage—who is mentally afflicted. I have kept him under my own roof as long as I could safely do so, but I find I can keep him no longer without becoming subject to the remarks of the neighbourhood. It is my earnest wish, therefore, to remove him to some safe and comfortable home, where he will be well cared for, and made as happy as it is possible for him to be in his present condition of mind."

"I am in a position to offer you just such a home, Lady Perriam," answered Mr. Ledlamb, carefully suppressing all signs of eagerness, and adopting that dispassionate tone which bespeaks ample means and an independent mind. "I have a pleasant country house—the Arbour, at Crupskew Common, near Hatfield, where I am in the habit of receiving a limited number of patients—strictly limited, for, whenever their health allows of that privilege, they join our family circle, and we gather round the domestic hearth as a cheerful and united household. At other times, when their state is more critical, they of course remain in the retirement of their private apartments. My house is not large, it does not boast of splendour, but comfort is studied in every detail, and we are eminently rural. I have endeavoured to indicate that by the name of our retreat, 'The Arbour,' a sound suggestive of agreeable images."

"How many patients have you in your house at present?" asked Lady Perriam.

"Well, just at present only one—a youth of excellent family, but weak intellect. He is like a son of the household, follows our children about the garden like a pet dog."

This was true in a restricted sense. The youth in question having been forced to devote some part of his leisure to wheeling Mr. Ledlamb's youngest hope in a perambulator.

"May I see Mr.—our patient, Lady Perriam?" asked the doctor, blandly.

"Presently, he has been very troublesome lately, and although it was my earnest wish to keep him in this house, where he had the care of an excellent nurse, I begin to fear that it might be dangerous to do so much longer."

"My dear madam, believe me it is always dangerous, however good your nurse, however excellent your arrangements, there is no safety. Only under the experienced eye of a medical man can there be security. Lunacy is beyond measure treacherous, uncertain. Mischief may arise at any moment. I do not speak in my own interests; pray believe that I am above all sordid considerations."

Lady Perriam did not trouble herself to notice Mr. Ledlamb's vindication of his honour. She looked at him keenly with those darkly brilliant eyes whose splendour carking care could not dim. He looked a man who would do anything for greed—a hungry-looking man, with wide thin lips, dog-teeth, hollow cheeks, and large gray eyes; an unprosperous man,