

ADVERTISEMENT
BY A FRIEND
TO



The Bath Novels of Lady A—™

It is a dull elf, indeed, who cannot fathom the pen that has crafted these works of delight, upon which the reader's eye shall grow ever more transfixed. If you cannot guess, then dwell no longer upon the identity of their author. As it was never her intention that these compositions be openly ascribed to her, indisputable proof in allaying public suspicion would only defeat such commendable discretion.

Yet, there *are* many questions that must follow so remarkable a discovery. *I* am authorised to answer but two of them: How they came to be so called, and how they came to be in the possession of a devoted friend and loyal ally.

To the first: Our 'Lady A—', as she was once laudably known by the fashionable set, began to work in earnest on these unknown novels while residing in Bath; only one other before me was privy to this private industry. There, the formative plans for the expanded narratives of three manuscript novels quietly took root in a mind searching for its steady habits in unsettled circumstances. These concealed drafts, which eventually became *seven* in number, were worked upon and completed through the whole period that followed this term of residence in Bath, right up until the author's premature and much-lamented demise.

To the second question, I can only confess that it belongs to a considerably longer and wholly confidential deposition. Notwithstanding such impediment, this advertisement and the publication of these most rare acquisitions are the sanctioned result of an exacting charge. In preserving anonymity through equivocation, I have respected united wishes; in publishing undisclosed creations, I have realised unacknowledged desires.

So much had this lady to give, yet so little time was given her to complete the quest. Indeed it is upon this consideration that I am compelled to share this extraordinary collection—a unique representation, if you will, of the most animating conspiracies of her prodigious imagination. Surely to do any less, would be to deprive the literary world its true share of one of its *brightest* ornaments.

**





CHAPTER I

Who can pass through a sweet country village without wishing to linger upon the lawn of that rural retreat, so effortlessly adapted to the grand scenery of a park of some great estate? Indeed who can resist the natural artifice of a cottage *orné*, its walls dressed with honeysuckles and its window shutters painted green?

Gouldham Cottage, on the estate of Gouldham Park, was just such a countrified attraction. As the epitome of simplistic domestic comfort and ladylike elegance, standing no more than two stories high, and with rooms enough for seclusion in small but commodious style, it was additionally blessed with its own set of *very* interesting inhabitants.

They might often be seen taking their exercise along a gravel walk or resting on occasional seats in a wood walk—or, as was the wont of the oldest lady in the house, digging up a furtive vegetable from the kitchen garden in a green smock-frock. This well-fashioned felicity, so novel to those who had not witnessed it before, was nothing like the Cottage's most fascinating resident, however, for Miss Cassandra Ashton-Dennis was known for being much less contrived.

A gifted young person of five-and-twenty, standing taller and straighter than most ladies of her age, Cassandra's frame and form were as slight and elegant as her carriage was graceful. Her looks bore that lively animation that revealed something intrinsic of her spirit, which would not be repressed, and it could always be seen through her dark and brilliant eyes. So indomitable was this expression of intelligence and energy that some thought her demeanor imposing—even alarming—especially when it challenged that inertia so becoming to other young persons of the female persuasion.

Yet far more striking than anything about her person, was her remarkable history of talent. From an early age, Cassandra distinguished herself. Shy, odd, and at times even whimsical and affected, she began to expose herself as a mistress of countless emotions that excelled in the extreme. Full of queerness and fun, and naturally exuberant, whenever the world about her would make little sense, she took refuge in an imagination that offered her a welcome escape.

Blessed with a home always full of them, she soon learned to write about boys, from boys followed food, and from food followed what boys should never choose above a good dinner—girls. As the only course of nature, very soon, she grew her boys into gentlemen, and her girls into ladies. And as her characters advanced, so too did her writing. The short stories that had first won her acclaim around the fireside at length progressed to tales worthy of books, and very soon thereafter it mattered a good deal to their author that the world at large should give her novels a greater audience.

So it is that my heroine takes up her place in this narrative, as a young woman possessed of wit, merit, beauty and books—lacking nothing but the distinction of birth and fortune that must qualify her as being completely accomplished.

Yet for these last detractions, nature had justly provided some compensation; what Cassandra lacked in money and influence, she was allocated equitably in respect of the faculties of gift and sense. These talents, though noteworthy in themselves, were even more to be admired when compared with the most fortunate member of her family, who enjoyed every one of these blessings—but quite in the reverse.

The Amiable Cassandra



The Bath Novels of Lady A

George, her eldest brother of four, bluff and hearty at eight-and-thirty, was fit to be called a gentleman. His fortunes, thanks to the unexpected supply of Ashton-Dennis offspring and the beneficent intervention of wealthy, Kentish childless cousins, had been advantageously advanced to a state that was nothing less than remarkable.

This Kentish interest, exhibited by the childless Gouldings, had very steadily grown into an attachment and, as with most rich people, what was coveted was wanted; very soon the love of George, as their selected favorite, dependably transformed itself into a notion of possessing him. With the prospect of adoption appearing not at all unconscionable (at least where one of the child's birth parents was concerned) it was not long before an affable arrangement was struck and the boy was permanently removed to Gouldham Park in Kent.

Being of an age to comprehend such a change, and taking comfort in the knowledge that the associations with his natural family would always be carried on, George, through such means, became the Gouldings' sole heir. Prosperous and benign, the couple embraced the steady plain-thinking boy with generous alacrity, just as he did them, knowing instinctively from youth that *all* of their estates, and their name, would one day be his.

He had not been wrong on any count. In an early gratification of this assumption, Mrs. Goulding, who had resolutely survived her husband, had already elected to voluntarily vacate Gouldham Park. She did so in order that her adopted son might take advantage of a much larger and luxurious home than the one he had formerly leased on his marriage to the daughter of a baronet, a Miss Emily Prowse. The couple's family was growing rapidly larger, and the benevolent Mrs. Goulding felt that the young family should benefit far more from a capacious house than she should at her time of life. It was therefore no trouble to find a smaller abode in Canterbury and reduce her income to two thousand a year, if it meant 'dear' George's happiness was to be materially increased by the presentation of her estate in Gouldham.

This East Kent wealth was only the first portion of George's good fortune. In the event of Mrs. Goulding's death, it was to be complemented by the addition of the Gouldings' Hampshire estates. These included the living of Deane, which had first been presented to his natural father, the late Reverend Ashton-Dennis. This valuable living had, of course, once been Cassandra's home, but the decease of her most cherished parent had consequently forced her eviction from it.

In the face of such unenviable circumstance, it was not unlikely then that when compared with the serendipity of George's splendid history, *this* unhappy disparity of fate was to be recorded as an event of protest. And, as with any writer of skill, Cassandra did it most efficiently by exposing a less auspicious adoption in one novel and querying the mark upon the merits of character in another. Indeed, notwithstanding this literary license, when *her* rank misfortunes as a Miss Ashton-Dennis were compared to her brother's great good fortune as a future Mr. Goulding, there seemed little truth in the maxim that 'the luck of one member of the family is luck to all.'

After the loss of her father, an enlightened amiable and pragmatic man, Cassandra, her sister Eliza and their mother were naturally expected to leave Deane, and all it had previously provided them, for its new incumbent. Once considered the daughter of a gentleman of cultivated intellect, Cassandra's first discomforts came in the sufferance of a constrained sojourn in Bath. This was followed by the next ill consequence of her father's demise: an indifferent and random lifestyle

The Amiable Cassandra



The Bath Novels of Lady A

of visiting relatives and resorts, in order to dispel the tenuous dependence on a reduced income, while living in one place too long.

Surprisingly, and as often with the unpredictability of fate, an interval of stability did offer up some reprieve. The small party was presented with an opportunity of removing to Southampton, to a house they would share with an esteemed son and brother. Fulwar, whose naval profession required he be situated at the seaport when not at sea, had at this time enough income to help sustain his mother and sisters in a degree of respectability. Unluckily, he could not guarantee it as an arrangement of permanence.

And thus, despite every good intention, the family had little choice but to quit their home another time. This last disruption, as with all the rest that had preceded it, took a toll unforeseen. Each had laid waste to the brilliance that had gone before and the fragile routines that Cassandra had guarded so jealously at Deane—the cradle of her genius, the foundation of her fame—were so far lost during this transition as to prevent her from engaging her writing talents in any significant manner. The loss of her first home, being naturally a great grief to any young person of strong feeling and lively imagination, had made my heroine exceedingly unhappy and these further removals only added to the alienation that had temporarily robbed her of her gift.

It was not until the premature death of George's Emily then, and upon delicate encouragement of his favorite sister Eliza, that an offer of a proper home was finally made to replace in kind what had been taken away by an unequal system of preferment. Having, under Mr. Papworth's wisest consultation, fashioned a species of house with considerable saving of expense that should look as well as any hermitage or the Grecian temple on his estate, George permanently settled the late Reverend's dear trio at last.

And so it was that Cassandra Ashton-Dennis came to live in Gouldham Park's most functional folly, to rediscover the genius and to resume the pen that had created those compositions which had already brought her a fair degree of fame.

**



www.thebathnovelsofladya.com / www.tbnila.com