



TUMBLE-DOWN FARM

ALAN MUIR

CHAPTER XVIII.—(Continued.)
A knock was heard at the door; the same maid who had hurried out into the garden came in.

"Please, ma'am, the doctor is here." "But why do you look so white?" the maid asked, reading the servant's face with quick apprehension. "Is Miss Maud worse?"

"Please, ma'am, the doctor must speak to you."

The maid lingered for a moment. "What is the matter?" Vanity asked. "Our smallest young lady has got smallpox," the servant said, shuddering as she spoke. "Master has seen the doctor, and we don't know what to do."

Vanity Hardware had the terror of that disease which every woman feels, and she turned pale herself.

"And the little lady is master's pet," the servant continued, "and mistress has always made much of her; and she has always slept beside mistress, and she won't hardly go out of her sight."

"I dare say," Vanity remarked, "she will never will nurse her."

"There it is, you see," she said, closing the door, and speaking in a confidential whisper; "master says the mother shall not go near her. You see"—closing the door more impressively—"master is as proud of missus' looks; and he says the risk shall not be run."

"Can't they get a nurse?" Vanity asked. "Don't you see?" the other replied, "that's where it is. This little lady is so used to mistress singing to her, and being with her, that she will not allow any nurse to come near her; and we only keep her quiet by the five minutes saying: 'Mama's coming, dear!' and even then she bursts out times and times. And if you please, doctor says the little lady must be kept quite away from everybody; and your room is the best in the house for her; and will you please come down stairs? Your room is made dark, and the little lady is to be taken there at once."

Vanity came out upon the gallery over the large entrance hall, and from which a double opened and one or two short flights of stairs led up to different passages. At the top of one of these flights stood the redoubtable old lady in a most excited state. For some inexplicable reason, she had gathered up her skirts; and the first idea her figure suggested was that of a stout elderly lady, of inflexible purpose, who was about to wade a river.

"I always said so," the old lady called out. "This comes of your Sunday school tracts. But Maud never would listen to advice—not since she was four years old."

Poor Maud, pale and crying, sat upon a chair. Beside her stood the doctor and her husband; the wail of the sick child was plainly heard. At the sound, the mother started to her feet.

"Augustus!" she called out, piteously.

"I must go! Doctor, do say that I am to go! Baby will die if she frets on in this way. It is cruel to keep me. It is my duty to run whatever risk there may be. Do let me go. I cannot bear to hear her."

"Maud," her husband said, drawing close to her, "I cannot permit it. We must get a nurse. Baby will soon cry herself to sleep."

"Oh, it is cruel!" she said, "it is cruel!"

At this point the older brother spoke.

"I feel for you, Neville," he said to his brother-in-law, "but I do think my sister is right. Her duty is with her child. Let her go and leave the rest in the hands of God."

"Mind," the old lady called out, "I don't agree with either of you. Remember that hereafter."

"Now, Augustus," the wife cried, "now you will let me go!"

Neville, feeling the tide running sharply against him, saw that he must speak decided. Like many easy-going people, he could, on occasion, assert himself irresistibly.

"There must be an end of this," he said.

"Doctor, let us have a nurse at once. Maud, you must not go near the child; your life is too valuable to us all."

Vanity had watched this scene with a remarkable look on her face; and now she hurried down stairs, and crossed the hall to the lady's side.

"I will nurse the baby," she cried. "I am not afraid!"

The whole company stood transfixed. The young soldier acknowledged the power of beauty by gazing for a moment at the stranger with a possibly too obvious admiration, but he soon recollected himself.

Maud Neville looked up.

"Oh, thank you, thank you," she said. "It won't be the slightest use. Baby will have no one but myself."

"I know, I know," Vanity replied almost impatiently. "Come with me."

Maud looked up in wonder; as for the rest, they stood in silent amazement; even the old lady was at a loss for a sentence. "Come with me," Vanity repeated, in a decisive voice. "Bid your servant follow us."

To the surprise of everybody, Maud Neville rose and walked across the hall with Vanity. The servant followed, and all three went out of sight.

Then the maid-servant was seen flying into the sick child's room, where the sound of closing shutters was heard. Thence she ran up stairs and disappeared. Then again she darted down to the doctor and whispered to him. After this she drew down every blind and closed every shutter of the hall windows, reducing the place to darkness. Then, without explaining these proceedings, she disappeared once more.

The whole party still remained motionless, none daring to speak, and in the darkness and suspense it seemed that several minutes passed away.

At last, low, soft, sweet, in the most soothing lullaby note, they heard a voice singing:

"Now the day is over,
Night is drawing nigh,
Shadows of the evening
Steal across the sky."

"Why," whispered Neville to his brother, "that is Maud singing to the child. She sings that hymn to her, night by night."

Then, in the semi-darkness of the hall, the husband saw his wife, dressed in a long, loose morning robe which he knew well, bearing the child in her arms and chanting as she slowly moved across the hall. The effect of the song on the sick child soon appeared. The little weary voice caught up a word or two here and there, and sang it in a drowsy, satisfied tone.

"Maud," the husband whispered, in a low, reproachful voice, "I am grieved."

He felt a hand in his own. Maud had stolen up to him from behind.

Wainwright ways, his handsome face, recalled their love scenes, hated her rival.

In the darkened room of sickness, with peri hard at hand, Vanity Hardware talked thus with herself:

"I have exposed myself to fearful danger; if my life is sacrificed, shall I much regret it? But if I survive, and leave this room with beauty unimpaired—then, Mistress Nancy Snow, beware! You stole my lover from me. I shall repay you. You husband from you. The colour of your hair as I touch me, a wild sob and cry for death as, under your cruel hands, I sobbed and raved and cried! If I am not to make Willie my own—why, here I have exposed myself to danger—let me be struck down; but if I come forth hence unharmed, then I shall treat my life as my own. Willie! Willie! by your weak, impulsive nature and by your beauty you shall yet be mine! After that, come what may!"

From the hour she took this resolution, all her fear of infection or of death was gone. She even courted danger. There was her fatalism again. "Dare anything; give Fate every chance of wrecking your scheme; and if you pass unscathed, then call your life—call Willie's life—your own!" So she went about her self-imposed task no longer with the tenderness of her first impulse, but with a stony calmness under which lay a secret sense of approaching triumph.

Time went by. The attack of smallpox was not severe, and the child soon began to mend. Vanity in the dark room still played her part of mother, and the child would never be still unless her "mother" was at hand. She grew fond of her little charge. The child was the most patient of sufferers; would whisper "Thank you, mamma," with a grace and prettiness every time she was tended; Vanity began to feel a new affection in her breast, a tenderness for this little child.

Meanwhile the dusky figure was seen slowly moving up the wide stairs toward the room where the child was to be laid. Low, sweet, the lullaby sounded:

"Grant to little children
Visions bright of Thee,
Guard the sailors toasting
On the deep blue sea."

"But, Maud," the husband said, "when she leaves the child in the room, how much better shall we be?"

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed his wife, in the lowest of whispers, "she is going to nurse baby through the illness. Maud Neville in half whispers, lest by any chance the small ear inside should hear."

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"Through the long night watches
May thine anger spread
Their white wings above me,
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The song was over. The dark threshold was passed. And the brave actress was shut in with her task and her danger.

CHAPTER XIX.

The housemaid understood her business.

Without waiting for the word of command, she lit in the light once more, and the whole party saw each other.

"Maud," the husband said, breaking the silence "what does all this mean?"

"Really, Augustus, you are stupid! Don't you see? Little Maud thinks I am with her; and going to stay with her! But such a clever girl! I really thought it was myself singing. She asked me, 'Have you any little thing you sing to the child?' So I sung her a verse of 'Now the day is over.' The verses, the music, the very tone of my voice, she caught on the instant. And then she went in to baby—in the dark—and took her up, singing all the while, and baby put her little head against her shoulder, and was quite soothed and still."

The mother's tears fell as she spoke, and the husband was moved himself.

"What a brave act!" he said. "I should have thought a woman would as soon have walked into Nebuchadnezzar's furnace."

"Maud," the husband said, breaking the silence "what does all this mean?"

"Really, Mr. Pembroke," the old lady said loftily, "will you be good enough not to be too absurd? Providence did not expect you to nurse the child."

"I feel," Augustus continued gravely, "that I must take the whole responsibility of the young woman's future upon myself."

"Not the whole of it, Augustus!" the soldier called out earnestly. "I ought to help you. Share and share alike, you know. No, I don't exactly mean that; but really, old fellow, I could not let all come on you, you know."

"Listen, Tom," his brother-in-law remarked; "if that girl were to pay the price of her bravery with her face, I don't see what I could do for her. It would be an awful result of so gallant a deed. If that happened—"

"If that happened," Tom Pembroke cried, interrupting, with great excitement, "if her face were spoilt, it would be your business, Augustus. As you say, I could do nothing for her. In that case, sooner than she should die of a broken heart, I—I would marry her myself."

"Thomas Pembroke," exclaimed the old lady. "I am horrified. But while we stand talking here, that complaint—here she pointed to the closed doors of the sick room—she listened, open-mouthed, trying to wriggle out of the old man's firm grasp, but found himself suddenly elevated, face downward, over a broad knee. He fell just time to say, "I ain't your boy!" when then ensued what is described as one of the grandest, most symmetrical whackings ever administered in this or any other age. During the performance the boy repeated his original statement several times, in several different keys, and then he was stood upon the floor of the car. "He shouldn't lick the boy so if he's no relation of his," remarked the conductor. "I never seen him before," whined the boy. "What?" said the commercial traveler, "does the young rascal deny his own father?" Then the old man put on his gold specs, and his expression of astonishment was beautiful to see. "Why, bless me," he exclaimed, "why, I thought it was my youngest boy, John. Dear me! I hope I have not inconvenienced you, young man. You'll excuse me, won't you?" But just then the car had reached Main street, and the boy got off, saying something that sounded like "police." When the old man looked about the car he found everybody smiling, and six ladies arose and quarreled with each other for the privilege of giving him a seat.

CHAPTER XX.

Vanity was alone in the darkened sick room. Her little charge was satisfied with the low song of "Now the day is over," and as often as the small sick voice plainted out its "Mamma," the reply of a chanted voice assured the little sufferer that her best consoler was at hand.

But the generous glow died out, as all emotion waned. Now, in the dark room, Vanity had time to think what she had undertaken; and, it must be confessed, she began to feel afraid. She resolved to stay at her post, however, and when the old man got off, she announced her resolution of sharing the duties, and still keeping up the kind illusion which gave tranquility to the little sufferer.

On the whole she was calm. Now, upon the subsidence of the terrible excitement of the last few weeks, Vanity knew the state of her own heart. The awful end of her father had been a stunning stroke of fate. Vanity had never known the facts of her father's life. The robberies of which he was suspected were never, with her, matters of positive knowledge. Still, she knew that her father was a bad, unscrupulous man; his conduct made it evident that some terrible danger was ever hanging over him. His death, appalling as it was, forever hid the worst facts she suspected from discovery or from legal proof.

But Willie Snow had broken poor Vanity's heart. In spite of his weakness, which she could not but despise, she loved him still. In her secret heart she still harbored the dangerous memory of handsome Willie Snow. The secret threads which bound the heart or a woman to a man are inexplicable. She thought of his

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THE JOKER'S BUDGET.

JESTS AND YARNS BY FUNNY MEN OF THE PRESS.

No Reason for Haughtiness—Made Light of It—Two Birds With One Stone—An Improvement, Etc., Etc.

Made Light of It.

Mr. Dolley—What do you mean by saying that your father made light of my proposal?

Miss Giggles—Well, he did. He used it to ignite his cigar with—Detroit Free Press.

An Improvement.

Professor (reading)—"Dropping the reins, Mr. Flood assisted his wife from the carriage, and together they entered the store." Can any little boy improve upon this sentence?

Bright Pupil—The reins descended and the floods came—Life.

Would Expect Him.

Watts—So don't you look don't young Sharpe as coming man, don't you?

Potts—I would if I were in charge of the penitentiary—Indianapolis Journal.

While You Wait.

Fitzfully blazed the lights in the Bong-ton restaurant.

"Hullo, Beardsley," called Dumley, as he sat down at the next table; "been waiting long?"

Beardsley shook his head morosely.

"Half an hour," he answered in a voice of gloom.

"That so?" continued Dumley; "what's your order?"

"Two eggs, boiled four minutes."—Rockland Tribune.