

'Twixt Life and Death

BY

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CHAPTER XXII.—(Continued.)

On afternoon she came into the room where Nessa was sitting alone, in a particularly ill-humor. Nessa could get no more than a nod or a shake of the head in reply to her observations; yet it was obvious by her manner that she had brought her knitting with the set purpose of staying there.

It had occurred to Nessa on this very afternoon that she had never told her friends who she really was, and how she had come to be an equestrienne. It struck her now that they must attribute her reticence to a want of confidence in them, or to her having done something which she was ashamed to reveal. The possibility of being so misunderstood made her cheeks burn, and she resolved that, on the very first occasion, she would tell the whole truth about herself. She expected that Grace would be dreadfully shocked to hear that she had run away from school, and got into trouble with the police at St. John's Wood, and been hunted out of Brighton; but she felt sure that Dr. Meredith—that dear, generous friend—would make allowance for her ignorance and simplicity, and see that she was not really guilty of dishonesty. And in her heart of hearts she was elated with the hope that he would like her better for knowing that she was well born, and the victim of cruel persecution, and heiress to a large fortune.

This pleasant reflection was brightening her cheeks when Mrs. Blount broke silence.

"I've sent 'em out for a drive," she said.

Nessa looked up from the page on which her eyes had been resting while her thoughts wandered elsewhere, and said she was glad; it was such a lovely afternoon for a drive.

"Yes; but he'd have been sitting in this room as it was raining cats and dogs if I hadn't spoken out," said the old lady, in a tone of vexation. "It's the first time I've ever had to tell him what he ought to do. He'd have found it out for himself a month ago."

Nessa, wondering, looked with wide, inquiring eyes at her companion.

"Oh, I suppose you have not noticed any more than he has."

"Noticed what?" inquired Nessa.

"That my dear Grace is growing quieter and quieter, more thoughtful, more gentle even than she ever was. You haven't noticed that she don't watch by the window for sweethearts to come, that she slips away from the room when he is here, that she is growing old-fashioned in her ways. I have. And it made my heart ache when I see 'em through the blinds as they started off in the pony chaise, for they didn't look smiling into each other's face; but he looked up at this window, and she looked straight before her as if she had no lover in the world."

"Oh, do they not love each other now?" Nessa asked, with a trembling voice.

"What is the matter?"

"What is the matter?" echoed the old nurse, laying down her knitting. "Well, my dear, if you don't know—and I will say this, I believe you are innocent—if you don't know, it's my duty to tell you before things get past mending. You're taking Sweeny's heart away from my poor Grace! He's fallen in love with you—that's what's the matter!"

This news so shocked Nessa that even before Grace returned from her ride with Sweeny she persuaded Mrs. Blount to take her with her to Brixton, if Dr. Meredith deemed her well enough to go; and, in fact, she received this permission a few days later.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Several weeks later Nessa received a letter. It gave her quite a flutter of excitement, so monotonous and dull was her eventless life at this time; but her heart beat quicker still when she perceived by the postmark that it must be from Dr. Meredith. She opened it with a feeling of hope which it would have been impossible for her to explain, having nothing to hope for. Sweeny inclosed a letter with a couple of lines:

"The inclosed letter," he wrote, "comes to you by a roundabout route, as you will see. You have not forgotten your promise to write to me if you need your doctor and friend."

"SWEENEY MEREDITH."

The communication was studiously brief. He could scarcely have written less; yet Nessa was not disappointed, and in the pleasure of reading it over and over again forgot the inclosure. It was clear she must acknowledge the letter, and feeling that she could think of nothing else until she had written her own words to the task at once. She wrote the first words that came from her heart:

"Dear Mr. Meredith; I thank you for the letter. I think I can never be so ungrateful as to forget your friendship and kindness."

V. D.

She could not say less than this, and she dared not say more, and so, with a sigh of regret, she put up the sheet of paper in an envelope and addressed it to the doctor. After that she went out and posted her letter with as much care as if the happiness of her life depended on it. This mighty business, with the flood of conjectures and bitter-sweet recollection it brought upon her, so engrossed her thought that only when she got home to Myrtle Cottage and set herself resolutely to think of something else she remembered the inclosed letter.

It was addressed, "Miss Viola Dancer, Arcadia, West Kensington," re-addressed, "J. Fergus, Esq., International, Paris;" addressed again, "Care of Dr. Meredith, Grafton Road, Hanmersmith, London;" and finally re-addressed, "Les-ton Park, Bartam, Yorkshire."

Opening the letter, Nessa, with awaking curiosity, turned to the signature, and found with surprise that the writer was Maud Redmond. It was dated 29 Murdoch Square, Euston Road, Tuesday, and ran on thus:

"My Darling Nessa! I do not know

—see. Mr. Fergus paid me two hundred pounds and I have brought half of it for you."

CHAPTER XXIV.

Since her first call on Mrs. Redmond Nessa made several others, sometimes in the afternoon, but more frequently in the evenings, and, though she seemed feverishly excited when she returned to her home, she would vouchsafe no explanation to Mrs. Blount.

One afternoon, while she was thus absent, Grace called to see her, and Mrs. Blount, uneasy at Miss Dancer's behavior, told Grace about it. The latter, scenting some grave and unknown peril to Nessa, left Mrs. Blount, almost abruptly, and from the nearest postoffice dispatched the following telegram to Sweeny: "Come at once. You are needed."

Nessa was dressing to go out the next morning, when the maid knocked at her door and said:

"Please, miss, will you come into the sitting room, Missis says, before you go out?"

"Yes, I will come," Nessa answered, "almost directly."

Mrs. Blount had told her briefly, when she came in, that Grace had called in the afternoon to see her, and now she expected to be scolded for her irregularities.

She went downstairs painfully conscious of her faults, and hoping that Mrs. Blount would forgive her. The sitting room door was partly open; she entered, closed the door, and, turning to the table where Mrs. Blount invariably stationed herself on serious occasions, she started with an exclamation of astonishment. Sweeny stood before her!

For a couple of moments they stood silent, and still facing each other, and marking the change a few weeks had produced. But her wonder was greater than this, for Grace had prepared him for what he saw, while she was ignorant of the struggle which had exhausted him. The boyish gaiety was gone from his face, the carelessness from his manner; he looked quite old and severe, despite the softness in his deep eyes.

"Here—get up! The young lady's come! Drive up in a hansom!"

"Is she alone?" asked Mrs. Redmond, springing out of bed with blinking eyes.

"Yes. You ain't goin' to have her up here, are you?"

The place was sufficiently wretched and squalid to excite compassion, but the general effect was not picturesquely—not the picture of distress which an experienced stage manager would set before his audience, and Mrs. Redmond knew her business and the character of the girl. She had to play to as well as anyone. The crust of a porridge, the remains of last night's supper, stood on the dressing table with a bottle of hair-wash, a saucer of violet powder, and a paper of rouge. On the table—drawn up for convenience to the side of the bed—was a lamp without a shade, a tray with the remains of the morning's breakfast, a pile of hairpins and some ends and ends of finery.

"I've showed her into the front sitting room," said the landlady, "but she ain't sent away the cab, so you'd better look sharp, my dear. What are you looking for now?"

"My shoes. Look under those things on the chair. That's just the way when you want a thing—"

"You are such an untidy lady. Here, take mine, my dear; they'll do to slip down in."

"Dip the corner of the towel in the water jug. Where's that braided jacket? Never mind; give me the towel. Now look about for that waterproof."

"Here it is, my dear—all cleaned up, anyhow. You ain't going to put any stuff on your face, are you?"

"Not likely," replied Mrs. Redmond, as she stood before the glass wiping her face with the towel.

"Mind, you'll have to get some money out of her somehow. You promised me that, you know, when she came—"

"Oh, that's all right. You shall have it right enough. I tell you I can twist her round my finger, and, you see, she's come just as I said she would, and the hansom shows she has got the money. How do I look?" She turned, assuming a woe-begone expression.

"You're as good as a play," chuckled the landlady, with her hand to her mouth. "You'd do."

Entering the sitting room where Nessa was sitting by the window, Mrs. Redmond started as if she had seen a wraith, and then tottering forward a few steps she fell on her knees, and stretched out her hands with an imploring cry. Nessa went quickly to her side and put her arms round the woman's neck.

"Nessa, my darling Nessa," gasped Mrs. Redmond, taking the girl's hand and smothering it with kisses. "Oh, tell me that you forgive me. No—will not rise till I know I am forgiven."

"There is nothing to forgive. You did not mean to hurt me. Oh, I am sure of that as you yourself must be."

"Thank heaven for this!" murmured Mrs. Redmond, devoutly, bending her head and clasping her hands. "But I forsook you when I should have stood by you."

"I would rather think of anything else—of how, for instance, you stood by me when I was in greater need. There, do get up. It distresses me a great deal more to see you like this than to think of your running away."

Mrs. Redmond allowed herself to be comforted, and gradually came round to a state of mind less embarrassing in its effect upon Nessa.

"You have given me strength," she said, faintly; "in a little while I shall be able to look for work." The hollowness of her voice frightened Nessa.

"You were very poor when you wrote to me. Have you had anything to eat to-day?" she asked. Mrs. Redmond shook her head, with a plaintive smile.

"But I had some tea and bread last night," she murmured gratefully.

"I feared it was so," said Nessa, "and I have kept the hampon waiting. We will go out and get some dinner."

"I can't, my darling. I have nothing but the things I stand in. The clothes I brought from Brussels have been taken by the woman of this house for my rent, and I have nothing to redeem them."

"I have," said Nessa, eagerly putting her hand in her pocket. "I am quite rich

—see. Mr. Fergus paid me two hundred pounds and I have brought half of it for you."

FARM AND GARDEN NOTES

ITEMS OF INTEREST ON AGRICULTURAL TOPICS.

Indication of Bad Management—Portable Racks—Preventing Hog Cholera—When a Horse is Worth Most—Clipping Clover Fields—Etc., Etc.

Indication of Bad Management.

Lice on animals indicates bad management. Horses or cattle in good condition seldom are afflicted with lice, but a low condition of the animal, the skin being hidebound, affords excellent inducements for lice. Good feed and the use of a brush will rid animals of parasites, with the aid of other remedies.

Portable Racks.

For cattle, a good rack may be made with common rough boards and a few pieces of scantling. Make them four or five feet wide, ten or twelve feet long, and two feet deep; have four by four inch scantling in the corners, and also in the center of the ends, running up twelve or fifteen inches above the top of the rack; to the latter nail in a center partition lengthwise; thus you have a double rack where cattle will eat contentedly.

Do not have the end boards or pieces of scantling reach down as low as the side boards and then by rounding up the ends of the side boards, after the manner of sled runners, the racks may be easily drawn from one place to another.

Preventing Hog Cholera.

Rules for the prevention of the fall outbreak of cholera in herds of swine may be summarized as follows:

1. Cleanliness is essential, in yards, pens, water, feed and everything.

2. Give plenty of pure water and do away with stagnant pools.

3. Use disinfectants such as ashes, lime and carbolic acid.

4. Feed a variety, especially such condiments as charcoal, ashes and salt.

5. Feed as much grass range as needed.

6. Breed from hogs of strong constitution.

7. Feed new corn cautiously, if at all.

8. Allow no chance of infection from diseased herds by visitors or dogs.

When a Horse is Worth Most.

The age at which a horse is worth the most depends very largely upon his breeding and raising. In nearly all cases well bred and well kept horses will stand hard usage better at an early age than horses that have had a struggle for existence and have inferior quality of blood in their veins.

When a horse has been well fed and cared for from birth so as to maintain a steady growth, he ought to be well matured by the time he is five years old, and from that time till he is seven ought to be at his best. Other horses that are let run, receive but little care, are not fed as they should be, will make a slower growth and may not mature until seven years. A horse should be fully matured before he can be considered at his best, no matter what his breeding may be.

Clipping Clover Fields.

A writer in Ohio Farmer advocates the clipping of clover the first year after the wheat is off, and even twice if necessary to prevent it from blossoming, as that weakens the next year's growth. This year he clipped on August 1 and clipped again in September.

He has done so for several years until year before last, and he said he would never omit it again. The hay last year where it was not clipped was very dirty, full of stubble and trash, while where too large a growth was made before winter, it lodged and smothered out the crop.

He cuts high, removing the swath board, and likes to cut just after a rain, leaving all the growth on the ground as mulch, which protects the roots in winter and keeps the ground more moist in summer. It might be pastured off and get some growth for cattle or sheep, but they will not feed on the ranker growing places, and feed the other too closely, thus making them liable to be winter killed.

He does not think this pays, and would prefer to grow green crops to help out the pasture than to use the newly seeded fields. He wants to leave clover about six inches high when winter comes.

Winter Preservation of Squashes.

My method has been to place the squashes upon shelves in a well-ventilated cellar. The shelves are four feet next to the sides of the cellar. The remaining ones are six feet wide, with alleys on each side. The first shelf is six inches from the floor and then they are two feet apart until the ceiling is reached. I use two by four inch studding for uprights and crosspieces and one by six inch strips for bottom of shelves. One of these strips is sufficient for the side. The uprights should be placed four feet apart, as the load they have to sustain is considerable.

The temperature should be as high as possible, without using artificial heat and interfering with good ventilation. This is best accomplished by keeping the cellar closed on very cold days and particularly during periods of foggy and rainy weather.

Choose the bright days for opening during the middle of the day.

With the best of conditions and best of care there is quite a loss and more depends upon time and manner of gathering crop than all else. Because the squash has a hard shell and does not show the effects of a slight frost, it is often left too long on the vine.

I plan to gather them just before the first frost. This can usually be accomplished if I am ready to put all my help to work as soon as I think a frost is on the way. I pick them and place in piles about six rods apart, covering them with their own vines.

As the weather becomes colder I draw them on truck wagon with springs and hay rack with about six inches of marsh hay on that. I handle them as carefully as possible, loading only three or four deep on the wagon and carrying them into the cellar in baskets and placing on shelves two deep. I am careful to sort them, using the soft and bruised ones for feed or sell them for immediate consumption.

Delbert Otter, in New England Homestead.

Charcoal cannot be used as a grit for poultry; it is too soft for that purpose.

When handled rightly turkeys are among the most profitable products of the farm.

Burnt corn with the cob makes the best charcoal for hens. Twice a week is often enough to feed it.

Farmers should keep themselves informed as to the markets, as they are constantly changing year by year.

Don't imagine that poultry do not require any care. It is only those flocks that receive every attention that pay big profits.

A point in favor of bees is that they insure the fertilization of fruit, which is an important matter that the American farmer has only lately begun to realize.

The care of poultry is not "women's work." There is too much money in it for the men to slight it. Nobody, male or female, can afford to slight the hens.

It's a good plan to assist the young pigs to make hogs of themselves, and after they have reached the hog stage assist them off to market. "Haste makes waste" doesn't apply to marketing stock when they are once in marketable condition.

It is said that an excellent way to deal with mice in an orchard is to procure small blocks of wood and bors one and one-fourth inch holes in them, placing some meal mixed with tallow and rat poison in the bottom of each hole and leave these about the orchard. No other animal can reach the bait.

CHINESE NEWSPAPERS.

Cheapest in the World and Dear at the Price, Except as Curios.