

A DYING PROMISE

OR, THE MISSING
WILL

CHAPTER XXXI.

The next afternoon, about the falling of dusk, saw Philip walking through snowy lanes and across field-paths toward the river's bank. He had pulled his coat-collar up about his face and crushed his hat over his eyes, and with a burning fear of being recognized by passengers as he strode swiftly along in the pale snow gleam.

As he walked, he thought of the strange experience and yet it was the strongest in all the wild medley of agonized feelings that surged within him. He pitied her much, but he condemned her more. Nothing, he thought, with the stern Pharisaism of male kindred, could palliate, much less excuse conduct such as hers; those secret meetings augured deception as well as a frailty that made him shudder; piteous as the idea of a self-sought death of despair was, it was still the one sign of grace to be hoped for. But he did not think that she had taken her life; the country talk, the cold looks and averted heads of her acquaintances would not provide a motive strong enough for so desperate a measure, and no more pressing motive could be argued. He did not know what Jessie had known too well that, guilty or not guilty, Mrs. Plummer would never receive a disgraced girl beneath her roof. "She might die on the road first," was her expression.

In the long watches of the night, as he tossed uneasily upon Mrs. Plummer's lavender-scented pillows he had thought much of Jessie's disharmony with her surroundings. Redwoods, the scene of pleasant holidays in childhood, had been taken without criticism, but now that he came fresh to it after so long an interval and habitual experience of more polished modes of life, it struck him that "Wood ways" could scarcely have been congenial to Jessie, the more so as she saw homespun roughness in contrast with the refined elegance, almost splendor, of Marwell Court. A vague remorse mingled with these thoughts; he asked himself again and again what he could have done better for her, and the answer always was, nothing. The fault seemed to lie in circumstance; she had been trained out of harmony with her position in life, she had no social status, she had risen from one class but not reached another. If he had taken her to India, her isolation would have been frightful; he would have to leave her while he marched to the first Relief of Lucknow, and went through the Rohilkand campaign. And if he married her in England and left her behind, it would have been far worse. Then Jessie's sweet, sorrowful face would rise before him with gentle reproach. No evil could be attributed to that sweet and guileless child. But he remembered that nearly every woman has once been innocent. He had passed the morning, not without some feeling of sacrifice, in the small wadded room that had been hers, looking over her papers and things in search of some clue to her disappearance. His own letters were all there, neatly packeted and endorsed; how cold and hard they seemed to be! One had arrived after her disappearance and had never been opened; there was something inexpressibly ghastly in opening and reading it. Her favorite books were there, a scanty stock; her Thomas a Kempis, the Tennyson he had given her on her fifteenth birthday, well-worn and much underlined—

Love took up the harp of life, and smote on all the chords with might. Smote the chord of Self, which, trembling, passed in music out of sight.

This was dated, September, 1858, and doubly scored.

There were long and most affectionate letters from Miss Lonsdale; she appeared to have kept every scrap of her writing; one or two pencilled notes from Ethel Medway—not a line of writing in the hand he expected and feared to see. There was a commonplace book, dainty and neat, into which she had copied passages from books that pleased her; he was surprised at the extent and judgment of her reading. Some household recipes, work-patterns, and half a dozen enigmas and charades completed Jessie's stock of papers. A few trinkets, old-fashioned things of Mrs. Meade's, were left in the little rosewood dressing-case, among them, wrapped in silver paper and inscribed, "For Philip," was the ring he had given her at their parents' grave, the opal ring, which she said was unlucky.

"But whatever is this?" Mrs. Plummer exclaimed, while exploring a drawer of clothing at his desire. His heart sank at the sight; for it was a morocco, velvet-lined jewel-case, fresh and new, bearing the name of a well-known firm of London jewelers in gold letters, and it had evidently been put into the far corner of the drawer for concealment. He wrapped it in paper and set it aside for future use.

"Dear heart!" exclaimed Mrs.

Plummer, soon after, as something rolled over the bare, white boards from the folds of a dress she was vigorously shaking before replacing in the drawer, "how did she come by pearls?"

"How, indeed!" he echoed, picking it up and examining it with heavy fear. It was large, of beautiful lustre, and pierced. It must have been worn with that dress and dropped from a string; it was no cheap imitation, but a pearl of price, a thing she could not possibly have bought. He did not like Mrs. Plummer to see it; and put it quickly away wondering, with an awed wonder, that women should sell their souls for stones, and be tricked by so poor a thing as the flash of a jewel.

The last gleam of sunset was gone when he reached the riverside, and stood upon the bank at the spot where the handkerchief had been found. The place had been a playground for them as children. Here heavy timbers, chained roughly together to prevent their being washed away, were laid raft-like, along the river's edge to be seasoned; the shore ends half bedded in mud, the others lifted and floated by the full tide. To stand on the end of a timber-balk, and spring up and down, with the water splashing through the cracks when the great beams rebounded from the spring, had then been a heavenly pleasure. If one performed this dance upon a long balk stretching into the river far beyond the others, one had the additional happiness of the chance of missing one's footing and going splash into the water, a catastrophe that once befell poor little Jessie, whom he had fished out with some difficulty and much laughter on his part, and weeping on hers, and carried home, a piteous little object like a drowned kitten.

Near these timbers was a small grove of stunted oaks, some of which leaned over the water; there boys used to undress and, climbing into the tress, take headers from the overhanging tops. Opposite was meadow whence they bathed at full tide, drying themselves by the simple process of racing round the mead in the sun and wind, shouting and leaping like young colts, as innocent of clothes and as unconscious of their need as unfallen Adam.

The meadow was white now, the river was black in the dusk by contrast with its snowy banks; the edges of the timbers were scaled by great white flakes of ice, the tide was running up, flowing strongly beneath his feet, as he stood on the edge of the floating timbers slippery with snow; the grove was heavy with shadows. About a foot beyond the timbers the channel was deep; he knew it well, and so did Jessie; a slight spring from the springy barks and one would be in mid-stream out of depth. No house was in sight but the ark, built on a boat at the water's edge, the grove would shelter one from the gaze of passers-by. Sally Samson, the old woman who lived there, had seen her from her door. Roger had found the handkerchief on the timbers; but what motive had Jessie for self-destruction? Roger maintained that the scandal had crazed her, but Philip thought it would take something stronger than mere talk to drive a girl who held secret meetings, received jewels, and was false to her absent lover and friend, to desperation. How false Jessie had been, to how solemn a troth-pledge, to what sacred memories! False to her dead father and all her youth. Yet he did not reproach himself for his own passionate swerve from loyalty; he had conquered his heart's desire and sacrificed all his hopes of advancement to keep faith with this frail, slight creature. Besides, he was a man, and are not men's temptations heavier than women's? are not their passions stronger? Must not a man love when under the spell of beauty and fascination he does not seek? Is it not criminal for a woman to love at all except at the word of command? Do good women feel the beauty of men—slight as it is in the estimation of males—or yield to fascinations they have not encouraged? So Philip thought in his instinctive male arrogance, drawing conclusions from arbitrarily fashioned premises, such as men lay down for women, blindly wondering when the latter spoil the syllogism by a false conclusion, and not dreaming that either premise can be false.

Musing thus, he went along the foot-path toward the black ark, whence one red glow from a little window gave comfortable assurance of warmth and humanity amidst the black and white desolation of the snow-wrapped fields and deserted, dark-flowing river. Thence another and broader glow streamed at his approach, as Sally opened her little door at the top of the railed gangway leading to her ark and stood in the keen open air, a quaint figure, familiar to him from early childhood, calling to her dog.

"Good evening, Sally," he called out, stopping at the foot of the gangway which passed from the bank over the water at flood and over shingle

at ebb tide: "don't you remember Philip Randal, of Stillbrooke Mill?"

"Meade's boy? Yes, I minds 'em," she replied, taking a pinch of snuff and surveying him with a critical air. "Grown," she added after a few seconds, when she dipped down into her ark beckoning to him to follow into the warm little nest.

It was an old tub of a boat ten feet long, shored up by timbers firmly sunk in the river's bed, so that the tide could not float it off. A low plank wall rose from its sides some two feet or three feet high, this was topped by a slant wooden roof like an inverted boat. With its tiny windows, one shoreward and one riverward, its little door and its stove-pipe through the roof, it was exactly like the Noah's Ark the children used to play with, and it was a thrilling joy to them to go there of a summer afternoon, especially at full tide, when it seemed to float on the river, to draw in the gangway and have tea in the marvellous little house, every inch of space in which had been utilized for Sally's limited needs.

Philip felt like a giant as he descended two steps and sat on the chest by the little grate, which blazed cheerily with burning driftwood and bits of old boats; there was the little dresser with bits of shining crockery, the curtained bed-place, the geranium in the window, the few pots and pans, the candlestick, the seashells, lumps of coral, and other sea treasures, the Maltese doll once the desire of Jessie's eyes, and the full-rigged model frigate, long the desire of his own. How delicious Sally's milkless tea used to be in this fairy dwelling, and Sally herself, what a marvellous picturesque old sibyl she looked as she sat taking her snuff, the scent of which seemed to Philip like a memory of infancy, relating the after tale, chiefly of the sea. So she sat to-day in the winter firelight as she used to sit in the summer sun-glow, the same quaint figure, with the same brown expressionless face surrounded by the flapping white cap-frill of her cap, the same bare, brown arms, which, like the face, seemed carved in old oak; the same dingy crossover shawl, the same scanty dark skirt that he remembered in boyhood. Summer and winter, indoors and out, Sally's attire never varied, thus she rowed on the river in sun or wind, wet or cold.

He had brought her a packet of snuff, and some Indian figures to add to her curiosities. She received them with a grunt of satisfaction; then she rose, and opening a tiny cupboard above the little fireplace brought forth a black bottle containing some pale, clear cognac which she poured into one of the old china tea-cups and gave him, and which he knew well had never passed the custom-house. While she did this, he took rapid stock of the familiar objects in the cabin, and saw on a little shelf with the Bible and Pilgrim's Progress, a railway timetable, which his quick eye made out to be of last year's date.

He talked of old times, and of the Crimea and the Mutiny, and then Sally began, as she always did after a taste from the black bottle, of her stories. He listened silently till she became almost unconscious of his presence, and she rambled on, as she probably did in the long nights and summer days when she sat alone, her mind thrown back on the past.

Then, when she paused and fell to staring before her into the glowing wood-coals, he said without preamble:

"Who was in the boat with you and Miss Jessie last October, Sally?"

"Never a soul," she replied, still gazing into the fire, her head slightly bowed forward and her hands resting on her knees.

"And how long were you rowing to Lynnmouth, that fine, calm day?" he added, keeping his hand before his eyes while his elbow was on the table, lest she should turn and catch the eager, pained interest that he could keep out of his voice but not out of his face.

"Matter of a hour; tide agen us," she said, absently, being, for so practised a story-teller, short of speech, doubtless made her tales tell the more.

"And you had to pull well, wanting to catch the mid-day boat, no doubt?" he continued, vainly trying to speak carelessly.

But either some vibration in his voice or his persistent catechising, roused the old woman, and she turned and eyed him sharply.

"Who's talking of boats?" she growled.

"Look here, Sally," said Philip, "let all be square, fair, and above board. How much did she give you to put the Plummers off the scent?"

Sally looked at him and took more snuff, not unmoved by the apparently irrelevant fact that he sent his fingers into his waistcoat pocket and caused the mellow chink of coin to be heard.

"Pound," she said. "What's your'n?"

"One pound ten," he replied, producing the money.

"Taint enough," said Sally, promptly.

"That's a pity," he returned, "there's no more to be had. Thirty shillings are not picked up every day."

"Ah, dear, I be a lone ooman," moaned Sally, eyeing the bright gold wistfully.

"I am her guardian, in place of her father," continued Philip. "She didn't know I was coming home yet and very likely wrote to tell me all about it. I daresay the letter reached India just as I stepped ashore."

"Not she, didn't want nobody to know," Sally said.

"For the first days, perhaps. But she may be wanting money now and I not able to send it." He took up the two gold pieces and tossed them on the table as he spoke.

"What'll ye do to her?" she asked, following the coins with her eyes.

"See that she wants nothing, poor child! and that—that nobody does her harm," he muttered, brokenly.

"Make it two, lad, ah, deary me! I be a lone lorn ooman. Make it two, dear," she said, coaxingly.

He dinked another half sovereign down on the little table and Sally covered the three bright coins with her hand, brown hand.

"Winter's hard, living's hard, 'tis hard to be a lone ooman," she muttered, clutching the gold, yet staring irresolutely into the fire.

"Still harder to be alone when young and beautiful and unprotected," added Philip. "It will be the best day's work you ever did in your life, Sally, if you just tell the whole truth."

"Ah, deary, dear! She begged and prayed and settled the day and hour and tide long afore. She fixed twice, but couldn't get down here. 'How'll you live away from your folk?' I asked. 'I shan't want, Sally,' she says. 'My fortune'll be made. I'm gwine where the ground is covered with gold,' she says."

"Did she come alone?" asked Philip, in the deepest voice.

"Alone, as lone as the dead. Once gone, no coming back, I tells her. No good. Go she must."

"What did she take with her? Boxes?"

"Box and a bag. Jim fetched it from Clevee. She give him five shillings. Just caught the boat at Lynnmouth Pier."

"Who met her there?"

"Man carried her things aboard."

"How was he dressed? Like a gentleman's servant?" he continued in an agitated voice.

"Lord knows. A bit of brass tied on's arm. There was a lot more like 'em helping off boxes."

"Oh, a porter," he said with relief.

Further questioning elicited nothing more of importance, so enjoining reticence upon the old sibyl, Philip took his leave of her, and stumbled out of the tiny nutshell into the night with his worst fears confirmed.

What duplicity, what a long course of intrigue on the part of this young, soft, tender thing. What could blame him for having no suspicion of double dealing in that quarter? Why he would as soon have thought of suspecting one of Heaven's whitest angels.

Half way across the snowy field, which sloped somewhat steeply down to the river, he stopped and looked back at the solitary light in Sally's tiny window. He could just see the dark mass of the oak-grove, the black blot in which the one red eye of light glowed, and the darkness of the river flowing between its ghostly gleaming banks; it was a clear, moonless, still night, the black vault of sky blazed with the white fire of innumerable frosty stars, the light of which reflected from the snow was sufficient to walk by and discern objects in outline.

He took something from his pocket and hurled it with the widest sweep of his arm toward the dark river; it glittered in the pallid light, making a tiny trail as it flew like the tiniest of falling stars and vanished. It was the opal ring he had given Jessie at her parents' grave.

(To be Continued.)

BUBBLES.

From pole to pole—telegrams.

For better or for worse—medicine.

Handkerchiefs may be called a crying need.

People who go to call on the King usually back out.

Music hath charms, but they are sometimes false ones.

The employees of a crematory have time to burn.

A disobedient child does not seem to know its own mind.

The first book needed to start a library is a pocketbook.

The veteran actor can appropriately be called an old stager.

If the mermaid wore a dress, it should be of watered silk.

Politeness is a thing some men won't stand for even in a street car.

The conceited fat man certainly thinks too much of himself.

The best way to get along with some people is to keep out of their way.

It's an incompetent surveyor who doesn't know where to draw the line.

The miner isn't the only man who is not appreciated until he's underground.

No doubt the cannibals would consider the fastidious dentist a toothsome dainty.

Going too far is not a good way to further one's plans.

Some people think they are running behind if they are not always before the public.

Even the redman might object to being called a lobster.

To "bank" is not a proper noun, it really should be capitalized.

M'Lubberty—"Nora, me jewel, Oi hov wan for yez. Av a man is born in Lapland, lives in Finland an' dies in Poland, phwot is he?" Mrs. M'Lubberty (promptly)—"A car-r-r-rpse." M'Lubberty (disgustedly)—"Begorra, somebody must hov told yez."

The wise man who has anything to say to a mule says it to his face.

FARM-FIELD AND GARDEN

COST OF RAISING CALVES.

A great many experiments in the feeding of farm animals have been made, but they have been incomplete as a basis for estimating the absolute cost and profits of animal production, because as a rule they cover only a small portion of the animal's life. Realizing the importance of more complete data in this respect, several of the experimental stations have made records of the amount and cost of food consumed by various animals from birth to maturity. While these observations need to be repeated many times under a variety of conditions before it would be safe to draw too positive conclusions from them, the results already obtained are suggestive and of considerable practical value.

Mr. W. Clark has recorded data regarding the cost of raising heifer calves. In a number of cases the record covered from birth to maturity—that is, for approximately two years. One of the calves weighing at birth 56 pounds, consumed during the first year 159 pounds of whole milk, 2,738 pounds of skim milk, 66 pounds bran, 224 pounds of hay, and was pastured for one hundred and sixty-one days. When one year old she had cost \$12.86 and weighed 435 pounds. During the second year the ration was made up of sorghum hay, silage, oat straw, corn stover, and a little cotton seed and bran. The period of pasture covered two hundred and twenty-four days. The cost of the feed was \$9.09 and she weighed at the end of the year 665 pounds. She dropped her first calf a few days before she was two years old. The total cost of feed up to this time was \$21.95.

THE FEED EATEN

by two other calves, which the author believes made a normal growth, cost \$11.40 and \$13.66 respectively, for the first year. One of these calves weighed 43 pounds at birth and during the first year consumed 92 pounds of whole milk, 1,192 lbs. of skim milk, 322 pounds hay, and 204 pounds of bran, and was on pasture one hundred and sixty-five days. The other calf weighed 50 pounds at birth and was fed in much the same way, weighing when a year old 350 pounds.

Data are also recorded regarding three other calves, which the author believes consumed too little skim milk during the first year and hence did not make satisfactory growth. Furthermore, they were accidentally bred too early. One of these calves weighed 50 pounds at birth. During the first year 250 pounds of whole milk, 1,193 pounds of skim milk, 180 pounds of bran, 63 pounds of corn meal, and 405 pounds of hay were eaten, and the calf was on pasture one hundred and twelve days. The cost of feed for the first year was \$11.65 and the weight when a year old 340 pounds. Aside from pasture she was fed during the second year cotton seed, corn stover, oat straw and silage. She dropped her first calf when twenty-two months old. The cost of feeding up to the time of calving was \$7.61, making the total cost of feeding \$19.26.

The second of these calves weighed 36 pounds at birth. She was fed under much the same conditions as the other, consuming 1,097 pounds of skim milk the first year, and dropped her first calf when two years old. Her weight when a year old was 350 pounds, and the total cost of feeding for two years \$19.48.

The third calf weighed 38 pounds at birth, and during the first year was fed skim milk and whole milk in addition to some hay, grain and pasture, the amount of skim milk consumed being 1,740 pounds. The first calf was dropped when nineteen months old, and her weight was then 445 pounds. The total cost of feeding up to this time was \$17.21.

Considering the test as a whole, the average cost for the first year's growth of these calves was \$11.77 or from birth until the time of calving \$19.47.

DAIRY NOTES.

There is much loss by imperfect skimming.

Cream is ripened before churning to develop flavor.

Milking qualities of a high order are bred into the cow.

It is the milk from the fresh cow that produces the perfect butter flavor.

To feed cows economically yet sufficiently, give only what the cows will eat up clean.

The amount of butter that can be made is limited by the amount of butter fats in the milk.

It is not so much the amount of butter a cow produces as what it costs to produce, that determines the profit.

A brush is much better than a cloth to clean milk vessels. It gets at places that a cloth will not reach.

The law of stimulation holds good in milking and if well followed will help to make good milkers.

A cow with a big udder is not always an enormous milker, nor is a thick yellow skin an unfailing sign of a rich milker.

In purchasing new dairy implements two things should be considered: Will it perceptibly improve the products? Will it cheapen production?