

MISS MILNE AND I.

CHAPTER XIII—Continued.

Of what I said or what I did I have no memory, beyond staggering back off the body of Warren and stammering: "You! you! Is it you who have tried to save me?"

Then I remember her taking hold of my arm and shaking me, and saying: "Never mind me. Never mind who it is; don't you see you have released him? He'll murder you yet if you don't mind."

Had Miss Milne risen from the ground or fallen from the skies, had she descended in a chariot of fire, or fashioned herself out of the fumes of hell, I could not have been more utterly awestricken. With an angry stamp of her foot and another shake, she repeated, "See, see! he is on his feet!"

But now I could not, or perhaps would not, for what little sense I had protested against life restored by her. Warren now, for all I cared, might work his will with me.

But she did not think so. Her quick eyes had seen him stoop to untie, or cut, perhaps, the string that held his legs. With a mad rush, into which all her weight and strength were thrown, she went at him and drove him, handicapped as he was, headlong over the steep incline that lay just to the right of us. He rolled down for several yards. She followed him and stooped to pick up something she had caught sight of in the bushes. It was Warren's ax.

I, more as a bewitched spectator than as one who was any longer playing a part in the proceedings, followed. When Miss Milne reached Warren, he was still writhing, and, for all I knew, trying to break or untie the string that held his feet together, and that, amid these bushes, quite prevented any quick movement. She evidently thought that was his object, for stepping quickly up to him, she hissed out: "You move again, you brute, and I'll kill you with this—your ax!"

As she spoke she clutched it with both hands and raised it over her shoulder. A superstitious dread of the woman held him spellbound. When he had settled himself quite motionless and was looking up into her moonlit face with a vacant stare, she spoke again, but now in a voice of great determination. "Look here, Warren, you have made your effort and failed. Now I will make you two offers; you can accept which you like. Promise me that you will make no further attack on Doctor Rigby, and I will let you go, and take you to a cave that I know of close to the place where your wife is housed, and where she can see you and bring you food every day. If you do not promise me in two seconds, I will arouse the police, and have you sent back to the 'Far Away' again. Now which shall it be?"

The man did not reply for several seconds. With his eyes still rolling, his hair on end, he stared vacantly, first at her, then at me.

"Now, Warren, which shall it be? We have no time to spare. Daylight is coming; you must decide at once."

"I promise," said Warren, in a dogged, subdued way.

Then Miss Milne stooped down and cut the string and (for the man himself sat powerless) tied up the chain to his knees.

"Now, Warren, jump up and wish Dr. Rigby good-night, and shake hands."

This was a bitter pill, but there was nothing for it but to obey, and, stepping up to me, he put out his hand. I took it in mine and said: "Warren, I am, and have always been, most terribly sorry for you, but I had to do my duty."

Without looking up, he replied: "I ain't 'ad no smallpox, but I've lost my gal."

For a moment the strong hand trembled, and the mouth of the giant quivered.

"Come, come, Warren, follow me now. I shall be missed. Good-night, Doctor Rigby."

And they were gone. And I, like Sir Bedivere, stood "revolving many memories," till the sound of their feet on the dead underwood died away, and their forms appeared as two black specks "against the verge of dawn."

CHAPTER XIV.

When even more than usually sick of the quarantine station and its ultra-prison-like surroundings, it was my custom to put a book in my pocket, and to clamber along the ocean coast from rock to rock until I reached a point that had probably never before been visited by mortal man. At least, so I judged from the excitement my visit occasioned among the millions of crabs, strange birds and uncanny fish that abounded there. My favorite seat was a jut of pointed rock that had by countless tides been washed into the shape of an armchair.

At my feet, as I sat in my ocean-niche chair, was a large plateau of perfectly clean, level rock, so smooth, lean and level that one might have played billiards on it. In the center of this table-rock was a most remarkable freak of nature; this was a perfectly round basin of water about ten yards in diameter, so circular that I do not think the most accurate mathematician could have discovered a flaw in—not only circular at the outlet, but uncavely circular in all its measurements. On the morning succeeding the night just recorded, I was walking and round this bath of mine, and trying in vain to realize something of last night, but the whole thing was like a dream. "Miss Milne

here—Miss Milne here!" I was saying over and over, as though the reiteration of the fact would help me to appreciate it. "And I owe my life to her!"

"My God!" I thought, "this woman, this novelty on earth, is doomed to haunt me, sent for the purpose of becoming my Nemesis."

So I raved on, unseen by mortal eye, unheard by mortal ear; so I kicked against the pricks of fate, and cursed the day I was born, when suddenly along the top of the cliff I saw something moving. 'Tis some one's head, that of a woman, stepping down "by zigzag paths and juts of pointed rock." I have not been seen as yet, and so hide; there is a little cave at the end of the table-rock, from the shadow of which I can safely watch her movements. Seemingly on the edge of an overhanging prominence, she stops, and produces from under her dress a basket and a rope. She ties the basket on and lets it cautiously down; then, when it had descended something like thirty feet, a stick appears from a cave opposite and gives the basket a push; this is repeated again and again until, while the woman holds patiently on to the end of the rope, the basket comes near enough to be caught by an outstretched hand. 'Tis the hand of Warren, I can see, and the woman above is his wife.

I certainly mark the spot where the man is hidden, and I see also where the woman hides the rope; then I hurry home and pack up some clothing, some whiskey, methylated spirit, and a small spirit lamp; to this I add tea, potted meat, and a few other necessities, and with my parcel make for the top of the cliff. I tie on the rope and let it down; presently a jerk tells me he has seen it; for a moment it swings violently, and then another jerk and the weight is gone. Then I go back to home and to work.

"This is a terrible thing about Warren," said the sergeant of police to me that night, as together we made the evening round. "Do you think, doctor, his death was a painful one?"

"Painful? No; why should it be? No death is so painful as men imagine, nor, for the matter of that, so pleasant either. The girl who faints, dies as far as she is concerned; the man who is stunned has gone through all the agonies of death; opium poisoning, bleeding to death, and death from exhaustion are simply sleeping without awakening. If Warren was drowned, his sufferings were nothing compared to what he had gone through; if eaten by sharks, then indeed he must have had a very bad quarter of an hour."

When the sergeant had gone, I started again for the place where Warren was hidden. This time I carried tobacco, a kerosene lamp and a bottle of water. I had previously made up my mind that the only safe road to the cave was somewhere on the opposite side to that from which I had watched him in the morning. But for an hour I wandered about, without finding any traces of a path leading in the right direction. I stood still and listened, and there directly below me, I caught now and then the sound of voices. Notwithstanding the danger, I resolved upon descending. For a few steps all went well, but suddenly I came upon a little precipice, down which I, parcel and all, slid with a violence that, but for a bush that stuck out from between some rocks, would have carried me straight over to my table rock below.

To this bush I hung on desperately, and soon discovered that there was no possibility of my continuing my descent with anything like safety; nor could I retrace my steps. There was, therefore, only one thing left for me to do, and that was to attract Warren's attention and secure his help. I whistled the long low whistle of the London burglar, and the conversation stopped, I repeated it, and then I heard a movement some eight or ten yards below.

"Is that you, Warren?" I whispered.

"Yes. Who are you?"

"The doctor. I have brought you some things and lost my way."

"Stick on, sir, and I'll help yer."

In a few seconds the man had climbed to the rock above and let down the rope.

"Hang on to that, sir, and I'll let you down to my ledge."

And I obeyed. As I felt his mighty arm lowering me I could not help thinking how easily he could avenge himself now if he liked. At the mouth of the cave I found his wife, and in the cave a solitary candle burning. Warren soon joined us, and put out his hand to me, this time with no hesitation.

"You must forgive me for wishing you 'arm, but you don't know all I've gone through."

"Forgive you! of course I do; and there's not a man on the station more intensely sorry for you than myself, but you know I had to send you down."

For a moment he was silent, then he muttered: "I never 'ad no smallpox."

"I thought and still think you had; but, Warren, if you had not, then it was a mistake, and you have made mistakes yourself."

"But think o' that gal of ours!" And the giant folded his face in his hands. Then his wife walked across to him, and with a tenderness that culture alone cannot bestow, put her arm around his neck. "Never mind, Bill, you must forgive the doctor; he meant ye no 'arm."

"I 'ave, I 'ave," muttered Warren. "Didn't I say so?"

"Now come, let us unpack this par-

cel," I said, anxious to change the conversation. "If there is anything more you want, Warren, you must let me know."

"Well, sir, 'ow long am I likely to be 'ere?"

"Oh! for some days. We shall have to think out what to do with you. You are all right and comfortable here, anyhow."

"Yes, sir, and the wife coming at night, she makes it all right."

"How does she manage to get away?"

"Well, sir, that nurse Hemily, as she calls herself, she's a wonderful woman. She's taken night duty, and then directly she comes on duty, the missus makes for a gap in the fence and don't go back till morning. Wonderful woman that, sir! But for 'er you'd be a dead man. She see'd me swim ashore, and then she listened to what I said to the wife, and went and told yer, sir. 'Ow glad I am now that she stopped me from 'urtin' yer. Yer should hear my missus tell 'ow she works that there cranky doctor up there; she just winds 'im round 'er finger. She got all of them things there out of 'im, as though for 'erself. Grand woman that, sir! I wish you knew 'er better, sir."

CHAPTER XV.

One night, it was at the time when things at the quarantine station were at their very worst, about half past 7, thoroughly sick at heart of complaints I could not remedy and wants I could not supply, I wandered in the direction of Warren's cave. We had become by this time great friends. I had forgotten all his threats of vengeance and learned to respect and admire him for his readiness to forgive, his tender love of his wife, and his patience under great suffering and privation, and therefore I did what I could in the way of supplying him with little luxuries, and seeing him as often as was prudent, that I might lighten his burden. This evening I thought I could safely absent myself for a couple of hours, and taking my fishing line, as a blind in the event of my being seen, I made for the cave. He was, as usual, very glad to see me, and together we sat at the mouth of the cave and smoked our pipes, while his wife made us a cup of tea over the spirit lamp; no other fire would have been, on account of the smoke, at all safe.

We were talking of old times—to him good old times; of the gold rush, when men picked up gold by the double handful, and spent it as freely. "Ah! them was the days, doctor," he was saying, "when a fellow wanted his eye teeth about 'im—But look at that there boat! She's beating up for the Heads, but she won't fetch them."

The boat to which he drew my attention was a good sized yacht that had been outside the Heads, either for a sail or for a fishing excursion. The night had come up equally, and she was evidently late in her return. She carried little canvas, and was coming in the teeth of the wind. Although knowing nothing of sailing myself, I grew intensely interested as Warren (who, like most middle aged colonialists, knew all the arts of navigation) dilated on the science of getting through the narrow opening that forms such a dangerous, and yet, at the same time, such an easily defended entrance to Sydney harbor.

"Now you'll see, sir, he said, as the boat came very near to us, "she'll tack again, beat along the coast, and then in. There they go! I told ye so—My God!" he suddenly exclaimed, as the sails flapped and the yacht reeled, "she won't answer! She'll be wrecked!"

And sure enough, the next sea brought her nearer the dangerous coast below, and the next nearer still. Then Warren grew desperate. Regardless of danger, he rushed out of the cave, and, bidding me follow, hurried down the side of the cliff.

By the time we reached the edge of my table rock she was close in to us, and we could plainly distinguish a woman's form holding onto the mast, and that of an old man encouraging the two sailors in charge.

"There's no chance for them," I heard Warren say, half to himself. "She must go to pieces. What is the best thing to do? You ought to know."

"A rope, sir; if we only had a rope."

(To be continued.)

In Suspense.

"So you don't know whether you want to go to work or not?"

"Well, ruh," answered Mr. Erastus Finkley. "I'd like de refusal ob de job a little while."

"But I need somebody right away."

"In dat case I'll hab to let it go by. I'ze jes' bought a policy ticket, an' I'll hafta wait till atuh de drawin' to see whether I'ze gwine to work at all or not."

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Once my sister Floy was sent on an errand for some things for my mother. There was a traveling man there who was selling some carpet spankers, and he asked her:

"Has your mother got one of these spankers?"

"No, sir," she replied.

"What does she use?" he asked.

"Her hand," was the prompt reply.

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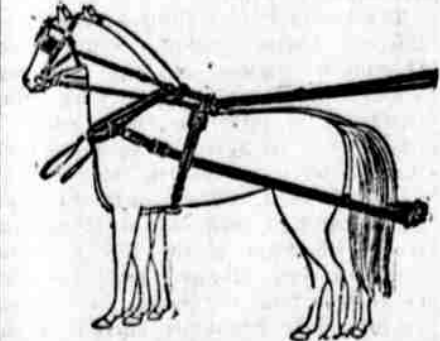
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