

The Story of an African Farm

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vancing in the kitchen; coffee is liberally handed round, and amid a profound sensation and the firing of guns the horse wagon draws up, and the wedding party alight. Bride and bridegroom, with their attendants, march solemnly to the marriage chamber, where led and boxed are decked out in white with ends of ribbon and artificial flowers and where on a row of chairs the party solemnly wait their turn. After time bridesmaid and best man rise and conduct in with ceremony each individual guest to wish success and to kiss bride and bridegroom. Then the feast is set on the table, and is almost unmet before the dishes are cleared away and the pleasure of the day begins.

Everything is removed from the great front room, and the mud floor, well rubbed with bullock's blood, glistens like polished mahogany. The furniture is arranged in the side rooms to attract themselves for the evening and resound in white muslin and gay with bright ribbons and brass jewelry. The dancing begins as the first tallow candles are set up about the walls, the music coming from a couple of fiddlers in a corner of the room. Bride and bridegroom open the ball, and the floor is soon covered with whirling couples, and every one's spirits rise. The bridal pair mingle freely in the throng, and here and there a misanthropic man sings vigorously as he drags his partner through the "Blue Water" or "John Sperdy" boys shout and applaud, and the enjoyment and confusion are intense till 11 o'clock. By this time the children who swarm in the side rooms are not to be kept quiet longer, even by bunches of bread and cake. There is a general howl and wait that rises yet higher than the scraping of fiddles, and mothers rush from the partners to knock small heads together and cuff little nursemaids and force the wallers down into unoccupied corners of beds, under tables and behind boxes. In half an hour every variety of childish noise is heard on all sides, and it has become perilous to raise one's foot in any of the side rooms lest a small head or hand should be crushed. Now, too, the busy feet have broken the solid coating of the floor, and a cloud of fine dust arises that makes a yellow haze round the dancers, and asthmatic people coughing and grows denser till to recognize any one on the opposite side of the room becomes impossible, and a partner's face is seen through a yellow mist.

At 12 o'clock the lights are led to the marriage chamber and undressed. The lights are blown out, and the bridegroom is brought to the door by the best man, who gives him the key. Then the door is shut and locked, and the revels rise higher than ever. There is no thought of sleep till midnight, and no unoccupied spot where sleep may be found.

It was at this stage of the proceedings on the night of Tant' Sannie's wedding that Lyndall sat near the doorway in one of the side rooms to watch the dancers as they appeared and disappeared in the yellow cloud of dust. Gregory sat moodily in a corner of the large dancing room. His little betrothed touched his arm.

"I wish you would go and ask Lyndall to dance with you," she said. "She must be so tired. She has sat still the whole evening."

"I have asked her three times," replied her lover shortly. "I'm not going to be her dog and creep to her feet, just to give her the pleasure of kicking me—not for you, Em, nor for anybody else."

"Oh, I didn't know you had asked her, Greg," said his little betrothed humbly, and she went away to pour out coffee.

Nevertheless some time after Gregory found he had shifted so far toward the room as to be close to the door where Lyndall sat. After standing for some time he inquired whether he might not bring her a cup of coffee.

"Thank you," she said, and he stepped into the bedroom.

"May I not bring you a stein, Miss Lyndall, to put your feet on?"

"Thank you," she said, and he stepped into the bedroom.

"There is a draft from that broken window. Shall I stuff something in the pane?"

"No, no want air."

Gregory looked round, but nothing else was doing. He sat down on a box on the opposite side of the door. Lyndall sat before him, her chin resting in her hand. Her eyes, steel gray by day, lit black by night, looked through the doorway into the next room. After a time he thought she had entirely forgotten his presence, and he dared to inspect the little hands and neck as he never dared when he was in momentary dread of the eyes being turned upon him. She was dressed in black, which seemed to tinge her yet further from the white and gawgawed women about her, and the little hands were white, and the diamond ring glittered. Where had she got that ring? He bent forward a little and tried to decipher the letters, but the candlelight was too faint. When he looked up, her eyes were fixed on him, as if she was looking at him—not Gregory, but as she had ever looked at him before; not as though he were a stump or a stone that chance had thrown in her way. Tonight, whether it were criticall or kindly or unkindly, he could not tell, but she looked at him, at the man, Gregory Rose, with attention. A vague elation filled him. He clinched his fist tight to think of some good idea he might express to her, but of all those profound things he had pictured himself as saying to her, when he sat alone in the daub and wattle house, not one came. He said at last:

"These Boer dances are very low things. And then, as soon as it had gone from him, he thought it was not a clever remark and wished it back.

Before Lyndall replied Em looked in at the door.

"Oh, come," she said. "They are going to have the cushion dance. I do not want to miss any of these fellows. Take me quickly."

She slipped her hand into Gregory's arm.

"It is so dusty, Em. Do you care to dance any more?" he asked without rising.

"Oh, I do not mind the dust, and the dancing rests me."

But he did not move.

"I feel tired. I do not think I shall dance again," he said.

Em withdrew her hand, and a young farmer came to the door and bore her

"I have often imagined," remarked Gregory, but Lyndall had risen.

"I am tired," she said, "I wonder where Waldo is. He must take me home. These people will not leave off till morning, I suppose. It is 3 already."

She made her way past the fiddlers and a bench full of tired dancers and passed out at the front door. On the "steep" a group of men and boys were smoking, peeping in at the windows and cracking coarse jokes. Waldo was certainly not among them, and she made her way to the carriage and was drawn up at some distance from the homestead.

"Waldo," she said, peering into a large cart, "is that you? I am so dazed with the tallow candles I see nothing."

His head was hidden in a place between the two seats. She climbed up and sat on the sloping floor in front.

"I thought I should find you here," she said, drawing her skirt up about her shoulders. "You must take me home presently, but not now."

She leaned her head on the seat near to his, and they listened in silence to the fitful twanging of the fiddles as the night wind bore it from the farmhouse and to the occasional thud of the dancers and the laughter.

She stretched out her little hand to feel for his.

"It is so nice to be here and hear that noise," she said. "I like to feel that strange life beating up against me. I like to realize some of the things that are like mine." She drew a long breath. "When my own life feels small and I am oppressed with it, I like to crush together and see it in a picture, in an instant, a multitude of disconnected unlike phases of human life—miserable, miserable, with the sting of death, the quiet orchard and looking up from the grass at his feet to the heavy fruit trees; little Malay boys playing naked on a shining beach; a Hindu philosopher gazing under his beard, thinking, thinking, thinking, so that in the thought of God he may lose himself; a troop of fleecy-haired men dressed in white, with crowns of white leaves, dancing along the Roman streets; a merry on the slight of his feet, looking through the archway of a doorway to the sky as if feeling that already he has the wings that shall bear him up" (she moved her hand dramatically over her face); "an epicurean discoursing at a Roman bath to a knot of his disciples on the nature of happiness; a Kaffir witch doctor seeking for herbs by moonlight, while from the huts on the hillside come the sound of dogs barking and the voices of women and children; a mother giving bread and milk to her children in little wooden basins and singing the evening song. I like to see it all. I feel it run through me. That life belongs to me. It makes my little life large. It breaks down the narrow walls that shut me in."

She sighed and drew a long breath.

"Have you made any plans?" she asked him presently.

"Yes," he said, the words coming in jets, with pauses between. "I will take the gray mare. I will travel light. I will see the world. Then I will find work."

"What work?"

"I do not know."

She made a little impatient movement.

"That is no plan—travel, see the world, find work! If you go into the world, without a definite object, dreaming, dreaming, you will be ultimately defeated. You must find a way and stick to it. In the end you will stand with your beautiful life all spent and nothing to show. They talk of genius. It is nothing but this—a man knows what he can do best and does it and nothing else. Waldo, she said, knitting her little fingers, "closer among his. 'I wish I could help you. I wish I could make you see that you must decide what you will be and do. It does not matter what you choose. Be a farmer, business man, artist, live for that one thing. We have only one life. The secret of success is concentration. Wherever there has been a great life or a great work, that has gone before. Taste everything that is little, but do not taste anything that is for one thing. Anything is possible to a man who knows his end and moves straight for it, and for it alone. I will show you what I mean," she said conclusively. "Words are gas, till you condense them into pictures."

"Suppose a woman, young, fit, and as I am, the weakest thing on God's earth. But she must make her way through life. What she would be she cannot be because she is a woman, so she looks carefully at herself and the world about her to see where her path must be made. There is no one to help her. She must help herself. She looks. These things she has—wealth, a fair, very fair face, with a power of concentrating in it itself and giving expression to feelings that other women have been disposed in words, a rare power of entering into other lives, unlike her own and intuitively reading them aright. These qualities she has. How shall she use them?"

"As a poet, a writer, needs only the mental. What use does she have for a beautiful body that registers clearly mental emotions? And the painter wants an eye for form and color, and the musician an ear for time and tone, and the more drudge has no need for mental gifts. But there is one art in which all she has would be used, for which they are all necessary—the delicate, expressive body, the rich voice, the power of mental transportation. The actor, who absorbs and then reflects from himself other human lives, needs them all, but needs not much more. This is her end, but how to reach it? Before her are endless difficulties. Some must be crossed, poverty must be endured, loneliness must be sought. She must be content to wait long before she can even get her feet upon the path. If she has made blunders in the past, if she has weighed herself with a burden which she must bear to the end, she must bear the burden bravely and labor on. There is no use in walling and repentance here. The next world is the plan for that. This life is too short. By our errors we see deeper into life. They help us."

She waited for a while. "If she does all this—if she waits patiently, if she is never cast down, never despondent, never forgets her end, moves straight toward it, bending men and things most unlikely to her purpose—she must succeed at last. Men and things are plastic. They part to the right and left when she comes upon them moving in a straight line to one end. I know it by my own little experience," she said. "Long years ago I resolved to be sent to school. It seemed a thing utterly out of my power, but I waited. I watched, I collected, I collected. I collected my place at the school. When all was ready, I bore with my full force on the Boer woman, and she went on at last. It was a small thing, but it is made up of small things, as body is built up of cells. What has been done in small things can be done in large. I shall be," she said softly. Waldo listened. To him the words were in confusion, no glimpse into the strong,

proud, restless heart of the woman. They were general words with a general application. He looked up into the sparkling sky with dull eyes.

"Yes," he said, "but when we lie up at a drug store, there for a doctor to come and see his child, then very sick with croup. Not finding the doctor in, he left word for him to come at once on his return. He also bought a Lottie of Chamberlain's Cough Remedy, which he hoped would give some relief until the doctor should arrive. In a few hours he returned, saying the doctor need not come, as the child was much better. The druggist, Mr. Otto Scholz, says the family has since recommended Chamberlain's Cough Remedy to their neighbors and friends until he has a constant demand for it from that part of the country. For sale at the Delta Drug Store."

It is very hard to stand idly by and see our dear ones suffer while awaiting the arrival of the doctor. An Albany, N. Y., dairyman called at a drug store, there for a doctor to come and see his child, then very sick with croup. Not finding the doctor in, he left word for him to come at once on his return. He also bought a Lottie of Chamberlain's Cough Remedy, which he hoped would give some relief until the doctor should arrive. In a few hours he returned, saying the doctor need not come, as the child was much better. The druggist, Mr. Otto Scholz, says the family has since recommended Chamberlain's Cough Remedy to their neighbors and friends until he has a constant demand for it from that part of the country. For sale at the Delta Drug Store.

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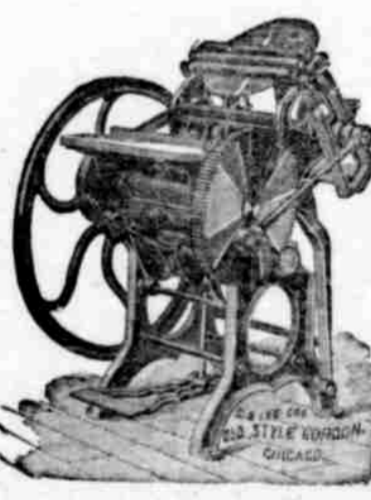
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