The Story of an African Farm

Continued from First Page

forward, then stood with bent backs to keep it from sliding back. From the black ox's nostril foam and blood were streaming on to the ground. It turned its head in its anguish and looked at me with its great starting eyes. It was praying for help in its agony and weakness, and they took their whips again. The creature bellowed out aloud. If there is a God, it was calling to its Maker for help. Then a stream of clear blood burst from both nostrils. It fell on to the ground, and the wagon slipped back. The man walked up to it.

"'You are going to lie down, devil, are you? We'll see you don't take it too easy.'

"The thing was just dying. He opened his clasp knife and stooped down over it. I do not know what I did then, but afterward I know I had him on the stones, and I was kneeling on him. The boys dragged me off. I wish they had not. I left him standing in the sand in the road, shaking himself, and I walked back to town. I took nothing from that accursed wagon, so I had only 2 shillings. But it did not matter. The next day I got work at a wholesale store. My work was to pack and unpack goods and to carry boxes, and I had only to work from 6 in the morning till 6 in the evening, so I had plenty of time.

"I hired a little room and subscribed to a library, so I had everything I needed, and in the week of Christmas holidays I went to see the sea. I walked all night, Lyndall, to escape the heat, and a little after sunrise I got to the top of a hill. Before me was a long, low, blue, monotonous mountain. I walked looking at it, but I was thinking of the sea I wanted to see. At last I wondered what that curious blue thing might be. Then it struck me it was the sea. I would have turned back again, only I was too tired. I wonder if all the things we long to see—the churches, the pictures, the men in Europe—will disappoint us so. You see, I had dreamed of it so long. When I was a little boy, minding sheep behind the 'kopje,' I used to see the waves stretching out as far as the eye could reach in the sunlight. My sea! Is the ideal always more beautiful than the real?

"I got to the beach that afternoon, and I saw the water run up and down on the sand, and I saw the white foam breakers. They were pretty, but I thought I would go back the next day. It was not my sea.

"But I began to like it when I sat by it that night in the moonlight, and the next day I liked it better, and before I left I loved it. It was not like the sky and stars, that talk of what has no beginning and no end, but it is no human. Of all the things I have ever seen, only the sea is like a human being. The sky is not, nor the earth. But the sea is always moving. Always something deep in itself is stirring it. It never rests. It is always wanting, wanting, wanting. It hurries on, and then it creeps back slowly without having reached, moaning. It is always asking a question, and it never gets the answer. I can hear it in the day and in the night. The white foam breakers are saying that which I think. I walk alone with them when there is no one to see me, and I sing with them. I lie down on the sand and watch them with my eyes half shut. The sky is better, but it is so high above our heads. I love the sea. Sometimes we must look down too. After five days I went back to Grahamstown.

"I had glorious books, and in the night I could sit in my little room and read them, but I was lonely. Books are not the same things when you are living among people. I cannot tell why, but they are dead. On the farm they would have been living beings to me, but here, where there were so many people about me, I wanted some one to belong to me. I was lonely. I wanted something that was flesh and blood. Once on this farm there came a stranger. I did not ask his name, but he sat among the 'karroo' and talked with me. Now, wherever I have travelled I have looked for him. In hotels, in streets, in passenger wagons as they rushed in, through the open windows of houses, I have looked for him, but I have not found him, never heard a voice like his. One day I went to the botanic gardens. It was a half holiday, and the band was to play. I stood in the long raised avenue and looked down. There were many flowers, and ladies and children were walking about beautifully dressed. At last the music began. I had not heard such music before. At first it was slow and even, like the everyday life when we walk through it without thought or feeling. Then it grew faster; then it paused, hesitated; then it was quite still for an instant, and then it burst out. Lyndall, they made heaven right when they made it all music. It takes you up and carries you away, away, till you have the things you longed for. You are up close to them. You have got out into a large, free, open place. I could not see anything while it was playing. I stood with my head against my tree, but when it was done I saw that there were ladies sitting close to me on a wooden bench, and the stranger who had talked to me that day in the 'karroo' was sitting between them.

"The ladies were very pretty and their dresses beautiful. I do not think they had been listening to the music, for they were talking and laughing very softly. I heard all they said and could even smell the rose on the breast of one. I was afraid he would see me, so I went to the other side of the tree, and soon they got up and began to pace up and down in the avenue. All the time the music played they chatted, and he carried on his arm the scarf of the prettiest lady. I did not hear the music. I tried to catch the sound of his voice each time he went by. When I was listening to the music, I did not know I was badly dressed. Now I felt so ashamed of myself. I never knew before what a low, horrible thing I was, dressed in tan cord. That day on the farm when we sat on the ground under the thorn trees I thought he quite belonged to me. Now I saw he was not mine. But he was still as beautiful. His brown eyes are more beautiful than any one's eyes, except yours.

"At last they turned to go, and I walked after them. When they got out of the gate, he helped the ladies into a phaeton and stood for a moment, with his foot on the step, talking to them. He had a little cane in his hand, and an Italian greyhound ran after him. Just when they drove away one of the ladies dropped her whip.

"'Pick it up, fellow,' she said, and when I brought it to her she threw sixpence on the ground. I might have gone back to the garden then. But I did not want music. I wanted clothes and to be fashionable and fine. I felt that my hands were coarse and that I was vulgar. I never tried to see him again. I staid in my situation four months after that, but I was not happy. I had no rest. The people about me pressed on me and made me dissatisfied. I could not forget them.

"Only one day something made me happy. A nurse came to the store with a little girl belonging to one of our clerks. While the maid went into the office to give a message to its father the little child stood looking at me. Presently she came close to me and peeped up into my face.

"'Nice curls, pretty curls,' she said. 'I like curls.'

"She felt my hair all over with her little hands. When I put out my arm she let me take her and sit her on my knee. She kissed me with her soft mouth. We were happy till the nurse-girl came and shook her and asked her if she was not ashamed to sit on the knee of that strange man. But I do not think my little one minded. She laughed at me as she went out.

"If the world was all children, I could like it, but men and women draw me so strangely and then press me away till I am in agony. I was not meant to live among people. Perhaps some day, when I am grown older, I will be able to go and live among them and look at them, as I look at the rocks and bushes, without letting them disturb me and take myself from me, but not now. So I grew miserable. A kind of fever seemed to eat me. I could not rest or read or think, so I came back here. I knew you were not here, but it seemed as though I should be nearer you, and it is you I want, you that the other people suggest to me, but cannot give."

"It has been a delightful journey, this journey home. I have walked on foot. The evening before last, when it was just sunset, I was a little footsore and thirsty and went out of the road to look for water. I went down into a deep little 'kloof.' Some trees ran along the bottom, and I thought I should find water there. The sun had quite set when I got to the bottom of it. It was very still. Not a leaf was stirring anywhere. In the bed of the mountain torrent I thought I might find water. I came to the bank and leaped down into the dry bed. The floor on which I stood was of fine white sand, and the banks rose on every side like the walls of a room. Above there was a precipice of rocks, and a tiny stream of water oozed from them and fell slowly on to the flat stone below. Each drop you could hear fall like a little silver bell. There was one among the trees on the bank that stood cut out against the white sky. All the other trees were silent, but this one shook and trembled against the sky. Everything else was still, but those leaves were quivering, quivering. I stood on the sand. I could not go away. When it was quite dark and the stars had come, I crept out. Does it seem strange to you that it should have made me so happy? It is because I cannot tell you how near I felt to things that we cannot see, that we always feel. To-night has been a wild, stormy night. I have been walking across the plain for hours in the dark. I have liked the wind, because I have seemed forcing my way through to you. I knew you were not here, but I would hear of you. When I used to sit on the transport wagon half sleeping, I used to start awake because your hands were on me. In my lodgings many nights I have blown the light out and sat in the dark that I might see your face start out more distinctly. Sometimes it was the little girl's face who used to come to me behind the 'kopje' when I minded sheep and sit by me in her blue pinafore. Sometimes it was the elder. I love both. I am very helpless. I shall never do anything, but you will work, and I will take your work for mine. Sometimes such a sudden gladness seizes me when I remember that somewhere in the world you are living and working. You are my very own. Nothing else is my own so. When I have finished, I am going to look at your room door"—

He wrote, and the wind, which had spent its fury, moaned round and round the house, most like a tired child weary with crying.

Em woke up and sat before the fire, rubbing her eyes and listening as it sobbed about the gables and wandered away over the long stone walls.

"You have many letters to write," she said.

"No," he answered. "It is only one to Lyndall."

She turned away and stood long before the fire looking into it. If you have a deadly fruit to give, it will not grow sweeter by keeping.

"Waldo, dear," she said, putting her hand on his, "leave off writing."

He threw back the dark hair from his forehead and looked at her.

"It is no use writing any more," she said.

"Why not?" he asked.

She put her hand over the papers he had written.

"Waldo," she said, "Lyndall is dead."

CHAPTER XXV.

GREGORY'S WOMANHOOD.

Slowly over the flat came a cart. On the back seat sat Gregory, his arms folded, his hat drawn over his eyes. A Kaffir boy sat on the front seat driving, and at his feet sat Doss, who now and again lifted his nose and eyes above the level of the splash board to look at the surrounding country and then, with an exceedingly knowing wink of his left eye, turned to his companions, thereby intimating that he clearly perceived his whereabouts. No one noticed the cart coming. Waldo, who was at work at his carpenter's table in the wagon house, saw nothing till, chancing to look down, he perceived Doss standing before him, the legs trembling, the little nose wrinkled and a series of short, suffocating barks giving utterance to his joy at reunion.

Em, whose eyes had ached with looking out across the plain, was now at work in a back room and knew nothing till, looking up, she saw Gregory, with his straw hat and blue eyes, standing in the doorway. He greeted her quietly, hung his hat up in its old place behind the door, and for any change in his manner or appearance he might have been gone only the day before to fetch letters from the town. Only his beard was gone, and his face was grown thinner. He took off his leather gaiters, said the afternoon was hot and the roads dusty and asked for some tea. They talked of wool and the cattle and the sheep, and Em gave him the pile of letters that had come for him during the months of absence, but of the thing that lay at their hearts neither said anything. Then he went out to look at the kraals, and at supper Em gave him hot cakes and coffee. They talked about the servants and then ate their meal in quiet.

She came and sat on a footstool near him.

"Do you wish to hear anything?" he asked.

She whispered, "Yes, if it does not hurt you."

Yet he lay quiet for a long time. The light through the open door showed him to her, where he lay, with his arm thrown across his eyes. At last he spoke. Perhaps it was a relief to him to speak.

To Bloemfontein, in the Free State, to which through an agent he had traced them, Gregory had gone. At the hotel where Lyndall and her stranger had staid he put up. He was shown the very room in which they had slept. The colored boy who had driven them to the next town told him in which house they had boarded, and Gregory went on. In that town he found they had left the cart and bought a spider and four grays, and Gregory's heart rejoiced. Now, indeed, it would be easy to trace their course, and he turned his steps northward.

At one desolate farm the Boer had a good deal to tell. The lady had said she liked a wagon that stood before the door. Without asking the price the Englishman had offered £150 for the old thing and bought oxen worth £10 for £16. The Dutchman chuckled, for he had the "Salt-rein's" money in the box under his bed. Gregory laughed, too, in silence. He could not lose sight of them now, so slowly they would have to move with that cumbrous ox wagon. Yet when that evening came and he reached a little wayside inn no one could tell him anything of the travelers.

The master, a surly creature, half stupid with Boer brandy, sat on the bench before the door smoking. Gregory sat beside him, questioning, but he smoked on. He remembered nothing of such strangers. How should he know who had been there months and months before? He smoked on. Gregory, very weary, tried to awake his memory; said that the lady he was seeking for was very beautiful, had a little mouth and tiny, very tiny feet. The man only smoked on as sullenly as at first. What were little, very little, mouths and feet to him? But his daughter leaned out in the window above. She was dirty and lazy and liked to loll there when travelers came to hear the men talk, but she had a soft heart. Presently a hand came out of the window, and a pair of velvet slippers touched his shoulder, tiny slippers with black flowers. He pulled them out of her hand. Only one woman's feet had worn them; he knew that.

"Left here last summer by a lady," said the girl; "might be the one you are looking for; never saw any feet so small."

They might have come in a wagon and spider; she could not tell. But the gentleman was very handsome, tall, lovely figure, blue eyes, wore gloves always when he went out; an English officer, perhaps; no Afrikander, certainly.

Gregory stopped her.

The lady? Well, she was pretty, rather, the girl said; very cold, dull air, silent. They staid for, it might be, five days; slept in the wing over against the "stoep;" quarreled sometimes, she thought—the lady. She had seen everything when she went in to wait. One day the gentleman touched her hair. She drew back from him as though his fingers poisoned her; went to the other end of the room if he came to sit near her; walked out alone; cold wife for such a handsome husband, the girl thought. She evidently pitied him, he was such a beautiful man. They went away early one morning, how or in which way the girl could not tell.

Gregory inquired of the servants, but nothing more was to be learned, so the next morning he saddled his horse and went on. At the farms he came to the good old "ooms" and "tantes" asked him to have coffee, and the little shoeless children peeped out at the stranger from behind ovens and gables, but no one had seen what he asked for. This way and that he rode to pick up the thread he had dropped, but the spider and the wagon, the little lady and the handsome gentleman, no one had seen. In the towns he fared yet worse.

Once indeed hope came to him. On the "stoep" of a hotel at which he staid the night in a certain little village there walked a gentleman, grave and kindly looking. It was not hard to open conversation with him about the weather, and then— Had he ever seen such and such people, a gentleman and lady, a spider and wagon, arrive at that place? The kindly gentleman shook his head. What was the lady like? he inquired.

Gregory painted—hair like silken floss, small mouth, underlip very full and pink; upper lip pink, but very thin and curled. There were four white spots on the nail of her right hand forefinger, and her eyebrows were very delicately curved. The gentleman looked thoughtful, as trying to remember.

"Yes, and a rosebud tinge in the cheeks, hands like lilies and perfectly seraphic smile."

"That is she! That is she!" cried Gregory.

Who else could it be? He asked where she had gone to. The gentleman most thoughtfully stroked his beard. He would try to remember. Were not her ears— Here such a violent fit of coughing seized him that he ran away into the house. An ill fed clerk and a dirty barman standing in the doorway laughed aloud. Gregory wondered if they could be laughing at the gentleman's cough, and then he heard some one laughing in the room into which the gentleman had gone. He must follow him and try to learn more, but he soon found that there was nothing more to be learned there. Poor Gregory!

One day, coming to a little town, his horses knocked up, he resolved to rest them there. The little hotel of the town was a bright and sunny place, like the jovial face of the clean little woman who kept it and who trotted about talking always; talking to the customers in the taproom and to the maids in the kitchen and to the passersby when she could hail them from the windows; talking, as good natured women with large mouths and small noses always do, in season and out.

There was a little front parlor in the hotel, kept for strangers who wanted to be alone. Gregory sat there to eat his breakfast, and the landlady dusted the room and talked of the great finds at the diamond fields and the badness of maidservants and the shameful conduct of the Dutch parson in that town to the English inhabitants. Gregory ate his breakfast and listened to nothing. He had asked his one question, had had his answer. Now she might talk on.

Presently a door in the corner opened, and a woman came out—a Mozambiquer, with a red handkerchief twisted round her head. She carried in her hand a tray with a slice of toast crumbled fine and a half filled cup of coffee and an egg broken open, but not eaten. Her ebony face grinned complacently as she shut the door softly and said, "Good morning."

The landlady began to talk to her.

"You are not going to leave her really, Ayah, are you?" she said. "The maids say so, but I'm sure you wouldn't do such a thing."

The Mozambiquer grinned.

"Husband says I must go home."

"But she hasn't got any one else and won't have any one else. Come, now," said the landlady. "I've no time to be sitting always in a sickroom, not if I was paid anything for it."

The Mozambiquer only showed her white teeth good naturedly for answer and went out, and the landlady followed her.

Gregory, glad to be alone, watched the sunshine as it came over the fuchsias in the window and ran up and down on the paneled door in the corner. The Mozambiquer had closed it loosely behind her, and presently something touched it inside. It moved a little. Then it was still, then moved again. Then through the gap a small nose appeared and a yellow ear overlapping one eye. Then the whole head obtruded, placing itself critically on one side, wrinkled its nose disapprovingly at Gregory and withdrew. Through the half open door came a fair scent of vinegar, and the room was dark and still.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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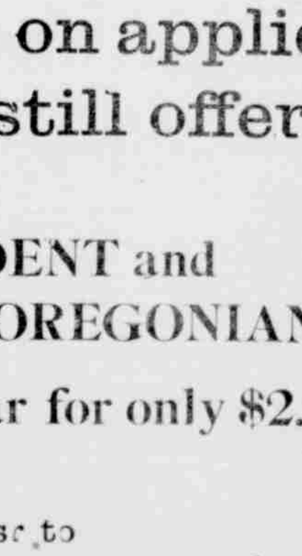

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8 p. m.	Ocean Steamships. For San Francisco sails every five days.	4 p. m.
8 p. m. Ex Sunday Saturday 10 p. m.	Columbia River To Astoria and way Landings	4 p. m. ex. Sunday
6 a. m. Ex Sunday	Willamette Rive Oregon City, Newberg, Salem & way-landings.	4:30 p. m ex. Sund
7 a. m. Tuesday Thursday and Satur	Willamette & Yamhill Rivers Oregon City, Dayton and way landings	3:30 p. m Mon Wed and Fri
6 a. m. Tues Thur and Sat.	Willamette River Corvallis and way landings	4:30 p.m. Tues Thu s and Sat
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