

A DOCTOR'S MISSION

BY EMILY THORNTON

Author of "ROY RUSSELL'S RULE,"
"GLENROY," "THE FASHIONABLE MOTHER," ETC.

CHAPTER XI.—(Continued.)

"O, my dear Miss Nevergill, the Fates certainly have befriended me this time! To think that I should have met thus your beautiful self, just as you start on a ramble, is too fortunate for belief! Which direction shall we go, for I at once constitute myself your devoted attendant."

"Mr. Glendenning, you will excuse me if I decline your services. I came out for a quiet walk by myself, and therefore shall not certainly trespass upon your time."

"Pardon me, my angel, my time is of no consequence at all. I must insist upon accompanying you, as I could never allow so lovely a lady to stroll around without a protector."

"Sir," said Ethel, now really losing patience, "there is no danger certainly to be met in the short walk I intend to take in your uncle's grounds. But since you aver otherwise, I shall instantly return."

"You will do no such thing," was the insolent reply, as Robert sprang to her side, seized her hand, and drawing it firmly under his arm, held it tight, and thus drew her back to the walk. "When I propose walking with a charming girl, I usually do it."

"Sir, release my hand. I have no desire to go further. I shall merely add that your presence is disagreeable, and your words of flattery almost insulting."

"Notwithstanding that, my dearest girl—"

"I am neither your 'dearest girl,' nor your 'angel,' and you have no right to address me in that style. I am your uncle's secretary and amanuensis, and am here merely to carry out his wishes, and work, not to be attended by you in any way whatever," returned the indignant Ethel, disengaging her hand, and returning towards the house.

"Miss Nevergill, go, since you are so determined, but remember, although you decline my friendship, nothing you may do will provoke my enmity, and before many days you will spend hours in my company, voluntarily."

Ethel made no answer, and the next moment, re-entered the hall, leaving the chagrined youth to his bitter reflections.

In one of Dr. Elfenstein's visits he had been presented with a quantity of exceedingly choice flowers by a grateful patient, and suddenly remembering the dismal life Ethel Nevergill was leading, he resolved to divide them with her.

Driving, then, first to his own home before seeking the hall, he selected the most beautiful, and forming them into a graceful bouquet, drove into the ramble with them in his hand.

Belle was in the drawing room and saw him leap from the gig, with his floral prize, so stepped quickly from the window that reached to the floor, in order to attract his attention, supposing, in her extreme vanity, that he would instantly present them to herself.

But to her deep chagrin, he merely made a few passing observations, and walked on, carrying the coveted flowers with him. Biting her lips in keen vexation, she muttered as she retreated to the room she had left:

"I will stay here and watch for his return. Something seems to tell me that those flowers are for that odious Ethel Nevergill. If they are—"

She did not finish her sentence audibly, but the ominous look in her eyes told of bitter feelings that would seek some petty revenge.

Ethel was passing through the upper hall to her room when Dr. Elfenstein ran lightly up, and as he pronounced her name to detain her, she tarried until he reached her side.

"Miss Nevergill, I do not know whether you are as fond of flowers as I am, but I have brought you a few, hoping they may cheer you in your lonely duties."

"O, thank you, doctor! They will, indeed, as I love them dearly. These are perfect beauties and I shall prize them highly."

"That rose, I think, will adorn your hair to perfection. Allow me to fasten it there. May I?"

With a pleased blush the young girl bent her head, and with skillful fingers Earle placed it just above her small, white ear where it nestled lovingly, adding a new charm to her bright young face.

Just as he was finishing a step approached, and Belle, who could not restrain her curiosity another moment, as she heard him pause on the floor above, and then make some remark in a low tone, came upon the scene.

Just in time to see his hand leave the rose, and to see Ethel turn toward her own room, and disappear with the bouquet in her hand and a gratified smile hovering around her lips.

Waiting until she had seen the doctor leave the premises, and Ethel again repair to Sir Reginald's side, the malicious girl proceeded directly to that room, where she found the flowers carefully bestowed in a fancy vase upon the dressing case.

Seizing them without a moment's hesitation, she turned directly to the baronet's room. Ethel sat by the bed, and at his request was striving to cool his heated brow by gently moving a fan. Raising her eyes, to her astonishment, she recognized her flowers, but before she could claim them, Belle's angry voice arrested her attention.

"Sir Reginald," she exclaimed, "I think it my duty to inform you that Miss Nevergill seems to have forgotten her position as your assistant nurse, and paid dependent, and seizes every opportunity that offers to carry on sly flirtations with gentlemen. I just surprised Dr. Elfenstein placing that rose in her hair outside your door, while at the same time he gave her these flowers. Do you approve of such behavior?"

"Approve? No! Of course not!" he returned, flying into a passion at once, as she well knew he was sure to do. "Miss Nevergill, what business have you to conduct in that style? Did I bring you here to form intrigues with gentlemen?"

"You certainly did not," was the calm reply, "nor have I done so. Dr. Elfenstein is an old friend, and as such he presented me with the flowers Miss Glendenning has taken from my room. Being my own property now, I will thank her for their restoration." So saying, she reached forth her hand for them.

But Belle drew back, and scornfully replied:

"You shall never have them again. I assure you, as I shall instantly see that every stem, leaf and bud is destroyed. If you do not know your place better in this house than to put yourself on an equality with its visitors, you must be taught. Do you not think so, Sir Reginald?" she added, appealing to him.

"Certainly. Just take the trash away, and see that it is destroyed. I shall myself inform Dr. Elfenstein."

"You will not do that, surely, uncle. He would then be vexed with me," Belle hastily exclaimed. "I will destroy them, since you wish it also, but not until you promise to say nothing to him about it."

"Well, have it your own way; but if I do not, perhaps Miss Nevergill will."

"She dare not! she knows it would seem unmaidenly to mourn over the loss of a few flowers that were his gift, in his presence. I am not at all afraid of her doing so."

So saying, regardless of Ethel's beseeching words and looks, the spiteful girl left the room with her ill-gotten treasures, and Ethel saw them no more.

Sir Reginald remained excited, cross and nervous, for some time after this scene, and poor Ethel found it almost impossible to please him in anything she attempted.

The sight of the flower she still wore seemed to aggravate him, although he made no further comments upon the subject, but Ethel felt that without a direct command she was not required to remove it.

Therefore it remained, and when Dr. Elfenstein returned in the afternoon for his usual second visit to the sick man, he smiled, as his eyes rested upon it, but never was told the fate of the rest of his offering, nor heard of the hard words she had endured on account of his friendly gift.

CHAPTER XII.

After Robert Glendenning had been so justly repulsed, by Ethel in the grounds of the hall, he felt exceedingly ill used, and the more he pondered over the coldness of this beautiful girl towards himself, the more he felt inclined to punish her want of appreciation of his merits as a handsome, wealthy and popular young man.

Immediately after his last adventure with Ethel, while yet chafed and sore on account of it, his sister gave him a graphic account of the presentation of the flowers by Dr. Elfenstein, and her own bold destruction of them, then concluded by saying:

"She is a proud, stuck-up thing, and I do delight in humiliating her lofty feelings. I intend to do all I can to bring her from the high pedestal on which she has perched, and if I can only incense Sir Reginald against her, so that he will send her away, I shall be delighted. Bob, I wish you would help me."

"I will do all I can to reduce her abominable pride, I assure you, though I do not care to have her sent away. She shall, however, repent snubbing me as she did yesterday."

"Snubbing you! What do you mean? Did she really dare to do that?"

Robert then related his experience with the subject of their discussion.

"The idiot! She does not deserve your further notice! However, if I see a chance to lower her in Sir Reginald's esteem I shall do it. If needful, I shall also call on you for assistance."

That afternoon the wished for opportunity arrived.

Belle happened to be in her uncle's room a few moments, when she heard the following conversation take place, which gave her a plan upon which to work.

Sir Reginald had received a note from a neighbor in reference to some very important private business, which he found necessary to attend to immediately.

Wishing some intelligent person to see and converse with Mr. Perkins in regard to the matter, he had explained his views to Ethel before Belle had entered, and was just saying:

"Do you think you could find Perkins for me, and attend to this important work, Miss Nevergill?"

"I do. I understand your wishes perfectly now; so if you can direct me there, I will go at once."

"You had better not go around the road, as the walk would be full a mile and a half, but go from the rear of the

hall and take a short cut through the fields. There will only be a couple of bars to lower, and the path is direct and plain."

"Then I will start at once."

"It will only take you until five o'clock to go and return. Please be as quick as possible in getting back, as I shall need you by that time. You understand, I wish you to hurry. I never like a person to loiter when I send them upon an errand."

Seeking Robert at once, Belle informed him of the errand Ethel had to transact for Sir Reginald, and his strict injunction that she should hasten back to his side.

"He told her the whole work could be accomplished by five o'clock. Now, Robert, I think it would provoke him greatly if she were detained until seven. Can you not intercept her on her return and manage to keep her away?"

"Yes, indeed. It will be splendid fun. I will do it. If I cannot keep her in any other way I will force her into a phaeton and take her off upon a ride."

"Do; then I will inform his lordship that she was seen riding with some strange young man."

"Ha, ha! good; and if she says it was this chap, I will deny it in full."

"And I will come in to prove an alibi. Where will you meet her?"

"Just the other side of the Perkins wood. I will have a horse and phaeton waiting on this side. There is a woodman's road there that leads to the main road; we can take that, and have a jolly long ride. But I shall have a fuss to get her into the vehicle, I expect; however, I shall manage it some way, never fear."

Laughing gayly over the fun in prospect the two separated to put in force the mischief they had brewed.

Poor Ethel left the house without a suspicion of what awaited her; glad, in fact, that she could thus enjoy a stroll after the confinement of that close, hard day.

She found Mr. Perkins at home, and soon explained the cause of her visit, and transacted the business with which she had been intrusted.

This completed, she turned her face homeward. All went well with her until she approached the woods. At their entrance she found, on consulting her watch that it was quarter past four.

"I shall reach the hall just about five," she thought, "and so please Sir Reginald. I would not have liked being late, after what he said."

Suddenly she was startled by a sound at her side, then, to her surprise and chagrin, Robert Glendenning stepped directly in her path.

"My dear Miss Nevergill, this is a delightful meeting in a delightful place. Where may your curiosity have taken you?"

"My curiosity, Mr. Glendenning, took me nowhere. I have merely been to transact a matter of business for Sir Reginald and am now on my way home. Being in a hurry, I would be glad to pass on."

"Not so fast, not so fast, my pretty girl; surely you will linger awhile in this romantic place, now that you have some one to enjoy the beauties of the wood with you?"

"No, Mr. Glendenning," was the dignified reply; "I cannot linger a moment. Sir Reginald desired my immediate return, and I cannot keep him waiting."

"Nevertheless, my sweet creature, he will wait; for you cannot return just now, as I intend for once to fully enjoy your society."

So saying, the bold young man attempted to take her hand, to draw it under his arm.

Snatching it instantly away, Ethel fixed upon him a stern look and ordered him to stand aside.

Not heeding her in the least, he impudently slipped his arm around her waist, exclaiming:

"Perhaps you would like this way of walking better. It makes no difference to me."

Shaking off his arm, Ethel pushed him aside indignantly, then with rapid steps pressed onward. Not a word more was spoken by either, although, to her dismay, Ethel found that he kept perseveringly by her side.

As they emerged from the woods, Robert grasped her arm firmly with one hand, while with the other he produced from his pocket a pistol, which he instantly pointed at her.

"Now, Miss Nevergill," he said, "you stand still and hear what I have to say, or take the consequences. I do not intend to harm you, if you keep perfectly quiet; but I do intend to show you that I am master of the situation at this time. You need not look round for assistance, for I assure you, no soul comes this way at this hour."

"Robert Glendenning," at last issued from the girl's pale lips, "put up that pistol instantly and allow me to pursue my way unmolested. Sir Reginald requires my presence immediately."

"So do I; and, what is more, I intend to have it, so he must wait. Do you see that horse and phaeton, behind those trees? They are there expressly to take you riding. I ask you therefore, politely, will you favor me with your company?"

"No, sir!"

"Yes, sir, you mean. If you do not mean it, it makes no difference, as ride with me you will. Go forward now, at once, to that conveyance, and let me assist you in; I assure you I will bring you back to the Hall in good season. Go on! I am determined you shall obey me!"

These words he enforced by planting the cold mouth of the weapon against her forehead. Now this 'pistol,' though it looked formidable, was not loaded, and he knew it, but for the sake of carrying his point, he intended fully to frighten her into complying with his strange wish. But Ethel was a brave girl, and though pale, she never even shuddered. Fixing her eyes fearlessly on his, she said in a firm, stern voice:

"If you think it manly, or wise, to shoot, shoot away! But I will not stir one step towards that phaeton."

(To be continued.)

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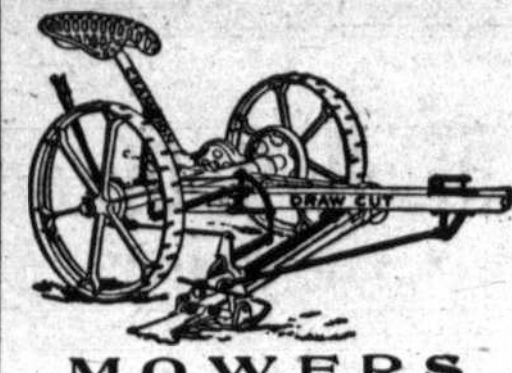
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