

A DOCTOR'S MISSION

BY EMILY THORNTON
Author of "ROY RUSSELL'S RULE,"
"GLENBOY," "THE FASHIONABLE MOTHER," ETC.

CHAPTER XVI.—(Continued.)

"But Sir Reginald compelled me to do it. I begged and entreated him to excuse me; I told him it was sinful, but he flew into a passion, and bade me disobey him on the peril of his everlasting displeasure. Sir, I was homeless, and he was sick! What was I to do?"

"Forgive me! You poor little girl, I was fast and cruel in my judgment. You were, indeed, obliged to execute the vile plans of the baronet. There," added he, tenderly, as he drew her hands from her face, and with his handkerchief wiped away her tears; "weep no more; you were not to blame. Child, give me your hand in token of forgiveness."

"Then you do not despise me?"
"Despise you? No! no! I only," he stopped; he was about to say "love you," but remembering his vow, he added softly, "pity you."

"Yes, you may pity me! Oh, auntie, auntie! why did I ever promise you to come to this wretched place?" was her wailing cry.

Still holding her hand in his, and also taking from her the candle, he turned and led her down the long, steep stairs. Only once did Ethel speak, then she merely said:

"Sir Reginald will be very angry if he hears of your entrance here! Must he be told?"

"I will think it over and let you know to-morrow. You must sleep to-night and so recover from this nervousness."

They soon reached the bottom stair, and entered the corridor. Then Ethel remembered that her work was but half done, and the rest could not be accomplished until Dr. Elfenstein had left her. Turning to him, she said:

"Will you kindly tell me how you entered this place? You must leave me now, going silently as you came."

"I will. I came through the ruins. I saw you open a door and reach for a basket, then I instantly entered."

"But surely, I fastened it again?"

"You were so agitated, you forgot to do it. I certainly opened it, without difficulty, and crept after you, eager to solve the mystery of the haunted tower, which I then, for the first time, began to connect with your movements. But you are weary now, so I will leave you, and return as I came."

Giving back the candle, he took her hand and was just saying, "Good night, Miss Nevergill," when suddenly both stopped short in their walk; both turned deadly pale, as a short, strange, loud report, close by their ears, startled and confounded them.

Then, to their horror, something darted towards them, a huge form swooped past, dashing the candle to the ground, thus extinguishing it, leaving them in total darkness and gloom.

"Oh, what is it? What is it?" cried the terrified girl, as she nestled close to her companion, while he, scarcely realizing what he did, threw his arms around her form, to protect her from the he knew not what.

Suddenly a wild, unearthly laugh, or yell, floated to them from the other end of the corridor, and as it passed, Dr. Elfenstein pressed the girl he held closer to his heart, and laid his cheek against her frightened face.

"Oh, do not leave me! I shall die! I shall die!" gasped Ethel.

"I will not. You are not so afraid now, and thus, close to me, are you, dear?"

"No; not so fearfully afraid as I was." Gently stroking her hair, the young man felt, even in the terror, inspired by their dreadful position, a feeling almost of rapture steal over him, as he held her thus close in his arms, with hers clinging to his waist. But suddenly, calmer reflections came; he felt this thing must be seen to; whatever presence had been near them must be discovered, and that he ought to follow up the sound.

"Child!" he whispered, "whatever has been near us, I know by that last cry, has escaped into the ruins, through the door by which I entered. That being so, I must in duty carry you to a place of safety, then search around to see what it could have been."

Instantly, then, it flashed over Ethel's mind, that the ape, Sir Reginald's choice concealed treasure, had escaped, and that the knife she had so carelessly given him had done the deed. He had cut his way out. Oh, the terror this thought thrust into her heart was almost unbearable! At once, she became, as it were, a dead weight again in the doctor's arms.

Then another thought came that imparted new life. Her oath had been taken never to reveal the existence of that animal, nor of the concealed room. In order to keep this vow, Dr. Elfenstein must not examine the premises.

She knew well now the meaning of that first report. The beast had knocked down the iron shelves, burst open the panels, and in consequence a light would show the doctor that opening, and the room beyond. No! he must never examine this corridor. Nervous herself for a new task, she said:

"Doctor, I cannot consent to being left a moment here alone! Nor will I consent to your exposing yourself further to-night. Take me, then, to my room, and we will look up this place, and you can steal softly from the house another way."

"But, Miss Nevergill, surely this ought to be investigated."

"Oh, no, please do not investigate! I cannot allow it, cannot endure it!"

As she spoke, a long, deep shudder passed over her frame, and the doctor, noticing it, knew at once that her nervous system could stand no more, therefore, felt it was best to yield.

"Shall I not, at least, light the candle?"

"No, no! I cannot bear it!" murmured the poor girl, horrified at the thought of what a light might reveal.

"Tell me, then, which way your room lies, and I shall carry you thither at once!"

"Straight! Just beyond the door by which you entered, through a passageway, my room lies opposite its door," she returned. "But, indeed, doctor, I can walk, if you will only let me hold to your arm. I would rather."

"Well, be it so!" returned the man, releasing her, yet still retaining her hand, which he drew under his arm.

When they neared the door of the ruin, however, Ethel felt a strong current of air upon her cheek, which revealed the fact that it stood wide open, and instantly a deadly fear of the horrible creature that had escaped, being still near, seized her, and again she shrank closer to her friend, while her faking steps told of departing strength.

Without a word, Earle Elfenstein lifted her in his arms, and so passed into the passageway. Remembering that his presence there must be kept a secret, the young girl whispered:

"Step softly; let no one hear!"

"I will," he breathed back, and guided by the dim light under the door indicated, he passed through, emerging from the open wardrobe, into the bed room beyond.

Placing her in a large easy chair, he stepped back, closed and fastened both doors, then returned to her side.

"Please, doctor," she murmured, "examine every part of this room before you go, to be sure the dreadful—the dreadful," she hesitated.

"Yes, I know," he interrupted, "and you will soon see you are perfectly safe." Obeying her wish, he then made a thorough search of room and closet. But as he supposed, nothing was to be seen.

"Now, how will you leave the house?" she murmured, anxiously.

A sly look back towards the corridor caused her to exclaim, in a whisper, as she laid her hand entreatingly on his arm:

"Not there, doctor, promise me you will not return to that place this night, but will go directly home."

Again Earle yielded to the pleading of the sweet girl beside him, and again answered:

"Then I must either drop from your window or go through the hall. Stay! I see a strong strap around your trunk. It is the very thing! I will fasten it to the balcony, and so slip down by its aid to the ground. Are you willing?"

"Perfectly. Doctor," she whispered, "do you know I should have died from fright had you not been there?"

"Yes, I know; and now, before I say good night, I shall mix you a composing draught, and then you must promise me, to go instantly to your bed, as soon as you take in the strap, and close the window, and the last thing, swallow the preparation I shall leave. Will you do this, in return for my not investigating further, what I see you do not wish explained?"

Ethel hesitated, then remembering that she could not see Sir Reginald that night, she gave the promise.

A moment more passed, and then the strap had been fastened, the doctor had whispered "Good night," and she watched him disappear amid the darkness and storm.

Darting out, she secured the strap without trouble, fastened down the window, and soon slept under the effects of the anodyne he had so thoughtfully left for her use.

Well indeed was it for her that she could sleep, for without some rest she could never have borne the terrible excitement that awaited her in the nearing hours of the coming day.

CHAPTER XVII.

The next morning Ethel attempted to rise, as usual, but found herself so ill with a sick headache that the attempt was vain. Every time she lifted her head from her pillow, it throbbed wildly, while a blind dizziness came over her to such an extent that she felt it were better to keep still for a while until it passed away.

At nine o'clock a servant came to her room, and she sent an excuse to the family for her non-appearance. About ten a message came from Sir Reginald, asking how soon she could come to him? She returned for answer that her head was still in such pain that she feared not until afternoon.

About five Dr. Elfenstein called to see his patient, and his lordship at once requested him to look after his secretary, saying that she was not able to come to him, while he was most anxious to see her. Mrs. Fredon was then dispatched to Miss Nevergill's room to prepare her for a visit from the doctor.

As the young man entered, he was really startled to see how wan and pale the excitement of the night before, and a few hours' illness, had made her. She had made several attempts to rise, and had succeeded in dressing herself, but the

exertion had overcome her, and once more she had been obliged to recline upon the bed, while her large dark eyes, and black dress, made her cheeks seem almost like snow.

"Oh, doctor!" she sighed, as he advanced and took her hand in his. "Can you give me something to stop this headache, so that I can go to Sir Reginald? He has wanted me all day, and has sent for me several times, and I must see him, but I cannot seem to get there."

"You have done right to keep still. I will give you a remedy that I think will cause you relief in an hour's time. Until then, you should try to sleep."

Preparing a liquid, he carefully held the tumbler to her lips, saw her drink it, then throwing a light shawl over her, left, saying as he did so:

"If you sleep now, I am almost certain you can visit his lordship in the length of time I mentioned."

It seemed that the medicine, and his calm, kind words did soothe her, for at once she fell into the restful sleep so much needed. The nap proved quite a long one, and it was seven o'clock in the evening before she crept through the hall, and with a trembling frame but head greatly relieved, entered Sir Reginald's presence. At once she saw that her illness had discomposed him, and that he was unusually irritable and nervous.

"I am sorry I could not come to you as usual," she began, but he interrupted her by saying crossly:

"Oh, yes; I dare say. Stop all apologies and while we are alone tell me if you obeyed my orders last night."

"I did," faltered the poor girl.

"Did the thing work well?" asked he, eagerly.

"It did. I had no trouble in the Tower, at all; but, O, Sir Reginald, something terrible has happened!"

"What?" exclaimed the sick man, starting up in so sudden a manner that it caused him to fall back with a groan, although he kept a firm grip on the arm he had seized in his excitement regardless of the fact that his tight grasp caused her to turn pale with pain.

"I dread telling you, but just as I left the Tower to push back the panels a frightful noise of a heavy fall came, then a large monster darted out, dashed the candle from my hand, and with a howl disappeared, leaving me half dead with fright."

"Girl! girl!" yelled the infuriated man, his face turning purple with rage, "what is this you tell me? Gone! Escaped! Speak!" added he, roughly shaking her by the arm. "Tell me it is a lie—a lie that you said just now!"

"No, Sir Reginald," returned the pallid Ethel; "it is the truth. Whatever you had there got out last night and ran off through the ruins!"

"What did you do wrong that made this happen? Answer, or I will tear you to pieces!"

"Release my arm, sir! You are cruel in your rage! You hurt me!"

"Speak then. How did he get out of his prison?"

With a faltering voice the frightened girl, while writhing in his grasp, murmured:

"I dropped the knife on the shelves a few nights before and forgot it. It whirled around, and I knew by the cry he gave that he had it."

"Idiot!" returned the enraged being before her, as he gave her arm such a fearful wrench that it dislocated the elbow. "Out of my sight; out of my house this instant! You have ruined me with your carelessness! Not another night shall you sleep under this roof!"

Once again he raised his arm—this time to strike. But fortunately, with a moan of pain at the injury she had already sustained, she had darted back, and so the blow descended on empty air.

Without another look at the man before her the poor young girl crept from his presence, and dragging herself back to her room, fastened herself in, while she sought to prepare for her departure. With her arm hanging motionless by her side, and nearly wild with pain, she opened her trunks and thrusting her valuables inside as well as she could with one hand, she locked them and dropped the key into her pocket.

Fearing, she scarcely knew what, she put the package of papers her aunt had given her, with her purse, also in her pocket, that she might be certain of their safety. Then hastily putting comb, brushes and night apparel in a hand satchel, she paused to rest.

Advancing to her window, she found that a heavy rain was still falling, and that darkness was even then over the earth. Throwing her waterproof over her shoulders, with its hood drawn over her hat, she opened her door and glided through the hall, down the stairs and out of the front entrance, fortunately without being seen by any of the family.

As she had passed the sick man's room she knew by the sound of many excited voices within that they had gone to his assistance, and she judged he must have injured his hip by his passionate frenzy.

While she pitied the man, she feared him, and never breathed freely until outside the door. Then with a hurried step she passed down the ramble.

Once away from the house and beyond the reach of Sir Reginald's wrath, she paused to consider whether she should go, and what she should do.

As she paused one thing seemed plain. She could do nothing until a physician attended to her wounded arm. In order to have this accomplished, it was evident that she must seek Dr. Elfenstein at his home.

She shrank from doing this. Still it could not be helped. Her arm could not be raised, and on that arm she depended now for her daily bread.

Once in the road beyond she could see lights in windows of dwelling houses far down the road. The first of them she knew was where Dr. Elfenstein lived, and hope revived once more, and she pressed on, thinking soon to be there.

(To be continued.)

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'Twas Ever Thus.

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Smith—What's the trouble?

Jones—I was foolish enough to let him owe me money.



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