

THE BATTLE WON.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DR. MEREDITH.

As Nessa recovered consciousness, she heard the roll of drums and the strident outburst of brass opening the triumphal march to which, the night before, she had been led to her place of honour, followed by a thunder of applause that drowned the music. But it came from a distance, that music, like the sounds in a dream, that stamping of feet and clapping of hands came from above, and she was bewildered with a strange sense of immobility and pain. What had happened? Had she fallen asleep? Was the spectacle being played without her? Where were the lights and the serried rows of spectators who applauded? It must be so—she has fallen asleep! For now, her eyes opening she saw a whitened ceiling, a gas jet flaring in its wire protector, all blurred and indistinct, but clearly enough for her to know that she was in one of the ante rooms of the arena, and she was lying down.

"Oh, I shall be late!" she cried in terror. "They can't do without me. I am called—"

She stopped abruptly. Something choked her, leaving a inky taste in her mouth when she swallowed.

There was a number of voices quite close to her. She recognized the voice of Fergus as he said, in a tone of fervent gratitude, "Thank God!"

"You must not speak. Lie still. Be calm," said a voice, low and soft, in firm, measured tones that commanded obedience. Who was it spoke? She blinked her eyes to clear them of the film that obscured her sight.

There was a circle of men about her, and one kneeling by her side who pressed a sponge to the lower corner of her mouth as he held her head in the hollow of his arm. She did not know the man; he was not one of the company. He had a close-clipped beard. It was still a continuation of the dream. But the music rising now as the applause subsided reminded her of the part she should be playing.

"I must go!" she murmured, in plaintive appeal. "I ought to be on the steps. Don't you hear them—"

She stopped again, for, as she struggled to raise herself, a terrible pang shot through her body, while a fresh rising of blood from her throat sickened her and made her giddy and utterly helpless.

The cold sweat was wiped tenderly from her brow, while the same low voice said— "You have been thrown from your horse and hurt. You must not try to move."

Then it all came back to her: the arena, the open course before her, the chariot ahead in the inner course, the voice of Fergus as she rushed past, crying, "Now, now!" the effrontery of Mrs. Redmond, sure of victory, taking the outer edge of the course to add to her triumph, and almost in the same moment as she was putting off her helmet, she felt full speed, the sweeping round of the chariot right across her course and not a length in advance, the fall of her mare, a terrible blow from one of the hoofs of the overturned chariot horses that seemed to break her arm in two, and the fading away of that awful shriek which rose from the audience.

She wondered what injury it was she had received. At every breath she felt that pain shoot through her body. What was the meaning of the blood that flowed into her mouth, and nauseating—of the cold sweat that chilled her? Was she dying? Was it nearly over—the short life so full of triumph and joy? Or was she only maimed and crushed—disfigured and crippled for ever, never again to hear the shouts of applause and receive the homage of admiring throngs? Oh! better die now than live on to remember a joy which could never return!

As these memories and speculations ran through her mind, she lay quite still, with her eyes closed, as if the eternal sleep was stealing upon her. The doctor's sponge had taken the colour off her cheek; her pallor, her stiffness, the waxen set of her features looked so like death that a significant glance was exchanged between one and another of the speechless men that surrounded her. And yet there was no visible sign of fatal injury except the thin line of blood that crept from the corner of her half-closed mouth. Almost as colourless as she, Fergus bent down and, unable to control his feelings, murmured, in a faltering, imploring voice—

"It's all right, my poor girl, isn't it?" She made no answer; she had not the strength to open her eyes, but there was a feverish glow in her face, and pain contracted her pretty brows.

In horrible contrast with the silence of the grief-stricken group, a strain of lively music came in a sudden burst through an opening door, and the audience in the gallery above renewed their applause at some incident in the arena.

A tear ran down Nessa's cheek and her lip quivered.

"They have forgotten me already," she said, with a faint sob.

The doctor raised his hand warningly as Fergus was about to speak, for he had reason to fear that the slightest excitement might produce fatal hemorrhage. Even at that moment a fresh round of applause caused the stricken girl to writhe involuntarily under the smart of ingratitude, and a sharp cry of pain was choked by a renewed flow of blood from the ruptured lung.

It seemed to Nessa in her delirium that the thankless, cruel crowd was stamping upon her poor, crushed body.

"What have I done? What have I done to harm you that you should so ill-treat me?" she thought, attempting to stretch out her arms in an appeal for mercy to those she had loved, and who had once loved her. The pain at her heart was more than she could bear, and all became dark and confused with the fading away of consciousness.

One morning she awoke to find herself lying in a strange bedroom. She could not make it out at all. There were two windows facing the foot of her bed. The blinds were down, but the sun was bright upon them. It must be quite late, yet she felt very tired and sleepy—so sleepy that she dozed off in the vain attempt to recollect whether there was a rehearsal to attend to-day. Presently she awoke again. Where was she? Clearly it was not her own room. It was much too neat and orderly for that, she reflected, with a painful consciousness that she had been getting more and more untidy and careless of late. There were French hangings to the bed with a crisp, drilled edge. The window curtains were draped prettily—not at all like her own, which were allowed to hang anyhow.

Everything seemed in its place, reminding her of the precision maintained in the old schooldays at Eagle House. Only here could not be said of the appointments at Mrs. Vic's. No; she had left school long ago—that was certain; but where was she now? She felt that she must be very thick-headed not to know that. Indeed, her intellect did seem to be in that state when she drank champagne after her first great success. To be sure! She was an equestrienne at the International. "Blue and White wins!"—and she was Blue and White.

If she could only get her head a little clearer, she would be able to make out exactly where she was. She turned, with the resolution of waking up thoroughly and settling the questions that perplexed her; but at the first movement a dull pain in her side brought back a flood of recollections that for the moment took away all power of reasoning—of breathing, almost.

Gradually her ideas grouped themselves into two distinct pictures—the arena with the chariot sweeping round the course, and the ante room with its whitened walls and ceiling and flaring gas, and the circle of silent, awestricken men about her.

She knew that her body was injured. She felt that it was encased in a rigid corset of some kind; and furiously she raised her arm, not without difficulty, to her face, with a horrible fear of finding that also crushed and disfigured. Slight as the movement was, it attracted the attention of a little beyond Nessa's range of vision, reading. She came to the bedside—a young lady, tall and thin, dressed with a simplicity that would have been severe on any one less gentle than she looked. While Nessa, with her hand still upon her cheek, looked up, making these few mental notes, the nurse scanned her face with earnest anxiety; then, with a flush of pleasure, she said—

"The doctor said you would wake this morning, and you are awake, dear. Your eyes are clear and steadfast. But you are parched with thirst, aren't you?"

Nessa moved her head affirmatively. "I have something ready for you. Don't rise," said the nurse, taking a glass from the adjacent table and bending down beside Nessa. "See, you can drink easily through this tube. You must let us treat you like a little child for just a few days more."

Nessa felt like a little child—weak and powerless, and willing to yield. She drank eagerly, and feeling refreshed by it looked up again gratefully into the kind face that was already fascinating her. They were dark, compassionate eyes—the beautiful feature in a face that had nothing else but its sweet expression to admire.

Then Nessa's curiosity revived, and she asked in a feeble voice— "Where am I? Not in a hospital—no?"

"No, you are in my rooms. And who am I? You want to know: well, I am Grace Arnold."

"I don't know you. I can't remember your name in the programme—Grace Arnold—there are so many of us."

"I am not in your company, dear," said Miss Arnold, laughing. "They wouldn't have me. Look at me. Who would come to see me?"

She drew herself up, turning her face to the light that Nessa might see her. She was too thin, her teeth were irregular, her face was long, and her beauty, if she had any, not at all of the type found at the International; but Nessa thought that she looked more lovable than any one she had ever known.

"And if one is not very pretty," continued Miss Arnold, "one must be clever, and I am neither. No, dear; I am nothing but Grace Arnold yet awhile."

Something in the look of her face and the expression in those two last words seemed to indicate that she was ambitious of being something more.

"Where is Mrs. Redmond? Why am I in your house?" Nessa asked, after a pause.

"You need attentive nursing—more than Mrs. Redmond could possibly give, and Mr. Fergus did not wish you to be taken to a hospital, so Mr. Meredith was good enough to bring you to me, knowing that I have nothing to do and that I am fond of nursing."

"Who is Mr. Meredith?" Miss Arnold's face flushed, and she seemed to find a difficulty in choosing words for her reply.

"He is a doctor, dear; very wise and very kind and good, and thoughtful. He was at the International when your accident happened, and happily he was able to be of great service to you. He knew what to do and what surgeon to send for, though I don't think any can be more clever than he, and I think you owe your life to him, dear."

"Am I—am I very much injured?" Nessa asked, falteringly.

"It was a very grave accident. A bone was crushed inward—there, on your side. And then you were taken with fever, and for many days you have been unconscious, lying like one in a troubled sleep. But said you would wake to-day, and you have and all the danger is passed, and you will get well again quickly if—"

She stopped abruptly, for Nessa had caught sight of her own hand lying on the coverlet, and was now looking at it aghast as she held it up to the light.

"Look, look!" said she, hardly above a whisper; "this is not my hand!"

Miss Arnold cast a swift, scrutinising glance at her face, fearing that the excitement of talking had produced a return of delirium.

"Yes, dear, it is your hand," said Miss Arnold, taking it gently in her own. "You can feel mine, can't you?"

"But there is nothing of it. I could see my bones through the skin. Bring me a glass—bring me a glass," cried Nessa, with terrible anxiety.

but she could not take comfort. It was too terrible to think that all the joy of life was lost, and she could think of nothing else. She fell asleep when her grief was exhausted, but her train of thought was unbroken; only when she awoke it seemed to her that she had realized her position, and brought her mind to reason calmly on her condition. She knew Miss Arnold was by the bedside, but she kept her eyes closed that she might think undisturbed.

"I shall have to make up like the other girls now," thought she; "then perhaps they will take me back. It wasn't my fault. Mr. Fergus must have seen that. But I don't suppose he will trust me to ride d'Esperance again, especially now I look such a dreadful scarecrow. They won't want me. I daresay they've got somebody else in my place—some one just as pretty and daring as I was. I am forgotten altogether perhaps by now."

A light murmur of voices at the bedside caused her to open her eyes. A gentleman was standing beside Miss Arnold who Nessa thought that he must be Doctor Meredith, but this opinion was shaken by her appearance. He did not look like a doctor—certainly not like the wise, benevolent, white-haired, elderly gentleman she had figured from Miss Arnold's words.

This gentleman was young—not more than thirty or thirty-two, tall and straight, broad shouldered and deep chested, with short, close curling hair, a beard trimmed to a point, and a long, fair moustache. He wore a grey jacket, and a flannel shirt with a neck, and his silk handkerchief was tied held a pot of lilacs of the valley; the other hand rested on Miss Arnold's shoulder, as he listened attentively to what she said. It was more probable that he was her brother by his manner, and like her, had no fixed occupation. Still listening he turned his head towards the bed, and seeing Nessa awake, smiled, and nodded cheerfully. Now Nessa decided that he could not be her brother, for his eyes were a clear blue, and his complexion good, and every feature regular, and wonderfully handsome, in Miss Arnold's opinion. Perhaps he was Miss Arnold's lover, and if he were, Nessa thought that they were well matched, for both looked so honest and good.

"These are for you, dear," said he, giving the pot of flowers to Miss Arnold; and then he came close to the bed, and taking up Nessa's hand he held her pulse lightly under his fingers while he fixed his eyes intently on her face—his own taking an expression of gravity that won Nessa's admiration and respect.

"Are you Doctor Meredith?" she asked. He nodded, still holding her hand, and then a smile breaking over his face he said— "You'll do now, Miss Dancaster. It has been no end of a tough contest this time, but you've won again. I shall have good news for your friends to-day."

"My friends," said Nessa, faintly; "oh! they have all forgotten me."

"Forgotten you!" exclaimed the young doctor with a laugh. "Hand me that thing off the table, Grace."

Miss Arnold brought an ornamental basket from the table.

"Look at these," he continued, taking up a handful of cards and letting them slip through his fingers back into the basket.

"That will show if your friends have forgotten you. We've had to muffle the door knockers; they came in such numbers. Look at them," stirring the cards with his finger. "Here are friends by the dozen, and some with capital good names too; what do you think of that for a friend?" He held up a card with a gaudy crest and monogram which Nessa recognized as Lord Carriek-bairn's.

"But I remember as I lay there after the accident, hearing the people applaud over my head, as if they had already ceased to care for me."

"Ah, that has been running through your mind ever since, and we've tried in vain to undeceive you. Now, thank Heaven, we can make it clear to you. The applause you heard was intended for you and no one else. You see, your accident created something like a panic in the audience, and to keep them quiet in their seats Fergus had the notion of mind to get a young lady as nearly like you as he could, and send her in upon a chariot with the robes that you were to have put on as victor, you know. He told the girl to cover her face as much as possible, and the chariot to drive round to the steps as sharp as he could. In that way he deceived the major part of the audience, who thought you had simply fainted in the arena and been brought outside. Thanks to the size of the building and the girl's cleverness in keeping her face well concealed, scarcely one in a hundred of the audience saw through the deception. It was only when the papers came out the next morning that the truth was known. And now you see that the audience was not the heartless monster you have been talking about all through your long sickness."

"Oh, I am glad to hear that," Nessa murmured, with fervent gratitude in her voice.

"And I am glad to set your mind at ease; for you can't get well and strong with a nightmare like that haunting you. Now is there anything else you wish explained—any question you would like me to answer? If so, out with it at once, because, you see, when we get our mental faculties into calm working order—and they can't work calmly while you are harassed with doubts and dread—so that you can govern your actions and lie still, we can do without this uncomfortable waistcoat, and give your body a better chance of recovering strength and vigour."

Nessa thought for a minute, and then she asked, "Was the poor mare hurt?"

"Yes; I think she was sprained pretty badly. I will ask about her to-night."

"Thank you; I was so fond of her. Is Mr. Fergus very angry with me?"

"With you! I should think not. He's cut up a good deal, for he knows he was partly to blame."

"He does not think it was all my fault?"

"How could he? You were not three yards behind when the chariot fouled the tripod. No one on earth could have avoided collision under such conditions. Be quite at ease upon that point. There is no misconception as to the cause of your accident; and if there were, Fergus would be the last in the world to entertain it. He's an honest, good fellow that, and I'm sure your sincere friend at heart, though I hold that he ought never have allowed such a race to be run."

"Then you think he will take me back again?"

"He'll be only too glad—when you get strong and well enough, you know."

Nessa gave a little sigh; then, holding up her wasted hand, she said, in a pathetic tone of self-commiseration, "I shan't be always like this, shall I?"

The doctor laughed; but the laugh could not conceal the pity he felt for the poor girl.

"Why, of course you won't," he said. "You've been starved for nearly three weeks, and it is but natural that you have grown thin and pale. But now you will eat and make flesh, and the colour will come back to your face."

"My friends wouldn't know me now, would they?"

"We will put them to the test soon, I hope."

"Soon; yes," she replied, eagerly, "but not yet awhile—not till I look nice again. That will be soon." He answered her appeal with a cheerful nod. "When shall I look well enough to go back again?"

"You may look well enough before you are able to sit in the saddle."

"But I shall be able to ride again. Not at once, but some day. Oh, do tell me that. I could not live if I thought I should never—never be anything but this. I am not so much injured—see," she moved, and then bit her lip to conceal the pang it gave her.

"That won't do, my child; you must lie quite still. I can only promise recovery on that condition."

"I will do whatever you tell me—nothing without your consent. I will obey you what I shall do now."

"This is famous," said the doctor, cheerfully, rising from the chair in which he had seated himself. "I'll give you my first order, and you must sleep if you can. Shut your eyes, and think of the very dearest friend you have, with a confident belief that there are happy days coming."

She moved her head in assent with a smile, and closed her eyes; then she tried to think who was her very dearest friend, but she could see none but the honest, kind face of the young doctor, and with that before her she fell asleep.

"We must make her wish to live," said Dr. Meredith to Miss Arnold.

CHAPTER XXX.

MRS. REDMOND ESCAPES.

When the chariot struck the tripod, it seemed to the general spectators that Mrs. Redmond had been thrown out; but in reality her fall was intentional, and she suffered nothing by the collision. When she rose from the arena, and, staggering across the course, she was indeed fainter than ever she had been in her life, but it was from the terror inspired in her by her guilty conscience by her own act: the fear that her intention had been detected, and that she would be made to suffer for it. As she glanced at Nessa lying motionless under the feet of the plunging horses, she had no doubt that her merciful purpose was effected; but the only remorse she felt was that she had chosen that means of killing her. As the supers beyond the barrier pressed forward to get a view of Nessa, she noticed that not one of them said "she is dead," but all exclaimed that she was killed. If they said that, it was because they knew she had purposely thrown her chariot across the course.

Sick with fear, she crept under the barrier and tottered to the exit. One or two of the men seeing her pass, glanced toward her, muttering under their breath with significant nods; but no one attempted to stop her. In her unreasonable state of apprehension that she was under the wall for support, a couple of the dressers, who had heard the scream of the audience, and were coming down to find out the cause, stopped and asked if anything had happened to her. She had no power to reply, but, muttering something inaudibly between her chattering teeth, she pointed down towards the arena and continued her way.

But one idea possessed her—flight! In the dressing room she huddled on her clothes, wound a woollen wrap, such as the French girls used, over her head and round her throat so as to conceal her features as much as possible, and got of the building. She passed several groups of men gathered about some member of the company who had seen the accident, and escaped almost unobserved—certainly unrecognized. It was only when she was outside, and at the moment when she was congratulating herself on her escape, that a hand was laid on her arm. With a start and a cry of terror she turned to find that the man who arrested her was the money-lender, Nichols.

"You've done it!" he said, in a low tone.

"Done what?" she gasped, glancing to the right and left to see if they were observed.

"Murdered her!" he replied in a whisper. "Come on, my dear; don't stand here. There's a policeman at the corner, and you have not got a moment to lose."

He hurried her across the road, holding her arm, and led her along the dark side of the street opposite.

"Why, you're trembling like a leaf, I do declare!" he continued, in a low tone. "Have they tried to arrest you already?"

She attempted a feeble defence—fearing coarsely on his part—doubtful whence the avenging blow would come.

"Arrest me!" she faltered; "what for? It was an accident."

"You stupid woman—oh, you very stupid woman! what a pity! Such a fine woman too—such a wonderful lot of pluck, and yet so stupid. You go and do a stupid thing, and then you're stupid enough to believe you when you tell a stupid story. I knew you were going to do for the girl when you left me. I said to myself 'that little Grahame won't be alive this day week,' I said. And I had a kind of presentiment you wouldn't be able to take time over it and do it thoughtfully and nice. Something or other made me think it would happen to-night, and I couldn't keep away from the show. It was a sort of fascination—just like what a friend of mine told me he felt in seeing a regular tamer go in to a cage of lions. He was sure the lions would kill the tamer one day, and he was obliged to go to that show every time there was a performance until one day sure enough the lions did kill the tamer. There, that's just how I felt. Only when I paid my money down I said to myself 'Well, I shan't have to go to this expense long.' I felt sure of it. I did, upon my word."

"But why did you do it like that, my poor woman?" he continued. "Why did you do what thousands of people would swear to—the outsiders—people as know nothing about circus business: to go slap out of your way and run up against a post that could keep clear of. I know what your idea was: you wanted to make believe you were showing off, and that you caused the accident by carrying your showing off a bit too far. Well, that might get you off if the company would support you. But they won't. They don't like you; they're all against you. They worshipped little Grahame, and they'll all swear you did it out of jealousy. All London will be on their side if it was only a question of professional jealousy. But it's something more than that. Your real danger is much worse than that—oh, much worse!"

"What do you mean?" she asked, thrilled with a fresh terror.

"Why, when the prosecution examine your antecedents, just think what a case it will be. You aren't stupid enough to think that they will believe in your *alias*, are you now? Of course not. You know, as well as I do, that they will find out who you are, and I ask you what jury is likely to let you off when it's known that your husband will come into £30,000 by the death of the girl, and that you are mad with jealousy of her rise in the profession! Why, public opinion wouldn't let you escape. Stupid woman! Stupid woman! If you'd only taken your time and done it cleverly, how nice and comfortable you might have been for the rest of your life."

She stopped, leaning against some iron railings heavily with her chin sunk on her breast; suddenly goaded to desperation by a sense of her own folly, she turned upon Nichols—

"It was you who put me on to this. If I am convicted, by God, you shall go with me. I'll tell all. You shan't escape if I don't."

"No my dear, but you will escape. If I wanted you to be convicted, I shouldn't have given myself the trouble to come round and find you. For your own sake, you'll save yourself, and keep a quiet tongue. Now what do you think of doing?"

She collapsed again, and merely shook her head in reply to Nichols' question.

"I'll tell you what you shall do, my dear lady. You shall go in and get your money and pack up all you want to save in one box. When that's done, I'll take you home with me. My wife will be delighted to see you. And to-morrow morning you shall take the boat and go to my wife's mother at Hamburg. She will take care of you and make you comfortable till the affair has blown over. While you keep out of the way, there can't be any inquiry as to who you are, and in a few weeks the police will cease to enquire after you. Then, when your husband has come into the property, you can just come back, present your little bill, and get your money—I'll say to that—and there you are a perfect lady for the rest of your life. Now ain't I a real good friend to you, my dear?"

Within twenty-four hours Mrs. Redmond and her baggage were in Hamburg.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Buildings Destroyed by Lightning.

Those who have carefully watched the working of the elements during the present season will have been struck with the numerous instances in which buildings have been destroyed by lightning. The fact that some of these were provided with lightning rods brings up the old dispute as to the protective power of the rod, as well as adds interest to the new theory of the subject by Dr. Oliver Lodge, an English scientist. Dr. Lodge's theory is that while in many cases, probably in a very large majority, a lightning rod is of the greatest service, it cannot be depended on as affording perfect immunity from risk. That they do not provide absolute immunity is, he explains, owing to the operation of a particular form of lightning which he calls the "impulsive rush." Let us assume by way of example the case of a building upon which are placed rods of the most approved form. A thunder cloud approaches from a distance until it overhangs the building. The lightning rods will silently and harmlessly discharge the electricity from this cloud into the earth. But if an overhanging cloud which was not charged with electricity, and was therefore harmless at first, should suddenly receive an excessive charge of electricity by means of a flash from some distant cloud, the time might be too short to permit the electricity rods, and the result would be a disruptive discharge. Even in that case the lightning would probably follow the conductor and leave the rest of the building practically unharmed; but that would not be certain. This difference between the steady electrical strain of an ordinary thunder storm, and the "impulsive rush" of a suddenly surcharged cloud would account, so Dr. Lodge thinks, for those exceptional cases where rods have failed to protect. Whether true or not the theory is certainly ingenious, and will soon, no doubt, be on the lips of every lightning rod agent in the country. And that means that "impulsive rush" whether comprehended or not, will soon be as familiar to the citizens throughout our land as the particular name by which they are called.

Slavery in Africa.

The announcement that the Sultan of Zanzibar has issued a decree looking towards the suppression of the African slave trade will come as good news to every lover of his kind. According to the London *Spectator* this decree prohibits the exchange, sale or purchase of slaves, and closes all slave-dealing establishments. All slave brokers carrying on the business are made liable to heavy penalties and to deportation. Arabs dealing in domestic slaves are included in this provision, and any houses hereafter used for any purpose connected with the slave traffic are to be forfeited. On the death of their present owners all Zanzibar slaves will be free, unless the deceased leave lawful children, who alone may inherit them. Slaves cannot be willed away or sold after the death of their owner, and their ill-treatment by their masters will be severely punished, in certain cases, involve the penalty of forfeiture. Any Zanzibar subject married to a person under British jurisdiction is disabled from holding slaves, and all slaves now in the possession of such persons are declared free. Every slave is to have the absolute right to purchase his freedom at a reasonable price; every slave is to have the same rights as Arabs in courts of justice, and the Sultan binds himself to accord them special protection.