

# THE BATTLE WON.

CHAPTER XXXVI.  
GOING BACK.

Nessa received a letter. It gave her quite a flutter of excitement, so monotonous and dull was her eventless life at this time; but her heart beat quicker still when she perceived by the postmark that it must be from Dr. Meredith. She opened it with a feeling of hope which it would have been impossible for her to explain, having nothing to hope for. Sweyn enclosed a letter with a couple of lines:

"The enclosed letter," he wrote, "comes to you by a roundabout route, as you will see. You have not forgotten your promise to write to me if you need your doctor and friend."

"SWEYN MEREDITH."  
The communication was studiously brief. He could scarcely have written less; yet Nessa was not disappointed, and in the pleasure of reading it over and over again forgot the enclosure. It was clear she must acknowledge the letter, and feeling that she could think of nothing else until she had written she sat down to the task at once. She wrote the first words that came from her heart.

DEAR DR. MEREDITH: I thank you for the letter. I think I can never be so ungrateful as to forget your friendship and kindness.

"V. D."

She also could not say less than this, and she dared not say more, and so with a sigh of regret, she put up the sheet of paper in an envelope and addressed it to the doctor; after that she went out and posted her letter with as much care as if the happiness of her life depended on it. This mightiness, with the flood of conjectures and bitter-sweet recollections it brought upon her, so engrossed her thought that only when she got home to Myrtle Cottage and set herself resolutely to think of something else she remembered the enclosed letter.

It was addressed "Miss Viola Dancaester, Arcadia, West Kensington;" "J. Ferguson, Esq., International, Paris;" addressed again, "Care of Dr. Meredith, Graston Road, Hammersmith, London;" and finally re-addressed, "Leston Park, Bartam, Yorkshire."

Opening the letter, Nessa, with awakening curiosity, turned to the signature, and found with surprise that the writer was Maud Redmond. It was dated 29 Murdoch Square, Euston Road, Tuesday, and ran on thus:

"MY DARLING NESSA.—I do not know whether you are living or dead. For the last week I have been in London, seeking you everywhere in a state of mind perfectly indescribable. People turn round and look after me, thinking I am mad as I go through the streets looking in their faces in the hope of finding your dear features. Indeed, I think I am mad sometimes, and no wonder, seeing the awful state of mind I have suffered since that dreadful night. I must have been mad to run away as I did; but what wonder when Ferguson told me I had killed you? Not only Ferguson, but every one else told me to my face that I had killed you intentionally. I own that the fear of being publicly accused of murdering my darling friend, terrified me, and I ran away to save myself; but I did not realize that there was a worse torture than that of being unjustly accused of a dreadful crime. The torture is the thought that you may be now lying injured for life, helpless and friendless in a hospital. Time, instead of bringing forgetfulness, only increased my fears, until the torture became so unendurable that I was forced to throw up a lucrative engagement I had obtained in a Belgian family as a teacher of music (where I was greatly respected and treated with the utmost kindness), in order to come here and seek you. For anything I know to the contrary, there may be a warrant out for my arrest, and I may end my miserable days on the scaffold. But that would be preferable to this terrible mental torment, which so unites me for my occupation, that I am absolutely starving, and must seek refuge in the workhouse if I do not meet the demands of my landlady. But miserable as my condition is, I could be happy if only knew that you were living. I could then find courage to work, and I would do anything—the most menial work—to provide you with an independent home and some of these comforts which you so generously bestowed upon me when I, alas! was too thoughtless and happy to value them. Yes, I would work my fingers to the bone joyfully to give you relief. I know that my darling Nessa has no cruel suspicion of my action. You know, dearest, that I am guiltless—however selfish and unkind I may have seemed at times—of any wish to do you harm. You know that, with all my faults, I am generous at times. When I saw that you were going to lose that race, one of those generous impulses seized me, and I took the outside of the course in order that my darling Nessa should again win. Whatever faults I may have, no one can say I am a fool, and only an idiot could have attempted to injure you in my position I had everything to lose, and nothing to gain by it. For did you not share all you had with me, and did I not give up my home, position, and everything else? But why should I seek to clear myself from such a monstrous charge when I am sure that you would be the last to harbor an unjust thought or ungenerous reflection? No, darling, whether you live or whether you are in that state when all secrets are known, it is all the same; you know that I am innocent—you know that I am to be pitied."

"I shall send this letter to Arcadia in the last hope that it may be forwarded to you if you live. And, oh! if far pity's sake, write to me if you receive it and put an end to my agony. Let me come and look at your sweet face once more—let me slave for your sweet face in some way to show how I love you—and would repair the chances I have lost. It is the last kindness I ask of you, my darling."

Your most unhappy,  
"MAUD REDMOND."

Mrs. Redmond had not yet risen from her bed in the second floor back 29 Murdoch Square—it was not yet midday—when her landlady, entering the room without ceremony, jogged her shoulder and said, hurriedly:

"Here—get up. The young lady's come. Drove up in a hansom."

"Is she alone?" asked Mrs. Redmond, springing out of bed with blinking eyes.

"Yes, you ain't goin' to have her up here, are you?"

Mrs. Redmond glanced round the room,

and shook her head as she huddled on her petticoats.

The place was sufficiently wretched and squalid to excite compassion, but the general effect was not picturesque—not the picture of distress which an experienced stage manager would set before his audience, and Mrs. Redmond knew her business, and the character of the girl she had to play to, as well as anyone. The crust of a pork pie, a beer jug, and a half-empty tumbler, the remains of last night's supper, stood on the dressing-table with a bottle of hair-wash, a saucer of violet powder, and a hair-pin, and a saucer of table-drawn up for convenience to the side of the bed—was a lamp without a shade, a tray with the remains of the morning's breakfast, a pile of hair-pins, a pack of cards, and some odds and ends of finery.

"I've showed her into the front sitting room, said the landlady, 'but she ain't sent away the cab, so you'd better look sharp, my dear. What are you looking for now?"

"My shoes. Look under those things on the chair. That's just the way when you want a thing—"

"You are such an untidy lady. Here in take mine, my dear; they'll do to slip down in."

"Dip the corner of the towel in the water-jug. Where's that braided jacket? Never for that waterproof?"

"Here it is, my dear—all creased up anyhow. You ain't going to put any stuff on your face, are you?"

"Not likely," replied Mrs. Redmond, as she stood before the glass wiping her face with the towel.

"Mind you'll have to get some money out of her somehow. You promised me that, you know, when she came—"

"Oh, that's all right. You shall have it right enough. I tell you I can twist her round my finger, and you see, she's come just as I said she would, and the hansom shows she has got the money. How do I look?" She turned, assuming a woe-begone expression.

"Lord, you're as good as a play," chuckled the landlady with her hand to her mouth. "You'll do. Run down. You can button your dress on the way."

Entering the sitting-room where Nessa was sitting by the window, Mrs. Redmond started as if she had seen a wraith, and then tottering forward a few steps she fell on her knees and stretched out her hands with her side and putting her arms round the woman's neck.

"Nessa, my darling Nessa," gasped Mrs. Redmond, taking the girl's hand and smothering it with kisses. "Oh, tell me that you forgive me. No—I will not rise till I know I am forgiven."

"There is nothing to forgive. You did not mean to hurt me. Oh, I am as sure of that as you yourself must be."

"Thank Heaven for this!" murmured Mrs. Redmond, devoutly, bending her head and clasping her hands. "But I forgive you when I should have stood by you—think of that."

"I would rather think of anything else—of how, for instance, you stood by me when I was in greater need. There, do get up. It distresses me a great deal more to see you like this than to think of your running away."

Mrs. Redmond allowed herself to be comforted, and gradually came round to a state of mind less embarrassing in its effect upon Nessa.

"You have given me strength," she said faintly; "in a little while I shall be able to look for work." The hollowness of her voice frightened Nessa.

"You were very poor when you wrote to me. Have you anything to eat to-day?" she asked. Mrs. Redmond shook her head with a plaintive smile.

"But I had some tea and bread last night," she murmured, gratefully.

"I feared it was so," said Nessa, "and I have seen the hansom waiting. We will go out and get some dinner."

"I can't my darling. I have nothing but the things I stand in. The clothes I brought from Brussels have been taken by the woman of this house for my rent, and I have nothing to redeem them."

"I have," said Nessa, eagerly putting her hand in her pocket. "I am quite rich—see. Mr. Ferguson gave me two hundred pounds, and I have brought half of it for you."

CHAPTER XXXVII.  
NESSA'S DANGER.

Twice Grace went to see Nessa, and twice Mrs. Blount, with frigid reserve, informed her that Miss Dancaester had gone out without saying where she was going, or what time she intended to return. On the second occasion, the old lady's manner was so particularly stiff, and constrained that Grace was impelled, partly by feminine curiosity, partly by a better and higher motive, to seek an explanation.

"Viola was out when I called last Wednesday," she began.

"You are quite right, my dear; she was," replied the old lady, drawing herself up, and assuming the rigidity of a sphinx.

"Do you think I should find her a home to-morrow if I call?"

"It's not at all likely, unless you leave word that you intend to come."

"Perhaps these fine afternoons tempt her to go out. If I come in the evening—"

"You would be still less likely to find her. How do you like your new occupation, my love?"

"Never mind about that. I want to talk about Viola."

"I don't," said Mrs. Blount, emphatically. "Indeed, I would very much rather not."

"Do you mind telling me why you object to talking about her?"

"Yes, my dear; I will. It's no business of mine; that's why. While Miss Viola does not make a scandal in the neighborhood, and comes home before twelve, I do not mind waiting up till then; though, of course I should very much prefer going to bed at regular hours; but I will not consent to letting the key go out of the house, for whatever you young people nowadays may think, I do not consider it respectable for young women to have unlimited liberty, and I'm sitting up listening to the ticking of the clock with the dreadful things you read of in the papers every day."

"But, surely," said Grace, checking the endless parentness, "Viola does not stay

out every night without giving you some reason?"

"I will not say it is every night, but it is too often, in my opinion; and as for Viola, she never offers one; and, as I say, it's no business of mine to enquire. No, as long as I live, I shall remember how cruelly Sweyn scolded me for doing what I considered best in the interest of that young lady. I lie awake and think of his words now with an aching heart."

"We must not consider our own sufferings, dear, when we have to choose between doing our duty and neglecting it. I am sure you would not hesitate if you saw that you were really ought to interest yourself in—in my welfare if I were concerned."

Mrs. Blount resisted this appeal for a minute, sitting silent and motionless as a marble, with her lips pursed up, and inflexible resolution in her spectacled eyes; and then her chin twitched, her lips fell, her body unben't, and taking the gentle hand Grace had laid upon her arm she turned to ward her with a shake of the head and said, "My dear, I'm afraid I'm behind the times present day. In my time they were easy to manage. One only had to be firm with 'em and they yielded. But now it seems that perhaps I have done just what I wished to prevent in being firm with this young girl. I do indeed!"

"I don't quite understand what it is you year."

"My love, I fear that Miss Viola has found bad acquaintances, and is being led astray."

"Why do you think she has had acquaintances?"

"Because she has never told me one word about 'em. I've made her afraid of me, that's what I've done; and she don't dare to tell me all she might if I had been kinder and less stern with her. I will not allow, though, that it's all my fault. She doesn't make any advances; or if she does, they don't last. She isn't the gentle, patient, little soul she was when I first nursed her. She's changed, my love, and is growing impatient and hard—wonderfully hard—for such a young girl."

"I did not notice any change in her when we met last."

"No, dearie; that was three weeks ago. All the change has taken place since, which makes me more sure than ever that she's got some wicked companions."

"Can you tell me when the change first began?"

"That I can't to a day. It began on the Thursday as you were here on the Wednesday. She got a letter that morning—the first she has ever received, and who it was I don't know no more than the dead. But as soon as she got it she sat down and wrote, and then went out again, saying not a word to me, and looking wonderfully happy. Then she came in, and in less than ten minutes out she went again, and never came back till the evening. And I remember quite well, when I put a few questions to her, she replied in her old, pleasant way."

"Don't ask me what has happened for I cannot tell you dear," which of course, put me out a little. She went out again the next day, and didn't come home till night midnight. And do you know, love"—here Mrs. Blount dropped her voice to a whisper—"I think she must of had some very strong excitement, for she was quite wild, almost as if she had been—well, I must say it—as if she had been drinking."

"Oh! I can't think that," said Grace, greatly shocked.

"Well, I don't know, my dear, but I've seen her frequently since then like that. Quite wild with excitement. And she next morning her eyes red, as if she had been crying, and looking ashamed of herself—ashamed to look me in the face; then she didn't leave the table and going up to her room, as I could hear quite plain; and then just as suddenly coming down dressed, and going out quick without a word."

Grace sat perplexed, astonished, and deeply grieved—seeking some satisfactory explanation.

"Do you think she had found an engagement?" she asked.

"What, play-acting or horse-riding? No, love! I thought it might be that. But it can't be; for some nights she won't go out at all, and others she comes home quite respectable hours, which she couldn't if she was in a theatre or a sikkus, could she?"

Grace gave up that hope with a shake of the head. Mrs. Blount continued, "No, dearie; it's had company, I'm sure. And I think she's been drove to it by having nothing to do, and finding Brixton more lonely than she, with her lively disposition, could possibly endure. I've seen her trying to fix herself on a book, but the leaves didn't turn over; and she can't settle down to a bit of needle-work; and at last she don't seem able to bear it any longer, and goes off: which does put me out, my notions being that a girl ought to settle down, as I have hinted again and again to this purpose."

Grace assented to no purpose. She began to understand how the dreary, eventless routine drove the unhappy girl to temptation.

"It can't go on for long," Mrs. Blount pursued; "for she's spending her money as if she had thousands. Always comes home in a hansom, and as for dress—come here, my dear."

Grace followed the old lady upstairs into Nessa's room with a qualm of conscience, and looking round, saw many articles of dress thrown carelessly on the bed and chairs, which her woman's eye saw at a glance were made with a reckless disregard to expense.

"Surely these have not all been made within three weeks," she said.

"Every one of 'em, love. This, and that are not a week old. And look at that hat, and this mantle—what would they be cost? I always thought you were a little extravagant in dress, my dear; but, lord! not to such a degree. And look at these little leather cases; they must be bracelets and rings and things. There's silk shoes—"

"No, no!" Grace said, checking her, ashamed of allowing her curiosity to lead her so far; "I have seen quite enough—too much." Suddenly her eyes in travelling round the room fell on a large bouquet. She pointed to it with an exclamation of delight.

"Oh, yes—that's the third this week," said Mrs. Blount; "flowers are very nice, but I don't like to see such bouquets as those in a young girl's room—anyway, a young girl of her station. I'm surprised it pleases

"But, don't you see," said Grace, finding at last a happy explanation, "a woman would never buy such flowers for her-

"No, that's a sure thing. But I don't see what you are driving at, dearie."

"Why, that explains all. Some one has fallen in love with her, and she dresses to please him, and goes out to meet him; and she may not like to talk about him to you."

Grace had her own reasons for joy in this conclusion. But Mrs. Blount discontented it with a slow shake of the head and a depression of the angles of her lips.

"No, my dear; if she'd got a sweetheart, she wouldn't cry in the morning—she would go out as if she was forced to it by her about it. No girl in love can ever conceal her pleasure—she must talk about her sweetheart—that is," she added, lowering her voice, "if her sweetheart is a good fellow, and she really loves him."

There was a terrible suggestiveness in these words that made Grace shrink with a nameless fear for the poor girl. With that realization the truth dawned upon her, and that lay before her.

She left Mrs. Blount, almost abruptly, and from the nearest post-office she despatched the following telegram to Sweyn:

"Come at once. You are needed."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Where the (ng) Comes in.

Immigrant Inspector:—"We have information that you came over here on contract."

Lord Fitzmud-Fitzmud (indignantly):—"Aw, what-er-why, you wude, impudent fellow, I came ova here to marry Miss Angelina Gollust of New Yawk."

Immigrant Inspector (triumphantly):—"Well, what's the matter with yer; ain't marriage a contract? You'll have to go back."

—Lije.

The Use of the Bell.

"This bell," said a well-meaning sexton, when showing the belfry on an interesting village church to a party of visitors, "is only rung in case of a visit from the Lord Bishop of the diocese, a fire, a flood, or any other such calamities."

Ready to Dye.

He came into the barber's in such a dreadful state of nervousness that the barber looked up the razor.

"What's the matter?" he inquired, holding a whetstone behind him in case of any outbreak.

"Why," he answered, in an agitated whisper, "I have just noticed my hair is turning gray."

"Oh, that's nothing."

"Yes, not much to you perhaps, but I feel that bad about it I'm ready to dye."

"Good Reasons for Selling."

Buyer (angrily):—"See here. You said the reason you wanted to sell that store was because you intended to travel. Well, the building is going to tear it down."

Seller:—"Yes, that's why I intended to travel."

An Amateur Detective Agency.

Sweet Girl:—"Pa, the house next door was robbed last night."

Pa:—"Mercy! Next door?"

Sweet Girl:—"Yes, and the burglars have been in two or three houses on this block within a week."

Pa:—"I know it. I know it. It's terrible! But what can we do?"

Sweet Girl:—"I was thinking it might be a good plan for Mr. Nicefellow and me to sit up a few nights and watch for them."

A Perpetual Boarder.

"Have you boarded long in this house?" inquired the new boarder of the sour, dejected man sitting next to him.

"About ten years."

"I don't see how you can stand it. Why haven't you left long ago?"

"No other place to go," said the other, dismally, "the landlady's my wife."

Most Likely.

Wife:—"What do you suppose baby is thinking about?"

The Brute:—"I s'pose he's thinking what to cry about to-night."

A Bad Impediment.

Bridget (in the witness-box): "Did he have an impediment in his speech? Faith, an' that he had, for his false teeth were loose, an' kep' jumpin' up an' down, bitting the words in two. Shure it was an impediment he had?"

Just the Reverse.

Mrs. Fry (to applicant for apartments): "Does your husband stay out late at night?"

Applicant:—"He does."

Mrs. F.:—"Very late?"

A.:—"Yes, very late."

Mrs. F. (with a loss of her head):—"Ah! belongs to a club I suppose?"

A. (calmly):—"No, the club belongs to him. His's a policeman."

Times Have Changed.

"Do you dictate to your type-writer?" asked Gibson of a Fleet Street literary man.

"I used to do so, but I married her, and now she dictates to me."

Infant Precocity.

Geat (fancies herself a poet):—"Judge of my horror, madam, when I yesterday caught my little Otto, aged three, in the act of composing my newly written poems into fragments."

Lady:—"What? can the little fellow read already? Poor child!"

In School.

"Give me," said the school master, "a sentence in which the words 'burning shame' are properly applied." Immediately the bright boy at the head of the class went to the blackboard and wrote: "It is a burning shame to keep us in school on a lovely day like this."

The Wicked.

Little Boy:—"Papa, when the preacher talked about wicked people he didn't look at the congregation, he looked up in the air. Why was that?"

Papa:—"He was probably looking at the choir."

Once was Enough.

A young gentleman, says the Calgary Herald, who lately left his home in England, having exhausted his credit, telegraphed to his parents:

Your son Walter was killed this morning by a falling chimney. What shall we do with the remains?"

In reply a check was sent for £20, with the request, "bury them." The young gentleman pocketed the money and had an elaborate spree. When in a condition for writing he sent his father the following note:

I have just learned that an infamous scoundrel named Barker sent you a fictitious account of my death, and swindled you out of £20. He also borrowed £10 from me and left the country. I write to inform you that I am still alive and long to see the parental roof again. I am in somewhat reduced circumstances, the accumulations of the last five years having been lost—a disastrous stock operation—and if you would only spare me £20 I would be ever thankful for your favor. Give my love to all.

A few days later the young man received the following dignified letter from his outraged parent:

MY DEAR SON: I have buried you once, and that is the end of it. I decline to have any transactions with a ghost. Yours in the flesh,  
FATHER.

The Destruction of Birds in India.

It is the opinion of local authorities that nothing can save the beautiful birds of India from complete destruction but a prohibitive tax upon the export of their skins and feathers. Such is the demand for the adornment of ladies' caps, bonnets, and even dresses in Europe, America, and elsewhere, that the time is believed to be ripe for this decisive remedy if India is not to be deprived of its feathered songsters or the crops of the ryot left to the mercy of the insects on which they feed. In the Punjab, in Bengal, and in Madras, the harmless paddy bird, the oriole, the roller, and the little sunbird, with wings flashing with metallic hues, are all being exterminated for the sake of their wings and tails, and birds' feathers, closely packed, are going away from Indian ports in shiploads.

Vaccine virus is very dear in Russia, and for economic reasons the physicians take the virus from the wounds of vaccinated children and use it again on the arms of other children. One of the most prominent physicians of St. Petersburg proposed to the Medical Department of the Ministry of the Interior to prohibit that practice by law. He showed that, together with that virus, not only the latent diseases of one child are imparted to the other, but even hereditary ills of the blood and the nerves are transplanted.

A Shoeburyness fisherman nearly lost his life early on Sunday morning. A party were out shooting in the fishing smack Shanghai, when they heard shouts of distress off Shoeburyness Point, about a mile and a half from land. They bore down as fast as they could, but were unable to get near on account of the depth of the water. The party fired guns every minute, which attracted some watermen to the spot, and after a search they found, by means of a lantern, a young fisherman standing up to his neck in water. He had walked over the sands to attend his lines, starting at eleven o'clock on the previous night, and the weather becoming thick he lost his way. He was landed at Southchurch by the smack in an exhausted state.

Recognizing the truth of the old adage "union is strength," the maritime Prohibition party, the Dominion Alliance, and Canada's New Party have entered into an alliance for political purposes. Among other provisions of counsel they unite in urging other prohibition voters to organize at once and at the coming election to put forward a candidate who has the confidence of all prohibition voters irrespective of party, and who can be counted on actively to promote prohibition in Parliament in entire independence of party allegiance. Should this be found impracticable then let them unite the prohibition vote in favor of such trustworthy prohibitionists as may be otherwise in the field, or at least withhold their votes from non-prohibitionists as against prohibitionists. Considered from the stand point of prohibition, this alliance is a move in the right direction and if the rank and file will only follow the suggestion of their leaders the prohibition issue will count for something in the coming Dominion election. But just here is where doubt comes in, and where defeat has been experienced in the past. Many temperance men have been first partisans, and afterwards, and sometimes a long way afterwards, they have become temperance men. Whether any considerable number of these have changed in character during the last two or three years coming events must prove.

A Ship of the Tongue.

Deaf and Dumb Boggart (at unexpectedly receiving a penny):—"Oh, thankee, thankee, Benevolent Passer: 'Eh? what does this mean, sir? You can talk!"

Boggart (in confusion):—"Y-e-s sir. Y-e-s-e-e, sir, I'm only holdin' this corner for th' poor deaf and dumb man wot belongs here."

Benevolent Passer (quickly):—"Where is he?" Boggart (in worse confusion):—"He's—he's gone to th' park t' hear de music."

An Appropriate Melody.

In a Western town, the other day, two funeral processions met in a narrow street, and the driver of each hearse refused to give way, resulting in a blockade which lasted for hours. Meanwhile the somewhat hilarious mourners passed the time in songs. The names of the songs are not given, but nothing could be more appropriate than "If a Body Meet a Body."

He Filled Teeth.

Captain Jinks—Do you remember, Major, that infernal idiot in Dr. Toothyancker's office in Tombstone?

Major Shurtz—Dot feller vat was tinkin' he would be a dentist von day?

Captain—Yes.

Major—He don't know enough to fill a hole in the ground.

Captain—But he finally succeeded in filling a whole set of teeth.

Major—My, my, ish dat so! Howed it vas?

Captain—He got a job in Snagg's saw-mill and fell on the buzz saw.

Major—Don't say a word. Vaiter! zwie lager und a leetle rye bread und sweitzer.