

# Beautiful Cynthia;

## Victory After Many Defeats.

### CHAPTER XXIV. A CHANCE OF LIFE.

She spoke slowly, repeating, simplifying the words she saw that he did not understand, and while she spoke she took off his boots, and washed the wound on one of his feet caused by a spent bullet.

"What luck!" he murmured. She opened her eyes and shut them twice.

"It is fate, sahib," she said quietly. "Allah has helped us to pay our debt."

"You're right, Khasti," responded Darrel gravely, and with self-reproach. "It's the mercy of Providence. Am I much hurt? Can I go back to the fort, to my people, soon?"

She was silent a moment, then she shook her head regretfully.

"No, sahib; you cannot go back," she said reluctantly.

"But—" urged Darrel eagerly.

"Not all my people have gone," she explained; "some are watching on the hills. They would know that Abdurmahn had saved you, and—"

"Of course! What a selfish beast I am," muttered Darrel. "His life—yours, Khasti—would not be worth a moment's purchase if they knew you had saved, succored me. Oh, I know! But can you send a message?"

She shook her head again. "There are watchers," she said.

Darrel stifled a sigh. "My people will think me dead," he said, rather to himself than to her.

"It is better than being dead, sahib," she reminded him.

"You're right, Khasti!" he responded emphatically; for, strange to say, he no longer wished for death. He had been so near to it as to have acquired a wholesome dislike of it.

"What do you mean to do? I see you have set your mind on saving me."

"The sahib will remain here till Abdurmahn comes to us. He will know the rest; it is in his hands. But the sahib must not talk any more or he will get the fever. The wound is a good one, good and clean; the bullet—I will take it out when the sahib pleases."

"Now, now, please!" said Darrel quickly.

A shadow darkened the entrance to the nullah, and Khasti bent over him.

"Is it well with the sahib?" she inquired gravely.

"It is well, Khasti," he replied.

"Your husband has—"

"Has not returned," she said. "The sahibs are pursuing his people; they have gone far up the pass. See, I have brought you food and water; you will eat and drink before I dress your wound."

"Where, how far, will your people go, Khasti?" he inquired.

She waved her hand. "To the villages beyond the hills, sahib," she said.

"To gather and fight again?"

"It may be so, for my people are brave; but it may not be so, for they have lost much men. But who shall say! My people are brave, and they love fighting; it is meat and drink to them, sahib, and they like to please their women. It is so with the sahibs, likewise, is it not?"

"I suppose it is," admitted Darrel; "and that's all to be said about it. Have your men killed many of us, do you know?"

"Yes, sahib; they killed the sahib colonel"—Darrel turned his face away and clenched his teeth—"and many others. It was kill and kill, the way it always is," she added, in a matter-of-fact fashion, as she moistened the bandage and bathed his face. "It will always be so. The sahib will sleep now?"

Darrel dozed and thought and brooded through the long day; at intervals, which seemed very long to him, Khasti brought him a chapti or

She put her hand on his brow—her primitive way of taking his temperature—then she drew out the knife—Darrel was doomed to feel it, after all!—and, with a deftness acquired by a lifelong practice, probed for the bullet, found it, and extracted it. Darrel fainted during the operation, and, when he came to, he saw Khasti, calm and unmoved, sitting beside him, her hands crossed in her lap, her eyes fixed on his.

"I'm sorry," he said apologetically, for he knew that one of her hillmen would have borne the torture unmoved and in full consciousness.

She held up the bullet, then slipped it into the receptacle that served her for a pocket.

"The sahib will soon get well. He will sleep now," she said, as she took off the thick blanketlike robe in which she was enveloped and arranged it over him.

Darrel tried to remonstrate, to push it from him; but the exhaustion that follows hard upon extreme pain held him, his eyes closed, and he fell into a deep sleep.

When he awoke, he found himself alone, the marvelous dawn, that daily miracle in every land, was stealing down from the hills and pouring yellow light into the nullah.

His wound was painful, he felt a stiff as if he had been engaged in a

rugby footer, and he was consumed by thirst. It was some time before he was able to think. Here he lay helpless—no, not helpless; that was

ingratitude—but unable of himself to

move; and here he must remain—how long? His fellows would deem him dead; for the hillwomen show no mercy to the wounded, and his case was an exceptional one, one of a

strange coincidence.

He would be reported as dead, Dunton, if he were alive, would take the ring—He turned over on his side, and his hands clenched. What a sentimental fool he had been to give Dunton the ring! But there might still be an opportunity for him to get it back. He thought of Cynthia—she was asleep at this moment—Ah, what folly it was to think of her, to dwell upon his hopeless love!

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some of the dried beans, with cool draughts of the sour goat's milk, and cared for him with the tenderness and the skill of a duly certificated nurse.

The days dragged along slowly; his wound was on the road to healing, and he was able to walk; but Khasti would not permit him to go beyond the sangar, and he inwardly chafed with impatience at the restraint, the deadly dullness of his benevolent imprisonment.

He had almost lost count of time, and had begun to feel as if he were doomed to be shut up in this hillside nullah for the remainder of his life, when one morning, soon after dawn

he felt himself gently shaken by a tougher hand than Khasti's, and opening his eyes saw a wild, half-clad

man bending over him.

It was Khasti's husband, Abdurmahn. Darrel remembered him and started up. Abdurmahn saluted respectfully, but Darrel caught at his arm and wrung it.

"At last!" he said, with a quick reath of relief. "I thought you were never coming! I want to thank you! You have saved my life, Abdurmahn, and I am grateful. What news? Where is the force; can I get to them?"

Abdurmahn shook his tousled head.

"No, sahib. It has gone on. To each it the sahib would have to travel many miles; he would be seen by our tribesmen, and—"

He paused abruptly, significantly. "No, sahib, you cannot join the force, but there is a way over the hills to Bharrell. I'll show it to you. I will go with you. Here is danger; the sahib might be detected by our people. But one must run the risk; there is no other way. See, sahib, I have brought you lothes to put on; you will pass as a hillman, and I as your servant, brother."

"That's the word," broke in Darrel, earnestly; "you have proved yourself a blood brother, Abdurmahn, but you and Khasti—will it be safe or you?"

"We do not forget, sahib," said Abdurmahn, with dignity. "You gave me Khasti. It is I who am grateful. Here are the clothes, the knife."

Darrel tore off his khaki and donned the long shirt, the puggaree which distinguishes the Pathan of the Northwest from the Afridis of the South, who wear the stocknet cap, and, thrusting the long, keen-edged knife in his girdle, stood up, a very good imitation of the real article, as he thought. But Abdurmahn eyed Darrel's bare legs and feet doubtfully, and daubing him with a mixture of sand and water, colored them "to fancy," as painters have it.

"The sun will make them right, sahib," he said encouragingly. "We will start at nightfall. I know the way blindfold."

The hours dragged their weary length along, but the sun dropped be-

hind the hills at last, the purple light fell against the valley and was quickly followed by the darkness for which they were waiting.

Khasti glided into the nullah as the two men were preparing to start. She took Darrel's hand and was for placing it on her head in token of humble farewell; but Darrel caught both her hands and held them in a close grip; his face pale, his lips twitching.

"Good-by, Khasti," he said, his voice thick and rather hoarse. "I owe my life to you and Abdurmahn here, and I cannot find words with which to thank you."

"We but pay back, sahib," she said quietly. "If you see Lal Sef, my father, again, tell him that we did not forget."

Darrel turned away with a lump in his throat, and followed Abdurmahn, who had watched the parting with grave impassivity. Your Afridi, like the Arab, disdains any display of emotion. He was paying his debt, and that was sufficient for Abdurmahn.

### CHAPTER XXV.

#### THE SLEEPING POWDERS.

Lady Westlake stayed on at Lucerne. The inhabitants grew accustomed to the stately carriage as it rolled past their doors, and the countless huge mushroom hat, and no longer rushed out to gaze at the equipage with its powdered coachman and footman, though the more or less simple Lucerners lost no opportunity of pointing "La Comtesse de la Vestlake" to visitors, and dilated with pride on the fact that la comtesse was so charmed with the lake and the place generally that she had decided to reside at the chalet for the remainder of her life.

And Cynthia was quite content to remain. Existence went on for her as it must for all of us while we remain on this terrestrial globe; one must eat and breathe and sleep, though the interest in these actions have waxed so faint as almost to cease.

Time, we are told in consolatory prose and verse, heals all wounds; if it did not heal Cynthia's, at least it lessened its pain.

She was like a person who has been suddenly deprived of a sense; its loss is a poignant agony at first, but in time one grows accustomed to blindness, to deafness, the lack of power or smell or taste.

She was surrounded by the beauties of Nature; devoted servants were at her beck and call; was clothed in remarkably fine linen, and could have worn purple every day, if she had chosen to do so. But she could find no enjoyment in these things for which most people are content to toil and toil all their lives; a shadowy, superficial pleasure was all she could get out of them. She seemed to be living in a past over which a veil had fallen, to be waiting for something that she knew could never come.

If she read a novel, and she read many, the story seemed unreal, and often, alas, rather tame, for her own life possessed so great a tragedy that fiction paled its ineffectual fires before those of her own experience.

Just at this time the desire for solitude was strong within her; but solitude was not quite so attainable as it had been. For Percy Standish still remained, if not a welcome, at any rate, a tolerated, visitor at the chalet; and he appeared to be very desirous of her company; indeed, he was so attentive to Cynthia that she herself was somewhat puzzled. For she knew all Percy's actions were prompted by some deliberate purpose.

(To be continued.)

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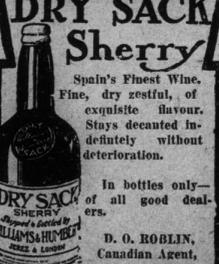
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