

A LIFE FOR A LIFE.

BY MISS MULLOCK

CHAPTER XXXV.

HIS STORY.

Alas! I was not mad; I saw all that was vanishing from me—invariably, irredeemably—my good name, my chance of earning a livelihood, my sweet hope of a home and wife. And I might save everything, and keep my promise to your father also, by just one little lie.

Would you have had me utter it? No, love; I know you would rather have had me die.

The sensation was like dying, for one minute, and then it passed away. I looked steadily at my accusers; for accusation, at all events strong suspicion, was in every countenance now; and told them that though I had not perpetrated a single one of the atrocious crimes laid to my charge, still the events of my life had been peculiar; and circumstances left me no option but the course I had hitherto pursued, namely, total silence. That if my good character were strong to sustain me through it, I would willingly retain my post at the jail, and weather the storm as best I could. If this course were impossible—

"It is impossible," said the governor, decisively.

"Then I have no alternative but to tender my resignation."

It was accepted at once.

I went out from the board-room a disgraced man, with a stain upon my character which will last for life, and follow me wherever I plant my foot. The honest Urquhart name, which my father bore, and Dallas—which I ought to have given to my wife, and left—if I could leave nothing else—to my children—ay, it was gone. Gone, forever and ever.

I stole up into my own rooms, and laid myself down on my bed, as motionless as if it had been my coffin.

Fear not my love; one sin was saved me, perhaps, by your letter of that morning. The wretchedest, most hopeless, most guilty of men would never dare to pray for death so long as he knew that a good woman loved him.

When daylight failed, I bestirred myself, lit my lamp, and began to make a few preparations and arrangements about my rooms—it being clear that, wherever I went, I must quit this place as soon as possible.

My mind was almost made up as to the course I ought to pursue; and that of itself calmed me. I was soon able to sit down, and begin this letter to you; but got no farther than the first three words, which, often as I have written them, look as new, strange and precious as ever: "My dear Theodora." Dear—God knows how infinitely! and mine—altogether and everlasting mine. I felt this, even now. In the resolution I had made, no doubts shook me with respect to you; for you would bid me to do exactly what conscience urged—ay, even if you differed from me. You said once, with your arms round my neck, and your sweet eyes looking up steadfastly in mine: "Max, whatever happens, always do what you think to be right, without reference to me. I would love you all the better for doing it, even if you broke my heart."

"If you ponder this, planning how best to tell you of things so sore; and when there came a knock to my room door. Expecting no one but a servant, I said "Come in," and not even looking up—for every creature in the jail must be familiar with my disgrace by this time.

"Dr. Urquhart, do I intrude?"

It was the chaplain.

Theodora, if I have ever in my letters implied a word against him—for the narrowness and formality of his religious belief sometimes annoyed and was a hindrance to me—remember it not. Set down his name, the Reverend James Thordley, on the list of those I wish to be kept always in your tender memory, as those whom I sincerely honored, and who have been most kind to me of all my friends.

The old man spoke with great hesitation, and when I thanked him for coming, replied in the manner which I had many a time heard him use in convict cells:

"I came, sir, because I felt it to be my duty."

"Mr. Thordley, whatever was your motive, I respect it, and thank you."

And we remained silent—both standing—for he declined my offer of a chair. Noticing my preparations, he said, with some agitation, "Am I hindering your plans for departure? Are you afraid of the law?"

"No."

He seemed relieved; then after a long examining look at me, quite broke down.

"O, Doctor, Doctor, what a terrible thing this is! who would have believed it of you!"

It was very bitter, Theodora.

When he saw that I attempted neither answer nor defence, the chaplain continued sternly, "I come here, sir, not to pry into your secrets, but to fulfill my duty as a minister of God; to urge you to make confession, not unto me, but unto Him whom you have offended, whose eye you cannot escape, and whose

justice sooner or later will bring you to punishment. But perhaps," seeing I bore with composure these and many similar arguments; alas, they were only too familiar! "perhaps I am laboring under a strange mistake! You do not look guilty, and I could as soon have believed in my own son's being a criminal, as you. For God's sake break this reserve and tell me all."

"It is not possible."

There was a long pause, and the old man said, sighing:

"Well, I will urge no more. Your sin, whatever it be, rests between you and the Judge of sinners. You say the law has no hold over you?"

"I said I was not afraid of the law."

"Therefore it must have been a moral rather than a legal crime, if crime it was." And again I had to bear that searching look, so dreadful because it was so eager and kind. "On my soul, Dr. Urquhart, I believe you to be entirely innocent."

"Sir," I cried out, and stopped; then asked him, "if he did not believe it possible for a man to have sinned and yet repented?"

Mr. Thordley started back—so greatly shocked that I perceived at once what an implication I had made. But it was too late now; nor, perhaps, would I have had it otherwise.

"As a 'clergyman—I—I—' He paused. 'If a man sin a sin which is unto death.' You think the rest."

"And there is a sin which is unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for it. But never that we shall not pray for it."

And falling down on his knees beside me, the old chaplain repeated in a broken voice:

"Remember not the sins of my youth nor my transgressions; according to thy mercy, think thou upon me, O Lord, for thy goodness. Not ours, which is but filthy rags; for Thy goodness, through Jesus Christ, O Lord."

"Amen."

Mr. Thordley rose, took the chair I gave him, and we sat silent. Presently he asked me if I had any plans? Had I considered what exceeding difficulty I should find in establishing myself anywhere professionally after what had happened this day?

I said I was full aware that, so far as my future prospects were concerned, I was a ruined man.

"And yet you take it so calmly?"

"Ay."

"Doctor," said he, after again watching me, "you must either be innocent, or your error must have been caused by strong temptation, and long ago retrieved. I will never believe but that you are now as honorable and worthy a man as any living."

"Thank you."

An uncontrollable weakness came over me; Mr. Thordley, too, was much affected.

"I'll tell you what it is, my dear fellow," said he, as he wrung my hand, you must start afresh in some other part of the world. You are no older than my son-in-law was when he married and went to Canada, in your own profession too. By the way, I have an idea."

The idea was worthy of this excellent man, and of his behavior to me. He explained that his son-in-law, a physician in good practice, wanted a partner—some one from the Old Country, if possible.

"If you went out, with an introduction from me, he would be sure to like you, and all might be settled in no time. Besides, you Scotch hang together so—my son-in-law is a Fife man—and did you not say you were born or educated at St. Andrew's? The very thing?"

And he urged me to start by next Saturday's American mail.

A sharp struggle went on within my mind. Mr. Thordley evidently thought it sprang from another cause, and with much delicacy, gave me to understand that in the promised introduction, he did not consider there was the slightest necessity to state more than that I had been an army surgeon, and was his valued friend; that no reports against me were likely to reach the far Canadian settlement, whither I should carry, both to his son-in-law and the world at large, a perfectly unknown and unblemished name.

If I had ever wavered, this decided me. The hope must go. So I let it go, in all probability, forever.

Was I right? I can hear you say, "Yes, Max."

In bidding the chaplain farewell, I tried to explain to him that in this generous offer he had given to me more than he guessed—faith not only in heaven, but in mankind, and strength to do without shrinking what I am bound to do—trusting that there are other good Christians in this world besides himself who dare believe that a man may sin and repent—that the stigma even of an absolute crime is not hopeless nor eternal.

His own opinion concerning my present conduct, or the facts of my past history, I did not seek; it was of little moment; he will shortly learn all.

My love, I have resolved as the only thing possible to my future peace, the one thing exacted by the laws of God and man—to do what I ought to have done twenty years ago—to deliver myself up to justice.

Now I have told you; but I cannot tell you the infinite calm which this resolution has brought to me. To be free to lay down this living load of lies, which has hung about me for twenty years; to speak the whole truth before God and man—confess all, and take my punishment—my love, my love, if you knew what the thought of this is to me, you would neither tremble nor weep, but rather rejoice!

My Theodora, I take you in my arms, I hold you to my heart, and love you with a love that is dearer than life and stronger than death, and I ask you to let me do this.

In the inclosed letter to your father, I have, after relating all the circumstances of which I here inform you, implored him to release me from a pledge which I ought never to have given. Never, for it was putting the fear of man before the fear of God; it was binding myself to an eternal hypocrisy, an inward gnawing of shame, which paralyzed my very soul. I must escape it; you must try to release me from it—my love who loves me better than herself, better than myself—I mean this poor worthless self, battered and old, which I have often thought was more fit to go down into the grave than live to be my dear girl's husband. Forgive me if I wound you. By the intolerable agony of this hour, I feel that the sacrifice is just and right.

You must help me, you must urge your father to set me free. Tell him—indeed I have told him—that he need dread no disgrace to the family, or to him who is no more. I shall state nothing of Henry Johnston excepting his name, and my confession will be sufficient and sole evidence against me.

As to the possible result of my trial, I have not overlooked it. It was just, if only for my dear love's sake, that I should gain some idea of the chances against me. Little as I understand of the law, and especially English law, it seems to me very unlikely that the verdict will be wilful murder, nor shall I plead guilty to that. God and my own conscience are witnesses that I did not commit murder, but unpremeditated manslaughter.

The punishment for this, I believe, sometimes transportation, sometimes imprisonment for a long term of years. If it were death—which perhaps it might as well be to a man of my age—I must face it. The remainder of my days, be they few or many, must be spent in peace.

If I do not hear within two days' post from Rockmount, I shall conclude your father makes no opposition to my determination, and go at once to surrender myself at Salisbury. You need not write; it might compromise you; it would be almost a relief to me to hear nothing of or from you until all was over.

And now, farewell! My personal effects here I leave in charge of the chaplain with a sealed envelope containing the name and address of the friend to whom they are to be sent in case of my death, or any other emergency. This is yourself. In my will I have given you, as near as the law allows, ever right that you would have had as my wife.

My wife—my wife, in the sight of God, farewell—that is, until such time as I dare write again. Take good care of yourself; be patient, and have hope. In whatever he commands—he is too just a man to command an injustice—obey your father.

Forget me not—but you never will. If I could have seen you once more, have felt you close to my heart—but perhaps it is better as it is.

Only a week's suspense for you, and it will be over. Let us trust in God, and farewell! Remember how I loved you, my child.

MAX URQUHART.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HIS STORY.

MY DEAR THEODORA,—By this time you will have known all. Thank God, it is over. My dear, dear love—my own faithful girl—it is over.

When I was brought back to prison to-night, I found your letters; but I had heard of you the day before from Colin Granton. Do not regret the chance which made Mr. Johnston detain my letter to you, instead of forwarding it at once to the Cedars. These sort of things never seem to me as accidental; all was for good. In any case I could not have done otherwise than I did; but it would have been painful to have done it in direct opposition to your father. The only thing I regret is, that my poor child should have had the shock of first seeing these hard tidings of my surrender to the magistrate, and my public confession, in a newspaper.

Granton told me how you bore it. Tell him I shall remember gratefully all my life his goodness to you, and his leaving his young wife—whom he dearly loves, I can see—to come to me here. Nor was he my only friend; do not think I was either condemned or forsaken. Sir William Treherne and several others offered any amount of bail for me; but it was better I should remain in prison during the few days between my committal and the assizes. I need quiet and solitude.

Therefore, my love, I dared not have seen you, even had you immediately come to me. You have acted in all things as my dear girl was ever—act—wise, thoughtful, self controlled, and oh! how infinitely loving.

I had to stop here for want of daylight; but they have now brought me my allowance of candle—slender enough, so I must make haste. I wish you to have this full account as soon as possible after the brief telegram which I know Mr. Granton sent you the instant my trial was over. A trial, however, it was not; in my ignorance of any law, I imagined much that never happened. What did happen I will here set down.

You must not expect me to give many details; my head was rather confused, and my health has been a good deal shaken, though do not take heed of anything Granton may tell you about me or my looks. I shall recover now.

Fortunately, the four days of imprisonment gave me time to recover myself in a measure, and I was able to write out the statement I meant to read at my trial. I preferred reading it, lest any physical weakness might make me confused or inaccurate. You see I took all rational precautions for my own safety. I was as just to myself as I would have been to another man. This for your sake, and also for the sake of those now dead, upon whose fair name I have brought the first blot.

But I must not think of that—it is too late. What best becomes me is humility, and gratitude to God and man. Had I known in my wretched youth, when, absorbed in terror of human justice, I forgot justice divine—had I but known there were so many merciful hearts in this world!

After Colin Granton left me last night I slept quietly, for I felt quiet and at rest. Oh, the peace of an unburdened conscience, the freedom of a soul at ease, which, the whole truth being told, has no longer anything to dread, and is prepared for everything!

I rose calm and refreshed, and could see through my cell window that it was a lovely spring morning. I was glad my Theodora did not know what particular day of the assizes was fixed for my trial. It would make things a little easier for her.

It was noon before the case came on; a long time to wait.

Do not suppose me braver than I was. When I found myself standing in the prisoner's dock, the whole mass of staring faces seemed to whirl round and round before my eyes; I felt sick and cold; I had lost more strength than I thought. Everything present melted away into a sort of dream through which I fancied I heard you speaking, but could not distinguish any words—except these, the soft, still tenderness of which haunted me as freshly as if they had been just uttered; My dear Max!

By this I perceived that my mind was wandering, and must be recalled; so I forced myself to look round at the judge, jury, witness-box, in which was a person sitting with his white head resting on his hand. I felt who it was.

Did you know your father was subpoenaed here? If so, what a day this must have been for my poor child! Think not, though, that the sight of him added to my suffering. I had no fear of him or of anything now. Even public shame was less terrible than I thought; those scores of inquisitive eyes hardly stabbed so deep as in days past did many a kind look of your father's, many a loving glance of yours.

The formalities of the court began, but I scarcely listened to them. They seemed to me of little consequence. As I said to Granton when he urged me to employ counsel, a man who only wants to speak the truth can surely manage to do it, in spite of the encumbrances of the law.

It came to an end—the long, unintelligible indictment—and my first clear perception of my position was the judge's question:

"How say you, prisoner at the bar, guilty or not guilty?"

I pleaded "guilty," as a matter of course. The judge asked several questions, and held a long discussion with the counsel for the crown on what he termed "this very remarkable case." The purport of it was, I believe, to ascertain my sanity, and whether any corroboration of my confession could be obtained. It could not. All possible witnesses were long since dead, except your father.

He still kept his position, neither turning toward me nor yet from me—neither compassionate nor revengeful; but sternly composed, as if his long sorrows had obtained their solemn satisfaction; and, even though the end was thus, he felt relieved that it had come. As if he, like me, had learned to submit our course should be shaped for us rather than by us, being taught that even in this world's events the God of Truth will be justified before men—will prove that those who, under any pretence, disguise or deny the truth, live not unto Him, but unto the father of lies.

Is it not strange that then and there I should have been calm enough to think of these things? Ay, and should calmly write of them now. But, as I have told

you, in a great crisis my mind always recovers its balance and becomes quiet. Besides, sickness makes us both clear-sighted—wonderfully so, sometimes.

Do not suppose from this admission that my health is gone or going, but simply that I am, as I see in the looking-glass, a somewhat older and feebler man than my dear love remembers me a year ago. But I must hasten on.

The plea of guilty being recorded, no trial was necessary; the judge had only to pass sentence. I was asked whether, by counsel or otherwise, I wished to say anything in my own defence? And then I rose and told the whole truth.

Do not grieve for me, Theodora. The truth is never really terrible. What makes it so is the fear of man, and that was over with me; the torment of guilty shame, and that was gone too. I have had many a moment of far sharper anguish, more grinding humiliation than this, when I stood up and publicly confessed the sin of my youth, with the years of suffering which had followed, I dared say, exalted it!

There is a sense in which no sin ever can be expiated except in One Blessed Way; yet in so far as a man can atone to man, I believed I had atoned for mine; I had tried to give a life for a life, morally speaking—may, I had given it. But it was not enough; it could not be. Nothing less than the truth was required from me, and I here offered it. Thus, in one short half hour, the burden of a lifetime was laid down forever.

The judge—he was not unmoved, so they told me afterward—said he must take time to consider the sentence. Had the prisoner any witnesses as to character?

Several came forward. Among the rest, the good old chaplain, who had traveled all night from Liverpool, in order, he said, just to shake hands with me to-day—which he did, in open court—God bless him!

There was also Colonel Turton, with Colin Granton—who had never left me since daylight this morning—but they all held back when they saw rise and come forward, as if with the intention of being sworn, your father.

Have no fear, my love, for his health. I watched him closely all this day. He bore it well—it will have no ill result, I feel sure. From my observation of him, I should say that a great and salutary change had come over him, both body and mind, and that he is as likely to enjoy a green old age as any one I know.

When he spoke, his voice was as steady and clear as before his accident it used to be in the pulpit.

"My lords and gentlemen, I was subpoenaed to this trial. N. being called upon to give evidence, I wish to make a statement upon oath."

There must have been a "sensation in the court," as newspapers say, for I saw Granton look anxiously at me. But I had no fears. Your father, whatever he had to say, was sure to speak the truth, not a syllable more or less, and the truth was all I wanted.

The judge here interferred, observing that, there being no trial, he could receive no legal evidence against the prisoner.

"Nor have I any such evidence to give: I wish only for justice. My lord, may I speak?"

Assent was given.

Your father's words were brief and formal; but you will imagine how they fell on one ear at least.

"My name is William Henry Johnston, clerk, of Rockmount, Surrey. Henry Johnston, who—died—on the night of November 19th, 1836, was my only son. I know the prisoner at the bar. I knew him for some time before he was aware whose father I was, or I had any suspicion that my son came to his death in any other way than by accident."

"Was your first discovery of these painful facts by the prisoner's present confession?"

"No, my lord." Your father hesitated, but only momentarily. "He told me the whole story himself, a year ago, under circumstances that would have induced most men to conceal it forever."

The judge inquired, "Why was not this confession made public at once?"

"Because I was afraid, I did not wish to make my family history a by-word and a scandal. I exacted a promise that the secret should be kept inviolate. This promise he has broken; but I blame him not. It ought never to have been made."

"Certainly not. It was thwarting the purposes of justice and of the law."

"My lord, I am an old man, and a clergyman; I know nothing about the law; but I know it was a wrong act to bind any man's conscience to live a perpetual lie."

Your father was here asked if he had anything more to say.

"A word only. In the prisoner's confession, he has, out of delicacy to me, omitted three facts, which weigh materially in extenuation of his crime. When he committed it he was only nineteen, and my son was thirty. He was drunk, and my son, who led an irregular life, had made him so, and afterward taunted

him more than a youth of nineteen was likely to bear. Such was his statement to me, and knowing his character and my son's I have little doubt of its perfect accuracy."

The judge looked up from his notes. "You seem, sir, strange to say, to be not unfavorable toward the prisoner. I wish to be, even though he has on his hands the blood of my only son."

After the pause which followed, the judge said:

"Mr. Johnston, the Court respects your feelings, and regrets to detain you longer or put you to any additional pain. But it may materially aid the decision of this very peculiar case if you will answer another question. You are aware that, all other evidence being wanting, the prisoner can only be judged by his own confession. Do you believe, on your oath, that this confession is true?"

"I do. I am bound to say, from my intimate knowledge of the prisoner, that I believe him to be now, whatever he may have been in his youth, a man of sterling honor and unblemished life; one who would not tell a lie to save himself from the scaffold."

"The court is satisfied."

But before he sat down, your father turned, and, for the first time that day, he and I were face to face.

"I am a clergyman, as I said, and I never was in a court of justice before. Is it illegal for me to address a few words to the prisoner?"

Whether it was or not, nobody interrupted him.

"Dr. Urquhart," he said, speaking loud enough for every one to hear, "what your sentence may be, I know not, or whether you and I shall ever meet again until the day of judgment. If not, I believe that if we are to be forgiven our debts according as we forgive our debtors, I shall have to forgive you then. I prefer to do it now, while we are in the flesh, and it may comfort your soul. I, Henry Johnston's father, declare publicly that I believe what you did was done in the heat of youth, and has ever since been bitterly repented of. May God pardon you, even as I do this day."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Looking a Button.

Walter Scott tells a story of a boy who was with him in school, who always stood at the head of his class. It was the custom of the scholars to change places in their class, according to failure or success in recitation; but though Walter was number two, he could not get to the head, because this boy never missed. But Walter noticed that he had a habit, when puzzled by a hard question, of twirling a button on his jacket, and this seemed to help him think out a right answer.

Walter, more through mischief than any worse motive, cut off the button slightly one day, to see if it would make any difference. The lesson was a spelling lesson, and several boys at the foot missed a hard word. It came round to the head. The boy instinctively put his hand to the button. It was gone. He looked down to find it, grew confused, missed the word, and Walter went above him. The boy never got to the head again, seemed to lose his ambition settled down into a second-rate scholar, and never accomplished much in life. Walter Scott declared that he often suffered sharp remorse at the thought that he possibly spoiled the boy for school and for life by cutting off the button that had done such good service.

Alexander McLeod, Kincairdine township, lost a number of sheep lately from a peculiar disease. After two or three sheep had died, Mr. McLeod made an investigation of the cause, and far up the nostril in close proximity to the eye, he discovered four or five grubs of a whitish color and nearly the size of a potato bug. The sheep affected by them may be distinguished by a kind of matter which oozes from the nose. A short time before death the eyes lose their natural color and turn completely white. One of the insects lived for six days after being removed from the sheep's head. Indeed it was put into spirits of turpentine and other liquids, with the view of accomplishing its death, but it survived the operation without appearing to be injured in the least. Mr. McLeod is anxious to hear from any one who is acquainted with the disease.

Swear not at all, but if you must swear, swear off.

"Henry is so practical," said Mrs. Youngwife. When mother went into the country last year he sent all her things after her the very next day; he said she must want some of them, you know. And its kind o' funny," she went on, "mother did want them, for she has never come back to live with us since. Wasn't it queer?"

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