

Love's Awakening

Continued from last issue.

the year's garnered harvest of days. All the pent-up tenderness of the long solitary years of his wanderings was cast at Eulalie's feet, and the sweetness of being loved—or deeming himself so—so even as he loved, blinded him to all else, as the eyes that have gazed at the sun are blind to the things upon earth around them.

He did not love me less; he never loved me less. Nay, I think the time came when he loved me more even than he had done in early years when we had golden days together, and hot sweets of Mr. Twinkler, who hoped his lordship was in good health, and forced me to run away and sit me down among the buttercups to have my laugh out.

When the last evening at home came around, and the shadows of the coming parting was over me, my mind was in a strange whirl of conflicting feelings. On the one hand I was glad even to thankfulness, thinking of Miss Mary's greeting and the peace and freedom that would be mine once more when I should teach my Land of Beulah; on the other, I was smarting with the pain of that near Good-bye that now seemed doubly bitter.

A miserable sense of distrust too—a distrust not only of Lettie (that was nothing), but of Eulalie—had been growing in my heart. The mirror in the music-room had been the first to tell me that my once loved friend was no true gentlewoman; a hundred trifles light as air had told me the same story since. Her way of speaking to the servants when papa was not by, jarred upon me, and made me ready to fling myself into the fray and take up arms in their behalf. I found out that she had turned the three dear ladies of Summerfield into ridicule to Miss Dove; a discovery that sent me promptly to my own room, there to fight with a rising passion of indignation that bade fair to urge me on to untold impudence of speech. 'How could she—how could she, when they did so much for her!' I sobbed, as I paced up and down my room; and my heart added: 'The old mirror told the truth; she is false—false—false!'

Well, the last evening at home came, and a sort of desperate feeling came over me—a determination to be happy my own way for just that once, and, 'after that, the Deluge.'

When papa joined us in the drawing-room, I went straight to him, slipped my hand within his arm, and put up my face for a kiss.

'You know I am going away tomorrow,' I said, just as if there had been no one else in the room save himself and his 'little girl.' 'I want to be spoiled and petted a bit tonight.'

Miss Dove might blink like an owl in the sunshine, Eulalie might look calmly amazed—I cared not. I was going away tomorrow—I would have my fling that night.

But, alas! the strongest of us cannot always count upon our physical endurance; and no sooner did papa fold his arm about me and draw my head down to his shoulder, than the 'climbing sorrow' of poor heart-broken Lear took my breath, and set me sobbing. I clenched my teeth hard and fast, I shook from head to foot with the effort after self-control; but it was no use to struggle—give an inch to expression of feeling and it takes an ell—and in another moment I was clinging about papa's neck weeping bitterly.

'Dear me, the child is quite hysterical!' said Lady Vansittart, hurrying to my side. The Dove made queer little noises with her lips expressive of surprise and sympathy, and fluttered to the assistance of her cousin.

Eulalie suggested a glass of sherry the Dove cooed out something about a 'few drops of red lavender'; both urged my immediate adjournment to my own room. This last suggestion was carried out, through perhaps hardly as they had meant it should be; for papa went with me, and telling them to leave me to him, closed the door upon them both.

'Nell,' he said, 'is anything making you unhappy? Is there anything you would like to say to me? My darling—I could not bear to think of there being any want of confidence between us. I have, fancied you changed of late; I said so to Eulalie.'

'Yes,' I said, twirling the ring upon his finger slowly round and round; 'and what did she say.'

'She spoke very lovingly of you—as she always does—no one has your good so much at heart; but she hinted at some possible school trouble.'

The hot blood surging to my face dried up my tears; I grew quite strong again all in a moment.

'She is mistaken then,' I said; 'quite mistaken I never had a school trouble in my life.'

He drew a long breath as if some weight were taken off his mind, and then he stroked my hair tenderly and kissed me. I was his 'own little girl'—once more for that one short while—that one short while. Yet he seemed the dream-child came to me and wept and wailed, lifting its wee, white, weary face to mine.

'Nell, how heavy your eyes look,' said Miss Mary as I kissed her next morning; 'go for a turn around the garden to brighten you up before Sir Charles comes; never mind your books, love—today must be a holiday.'

Papa could not be at Summerfield before midday, so I had plenty of time 'to brighten myself up,' as Miss Mary said, and soon felt all the better for a stroll round the coppice, and a scramble in the wood.

As I came towards the house again, Amy, now grown to be what she called 'a great durl,' met me.

'H're's a funny, funny letter for 'oo, Nellie dear!' she said, holding a small blue envelope high above her curly head.

It certainly was a funny letter. The address, commencing at the top of the left-hand corner ran down-hill all the way nearly to the lower corner on the right; and the writer had evidently been mindful to practise economy in the matter of capitals, for he or she had bestowed one on Vansittart, but none on the 'Miss' that preceded it.

Laughing, I opened my letter, saying, 'I really think, Amy, it must be from Mr. Twinkler.'

Then I read it, but the words conveyed no meaning to my mind.

Amy, poor frightened child, clung to me, and I saw her lips move, but I heard nothing. I was deaf, and—half satisfied, for after a long silence he repeated his first question, looking wistfully into my face.

'Is there nothing you would like to say to me, Nell, before we part?'

I turned away.

'Nothing, nothing, dear papa,' I said; for how could I complain to him of his wife? A woman must fall very low before she can teach her tongue to speak against another woman to that woman's husband even in self-defence; gain what she may by such a course, the gain must turn to dust and ashes in her mouth.

As papa opened my door, I heard the wisk of a dress at the end of the passage.

'What have they to gain by all this watching and plotting?' I wondered to myself as I lay awake that night.

The next morning I left Hazeldeane, and papa and Eulalie drove with me to the station. We left Miss Lettie behind, blinking and kissing her hand at the hall-door, while Terence smiled at me from the back-ground.

I had been round to the yard and patted Roderick's head; nay, more, I had bent down and laid a kiss upon his neck, sleek, wrinkled forehead; and then he lay down full length, and whined after me as I went away.

When I reached Summerfield Miss Mary was the first to greet me, and I had some ado to prevent repeating the 'quite hysterical' proceedings of the night before, for I was glad and sorry all in a breath.

'Have you been happy, child, at home?' said my good friend, as she and I walked over to Bromley church on Wednesday evening service some hours later.

'No; but I think I ought not to speak about it,' I answered, steadying my voice as best I could, and feeling by no means sorry that we were in the dusky gloaming.

'Child!' she said, 'dear child—'

'Yes, I put in quickly; 'yes, that is what I am, and Summerfield—my Land of Beulah—is my home.'

Summer was soon upon us in all its fulness of beauty, and never had I seen the roses in our garden more plentiful than they were that year. I was very young still, and the young have a power that belongs to them alone of casting aside sorrow. The vividness of my trials at Hazeldeane faded; and before long I heard that in consequence of Lady Vansittart being in delicate health she and my father were going on a yachting expedition in the Ladybird, and that the length of their cruise would be indefinite. I had a dear kind letter from papa telling me of all this. I had many other letters of a like nature from him in the days that followed, now from this place, now from that, but always full of the same loving histories of the doings of himself and his wife, always full of the same tender thought for me, his 'own dear little girl,' his darling Nell.

The summer passed away, and the leaves began to fall. Those from the chestnut tree in the coppice were striped orange and brown, while those of the Virginian creeper were more beautiful in their death robes of rich and glowing crimson than they had been in life. The rooks were blown about sadly by the wind; the hips and haws began to redden in the hedges.

By this time I had become quite a full-fledged young lady; my dresses were always long now; I climbed no more trees and played no more at hare-and-hounds with Amy and her comrades. Books that had been unknown to me before, began to open their meaning to me as a new life. I read Evangeline instead of Ivanhoe; the Psalm of Life instead of the Swiss Façade; Robinson. Hitherto it had been enough to read of the doings of men and women, good and great; now I began to long to fashion my own life after the pattern of theirs—in a word, my girlhood felt the stirrings of the

womanhood within me, as the pool of old was 'troubled' by the angel's touch. By the end of September my father and his wife returned to Hazeldeane, where they found all things 'swept and garnished' under the careful administration of Miss Dove, who appeared to have become a fixture there.

'Eulalie is much stronger now, and has almost lost her cough,' papa wrote; 'as for me, I am flourishing.'

This was satisfactory, but nothing to what followed, for he told me he was coming to Summerfield for a 'long day,' and should insist upon being taken to pay his respects to his old friend Mr. Twinkler.' He added that he knew me to be as impatient a little mortal as ever breathed, and so fixed upon a date only ten days off for this promised visit.

Ten days is not a long time in itself yet my longing made it seem so. The night before the day that was to be a 'golden' one I could not sleep. I had heard nothing further from Hazeldeane, but I did not doubt that all was well—it was joy, not doubt, that kept me waking. Strangely vivid thronging thoughts of past happy times made me lie and count the hours chimed from Bromley church tower—those memories of little things and little words that come to us in such quiet, silent hours, like angel visitants.

Just as a faint streak of grey fell upon my bedroom floor I sank into a heavy sleep, and then all the sweet memories fled like elves at dawn, for yes, it must be so—mad! I looked wildly round as if for aid against some arm that was raised to strike me down where I stood.

Again my eyes grew to the words traced in strange uncertain characters upon the paper in my hand.

'Dear Miss Ellen,—Which it is my sorrowful duty to tell you as my master died very sudden early this day. They said they would rite; but I know it was no such thing, or you would have cum. I have lost a good master, but he is a gone to a Better world—From your 'umble servant,
'Terence Mahaffy.'

This time I grasped the meaning of what I read. I tried to take a step forward—to get to Miss Mary, I think—but the bank, leaf-strewn grass rose up to meet me, and I thrust out my hand to keep it off, all things—even my wful sorrow—faded into nothingness.

CHAPTER X

Terence Tells His Story.

In the 'good old days' when torture was a science, there was one relief that not even the most cruel could deny their victims, for when nature could bear no more she wrought a cure for herself, and insensibility stilled the sufferer's pain awhile. As in bodily, so in mental pain, its very keenness at last dulls sensation, and a sort of misty unreal composure mercifully deadens the faculties.

From that one dreadful moment in which I, falling, seemed to meet the rising ground, a numbness came over me, and I heard, as one hears things far off, voices that faint would have offered comfort when no comfort could yet come; saw tears streaming down Miss Mary's face, and envied her in that she could weep. Some one led me in from the garden, and then I sat down in one of the big oak chairs by the side of Polly's cage. I wanted no one to speak to me, no one to touch me. I wanted to be left alone, face to face with one awful thought.

In an hour's time papa should have been there; we should have gone out through the fields together, as we did long since; but now he would never come again—he would never come again. The roses that he had loved would all bloom again when summer came, but even then I should never see him more.

I had been making a watch-guard for him; now I drew it from the pocket of my little muslin apron and twisted it round my fingers.

'Get her to go up stairs to her room,' said some one, and I turned quickly to see Miss 'Dossia' standing between me and the light from the hall door. She was as tall and rigid as ever, but—was it part of the dream in which I was living?—her voice shook, and tears—yes, tears—were on her cheek. Somewhere hidden beneath that hard exterior then there beat a woman's heart, and my white, tearless agony had touched it.

The strangeness of this softening on the part of my old enemy struck me as so marvellous a thing that I held out my hand to her, and—yes—smiled.

'He will never come again,' I said. 'I made this chain for him; look at it—it is no good now. What shall I do with it, Miss 'Dossia?'

What happened after this? I can hardly tell. Time seemed to be no longer, and as I look back, one disjointed memory and another rises up merging into one another in wild confusion. Yet one memory is clear and vivid. I was in a train; the lamp above my head gave a sickly light, but enough to show me a figure in the opposite corner to the one in which I sat huddled, the figure of the vicar of Bromley, with a soft felt hat on the back of his head and his hands folded over the rug across his knees.

All Children Love "Syrup of Figs" For Liver and Bowels

Look at the tongue, Mother! It coated, it is a sure sign that your little one's stomach, liver and bowels need a gentle, thorough cleansing at once.

When peevish, cross, listless, pale, doesn't sleep, doesn't eat or act naturally, or is feverish, stomach sour, breath bad; has stomach-ache, sore throat, diarrhoea, full of cold, give a teaspoonful of "California Syrup of Figs" and in a few hours all the foul, constipated waste, undigested food and sour bile gently moves out of its little bowels without griping, and you have a well, playful child again.

You needn't coax sick children to take this harmless "fruit laxative"; they love its delicious taste, and it always makes them feel splendid.

Ask your druggist for a 50-cent bottle of "California Syrup of Figs" which has directions for babies, children of all ages and for grown-ups plainly on the bottle. Beware of counterfeiters sold here. To be sure you get the genuine, ask to see that it is made by "California Fig Syrup Company." Refuse any other kind with contempt.

As we whirled through the starlight night he neither spoke to me nor looked at me; he knew that fresh-made wounds cannot bear even the lightest touch. Once looking across at him I saw his lips move, and I knew that all his simple God-loving, God-fearing soul was being lifted up in prayer for me. The knowledge brought no comfort. I was somewhere all alone in a thick cloud of darkness through which no ray of heaven's comfort could come to me. I was alone with one thought—the old thought, yet a new phase of it. Papa would never speak to me, never kiss me again, but I should see him; there was yet time—a few days at most; but oh, what precious days!—in which the sight of my dear should be vouchsafed to me. I should kiss him, though he could not kiss me back; should touch his hand, though it could no more close on mine.

Presently—whether in a long or short time I cannot tell—Mr. Girdstone left his place by the window and came to my side; he took my hand, and held it close in one of his, patting it softly with the other.

'Nell,' he said, 'we're there now; tie your bonnet, child.'

I had undone the strings and thrown them back, for the one I felt was airy, plenty of air—something that should ease the strained tightness of my chest and throat, the burning throb of my temples. I did as he told me, and then our train drew up alongside the Hazeldeane platform.

I had no luggage with me save a small hand-bag, and so we were quick in a fly and on our way to the Hall. Mr. Girdstone held my hand still, and that kindly clasp seemed the only thing in all the world left to sustain me. As we passed through the gates and under the dark shadow of the trees in the avenue his hold grew closer, and he spoke to me—very quietly, but very distinctly—as if he wished to impress each word upon my mind.

'Nell, listen to me, dear, and try to remember what I am saying. I shall stay at the inn in the village until tomorrow night. If you want me, you have only to send a verbal message, and I will come.'

As he finished speaking our wheel grated against the curb of the steps I was at home once more.

The house was so still that the sounds of our arrival seemed a sort of sacrilege; and as Terence appeared he might well have been the dumb servant of an enchanted castle, for he stood staring at me, shaking from head to foot and stretching out his poor trembling hands almost as if he wanted to prevent me going in, and would fain keep me out in the chill autumn night.

'Miss Ellen, Miss Ellen,' he managed to say at last, plucking at my dress as I passed him by; 'wait a bit, my lady—wait a bit. Sit ye down in the chair here by the fire; ye must be cold; it's real chill to-night—too chill entirely.'

He was kneeling by the fire stirring the embers to a blaze; but as I put my hand upon his arm, he rose and faced me, shaking still.

'Take me to papa, Terence,' I said calmly. The nearness of my dead awoke me into quietude.

'Is it myself that must do as my young lady bids me, your reverence?' he said, turning to the vicar in dire distress.

'Let her have her way,' was the answer. 'I will come too.'

So we passed down the gloomy corridors: Terence leading the way, I following Mr. Girdstone last.

A door was opened, and the two others stood back to let me pass in.

In my agony I cried out to the ears that could not hear, 'Papa, papa! it is Nell—it is your little girl—Dear—I have come to you at last!'

The hour grew late. After a hurried conversation with Terence, Mr. Girdstone had left the Hall promising to return early in the morning; and I, weakened and softened by the sight of that quiet face, whereon a smile still lingered, as if even death had pitied me enough to leave me that dear greeting, began to bethink me that I was not the only woman in that silent house.


'Where is Lady Vansittart?' I asked of Terence, who hovered about me and seemed strangely ill at ease.

'She's in her room, Miss Ellen, along with Miss Dove. The new maid as come with her ladyship from foreign parts, she's there, too she is Miss Ellen.'

I put up my hand to my burning, aching eyes, and strove with all my might to grapple with this position of affairs.

'Does Lady Vansittart know that I am here?' I said. Then I added, 'But I daresay she is not able to come to me; I will go to her.'

'Maybe,' said Terence, rumpling



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his gray head with his hand as if in some sore bewilderment they'll not be after caring to see you. Maybe, Miss Ellen, ye'd best bid here whiles. I told the maid you'd come, and she's sartin sure to have told the mistress; maybe they'll send ye some bidding or other—'

'Send me some bidding?—not care to see me?' I repeated helplessly, letting my head fall back against the easy-chair in which I was sitting, and fondling poor Frizzle's ball of a head. 'I can't understand what all this means.'

'Well, Miss Ellen, then, it manes this the lot of them's terrible skered of the sickness that killed poor master, and they've been shut up there like so many nuns in a convent since iver he took ill.'

Here the old man began to shake again, and the cup and saucer that he was placing on the table rattled in his hands.

'Ever since he was taken ill?' I said, holding tight on to the edge of the table by my side. 'Do you mean to say, Terence—Terence, do you mean to say they left him to die—alone?'

Do what I would my voice rose to a sort of shriek as I spoke.

'For God A'mighty's sake, Miss Ellen, don't be after keening over it that way!' cried poor Terence, wringing his hands. 'How should the master be alone at-all, when I was along wid him? Poor old Terence, as dandled him on his knee a score of times when he wanted to ride cock-horse—and he no higher than the table, the cratur!—and sure the doctor was there too!'

But I might as well have been deaf for any comfort his words gave me.

'She was his wife—and she was afraid—she left him alone—to die. Oh, papa! papa!'

I was beside myself, and Terence was little better. I have a fancy that he tried to keep me from leaving the room. I think he saw the state of wild excitement I was in, and knew not what I might, or might not, do or say next. But no one could have kept me back; the old impulsiveness had got me in its clutches hard and fast—it drifted me

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