

The Pioneers

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CHAPTER XLIII—(Cont'd.)

Deirdre picked up the sock she had been mending again. The needle slipped backwards and forwards, across, under and over, the dark threads. She worked steadily.

The voice of the wind drew her mind again. It tugged gently and then carried her away on its plaintive wailing. Her hands fell in her lap as she listened. Her heart swayed; it went out to the wind again.

There was a clatter of a horse's hoofs on the road. The sound startled her; but it was not until she heard the dogs barking in the yard that she realized some late rider had come to Steve's, that there would be food and drink, and probably a shakedown, to get ready. She waited for the sound of footsteps on the verandah and a rap on the door of the bar.

The back door flung open, and on a gust of wind and rain, a tall, gaunt figure swung into the kitchen.

"Conal!" Deirdre cried, and flew to him.

In her gladness at seeing him the past was a blurred page. She forgot it when she saw him in the doorway, his weather-beaten face turned to her. Her confidence in him, all the old joyous affection, rushed over her.

His face was shining with rain, his hair and beard wet. From the way his breath came and went, and the muscles were whipped out from his neck, she knew that he had been riding hard.

"They tell me Davey and Dan are on trial in Melbourne," he said.

"What happened? What's been doing, Deirdre?" he gasped. "I've only just heard of it. It's taken me a couple of days to get here. I don't know anything but what I've told you. Thought p'raps you could tell me something before I go up to them. And give me something to eat and drink. . . . I haven't had anything since yesterday morning."

He wrenched off his wet coat and dropped into Steve's chair.

He had a gauntness that Conal used not to have. But his eyes, those eyes of fierce tenderness, were the eyes of the big brotherly man who had been the companion of so many of her and the Schoolmaster's wanderings.

She quickly put some food on the table for him, set the kettle on the bar over the fire, and while he was eating told him what she knew of Davey's arrest and Dan's going to swear Davey's innocence of the charge brought against him.

"Why did he do that? Davey was more in it than he was," Conal asked savagely.

"I don't know," Deirdre hesitated. "Yes, I do, Conal. It was because Mrs. Cameron—"

"Oh, that was it, was it?" Conal went on eating, hungrily. "What do they say about here? Do they think Davey'll get off and Dan'll have to pay?"

"You've heard of Mr. Cameron's death, Conal?" Deirdre asked. "They say that'll make all the difference. Davey can't very well be accused of stealing his own cattle, and McNab—"

"What has he got to say about it? Of course it's his hand in it all."

"He says . . . I'm the cause. . . . Her voice faltered.

"What's that?" Conal's knife and fork clattered to the table.

"Did you know . . ." she asked, "did you know, Conal, Steve and father came from the Island over there?"

He moved, uneasily.

"No," he said, but uncertainly.

"Who says so?"

"McNab. He did the chain trick here on Steve—scared him to death when he was by himself one afternoon. Seems he wasn't quite sure before, but Steve in his fright gave him all the proofs he wanted. And McNab promised to use all he knows against father and Steve unless—"

Says he only put the troopers on to this cattle business to get you and Davey out of the way, though he had another score to work off against Mr. Cameron, too. But he says he always suspected . . . about Steve and father, and was only waiting for a chance to be sure of it to make me . . . make me marry him."

"By God—"

Conal spun from his chair. His oaths startled the birds from their night perches under the roof.

"He'll not do that, Deirdre!" he cried. "Not while there's life in me. Rot him—the crawler! To come here scaring the wits out of you. I'll screw the last breath out of him, before—"

He made for the door. Deirdre went after him. She put her hand on his arm.

"You'll do no good now, Conal," she said. "You're done yourself. Rest till morning. Then you can go to McNab. If he knows there's a man about to stand by me, p'raps he won't dare to do what he said."

Conal jerked himself away from her.

"No, I'll swear he won't!"

"But you'll do nothing at all if you go now," she urged, "and I'll have nobody without you. If you'll only rest and sleep now and go in the morning, it'll be better. You'll be able to put the fear of God into McNab perhaps if he sees you strong and ready to make him do what you want."

"Sleep?" He cursed under his breath. "Do you think there's any sleep'll come to me when I think that McNab—a filthy, damned swine like McNab—could come near you. I'd kill him—kill him if he touched a hair of your head."

Her hands fell from him.

Conal's face was distorted with rage. His words brought back memory of the shot that had almost killed Davey.

Davey guessed what her movement meant.

"Do you still believe?"—he lifted her chin and looked into her eyes. "Do you still believe I fired that shot in the dark, Deirdre?"

"Did you, Conal?" she asked simply. He turned from her with a gesture of disappointment.

"Oh, it was in anger, and when you weren't sure of what you were doing, I know," she cried.

He opened the door.

"You're not going to-night?" she asked.

"No. You're right. It'll be better to wait till the morning," he said, with, for Conal, a strange quietude. "I want to give the mare a rub down and a feed. Are there any bones for Sally? Throw a shakedown by the fire for me. I'll be in directly."

CHAPTER XLIV.

Conal was early astir. Deirdre heard him moving in the kitchen and then out of doors.

When he came in again, she had spread a cloth on the end of the table. Bacon and eggs were spluttering in a shallow pan on the hearth, a pot of porridge was ready for him, the kettle steaming.

Conal's face was sombre; it was easy to see that he had not slept and that his mind was set to a plan of action. He ate without speaking, and got up to go.

Ginger was standing saddled by the door, her reins trailing beside her. She cropped the young grass that showed vivid green blades about the water barrel, and was nourished by the drips from the roof spouts and leakages from the barrel itself. Deirdre heard the click, click of Ginger's snaffle, the chirping of young birds under the roof, while Conal was eating.

There was a solemnity, a wrapped-up purposefulness about him this morning; she dared not ask him what he was going to do.

It was a fresh morning with frost

NURSES

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in the air. A sparkling rime lay out on the grass in the paddocks and spread under the straggling shade of the sheds and the stables in crisp white patches. The sunshine splashed golden over the hills; it lay in long shafts of purest brilliance on the paddocks and across the stable yard.

Conal went out of doors; Deirdre followed him.

"Conal," she cried.

There was appeal in her voice. He had gathered Ginger's reins in his hand. The mare turned her head, her beautiful eyes on Deirdre.

"It's no good your saying anything, Deirdre, telling me what to do and what not to do," Conal said roughly. "I've thought it all out. I know what's got to be done. I'll do it the best way I can."

He understood the prayer of her eyes.

"Do you think I want his blood on my hands?" he asked irritably. "But he's got to let you go, Deirdre. He's got to. There's no two ways about it, if he says a word about the Schoolmaster or Steve, he'll have to reckon with me then—and the reckoning'll be a short one. That's the bargain I'm going to make with him. And I'll hold him responsible . . . if ever the story gets out. He'll pay all the same and I'll swear that—on the soul of my mother. Do you think my life's worth a straw to me? Do you think if it is a question of yours and Dan's life against McNab's, I can hesitate?"

He threw back his head with the old reckless movement.

"Not much! Lord! I'd take what was coming to me, cheerin', if I thought I'd put things right for the Schoolmaster and you. But if a knocking about'll do Thad any good instead, he's welcome to it. If I can get what I want out of him with a scarin' there'll be no need to go further."

"If I promise him on the reddest oath under the sun, and he's pretty sure I mean it—it'll do instead, perhaps. But I'm not taking any chances of his trickin' me. I can't afford to take chances, Deirdre. If I don't feel I've got him that way—"

"She knew what he meant.

"It'll be a long day till you're back, Conal," she said.

He swung into his saddle, and went out to the road. She watched the bay with her long easy stride and Conal swinging above her, till the trees hid them.

There was no doubt in her mind that when Conal let his tongue loose, unleashed the rage in him, McNab would do what he wanted. Conal for nothing, and he was credited with being a man of his word. Reckless and dare-devil as he was, none knew better than McNab that he cared neither for God nor man when his blood was up, and that he would assuredly do as he said though the heavens fell.

Everybody knew the cringing coward McNab was. More than one of the men he had sold had threatened to wipe off old scores without leave or licence. A threat more or less might not have mattered, but each one intensified McNab's terror of the clutch of iron fingers in the night, the swift blade of a knife, the short bark of a pistol. It was easy to scare Steve with a clank of a chain, but the click of a pistol behind McNab turned him livid, a greenish hue spread on his face, Deirdre knew the frenzy of McNab's fear; but she knew, too, his shrewd brain.

(To be continued.)



GRAVE RESULTS

"This prohibition law is having grave results."

"Yes; many a grave has been made in consequence of its operation."

The First Consideration.

The dentist had finished work on a lady's back molar and had handed her a hand mirror that she might observe the result herself. Then he went on with his task with respect to the other teeth, repeating his performance with the mirror when each tooth had been filled. Finally, when the job was entirely complete, and she handed back the mirror with thanks, he said:

"Well, madam, how do they look to you?"

"How do they look to me?" she repeated.

"Yes, the teeth I have just filled."

"Oh, I forgot about the teeth!" she exclaimed, reaching for the hand-glass.

"What did you look at each time I gave you the mirror?"

"Why, my hair, of course!"

Hard to Please.

Grocer—"What was that old lady complaining about?"

Assistant—"About the long wait."

"She must be very hard to please. Yesterday she was complaining about the short weight."

It Makes a Difference.

Rejected Suitor—"Would you object to my presence at your wedding?"

The Girl—"How do you spell the word?"

About the House

HINTS FOR SWEET PEA LOVERS.

It would be difficult to recall all the women I have heard declare that sweet peas were their favorite annual. Popular, and a general favorite in our grandmother's day, they are no less so now. One seldom sees a summer garden without a wealth of these fragrant blooms. However, this is perhaps due to something besides the universal favoritism felt for the sweet pea. They are one of the easiest of the annuals to grow.

I would not advise any one to purchase seeds from their general store or from some seed house that is comparatively unknown. Order from a company who has a reputation to sustain, and if you pay a few cents more per ounce, do not consider the money spent foolishly. I have always considered that the mixed varieties were more attractive for the home garden than to have each kind in a separate row. But many women raise a quantity of the blossoms for their home market. These are often sold to cafes, hotels and restaurants; when this is done, the varieties should not be mixed together.

Prepare the ground as early as the frost is out of the ground, and if this is a few weeks before time to plant, so much the better. Dig the trench the desired length and two feet deep, as well as two feet wide. Put in a layer of manure. Fill in the remainder of the trench with a mixture made of equal parts of well-rotted manure, leaf mold and garden loam. Have the trench run north and south, if possible, as this permits the plants getting more sun. I always prefer to have my sweet peas planted in double rows as this allows room for netting to be stretched between the rows.

Early April is usually considered the best time to plant sweet peas. Make a furrow six inches deep and the full length of the trench. In this drop the seeds, an inch apart. Cover to the depth of two inches and press the soil down with a two-inch board. Water well and in two or three days the little plants will begin to appear. Until they are three inches tall they will need watering every fourth day. After that they should be watered once a week.

When the vines are four inches tall it is time to put up the netting for them to climb on. This should be four-foot poultry netting, and we stretch it between the rows. When the plants begin to bloom, do not neglect to keep them closely picked, never allowing a blossom to become faded on the stem. This greatly assists in keeping the plants in good blooming condition as well as insuring larger blossoms.

Do not plant the same soil to sweet peas season after season, but rather, choose a different spot for them each year.

TEACH ADAPTABILITY AT HOME.

A characteristic too often overlooked, or at least unemphasized in the training of the children, is that of adaptability. How does your child respond to adverse conditions or new contacts? When you take him visiting does he make a roar because he can't sleep in his own bed or eat with his own spoon or ride in the front seat of the car as he does at home? If he responds unfavorably to new conditions then his training in conforming to circumstances has been neglected.

A child that cannot comply with the routine of the home in which he is a guest can upset plans and create friction until the pleasure of the visit is spoiled for mother and hostess; and to prepare him so that this unpleasantness may be avoided cannot be done in the two or three days that precede a visit.

To be sure, a child should have his own things and should be held to a system of conduct at home—else how can he form any habits of regularity? Not for a moment can this theory be discounted. And it is very well to add that small children should be left at home as much as possible and not

subjected to a change of living conditions—but every mother knows that there are exceptions to this rule. We cannot all have nurse girls and housekeepers, and we cannot always stay at home; so while we are training the children in good habits, let us not give them the idea that these habits are not adjustable to other conditions.

Well, how shall we do it? The fundamental point in adjustability is unselfishness. In fact, when you stop to think of it, doesn't unselfishness almost always solve the problem of friction in social and business life?

One little mother helped her children by having a guest day at home. On this day the whole family pretended they were dining some place else. Bobbie, instead of having his high chair, sat on two books and a cushion as he has to do at Aunt Ellen's when he visits there. And Esther had to eat with a big knife and fork and drink from a "grown-up glass" and there wasn't any milk so they drank water and were very polite about it.

You get the idea! The family are lifted out of the rut—boosted up as it were to peek over the highboard fence to see what is in the neighbor's yard. And the change of scene is inspiring rather than annoying.

In social life the happiest individual and the most popular is the one commonly known as a good mixer, the qualifications for which are simply adaptability to circumstances and re-

spect for the interests and ideas of others. So the sooner and the more thoroughly our children cultivate these traits, the easier will everyday living be for them and their associates, but only by the careful patient guidance of the mother can these acquisitions be attained.—N. K. A.

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