

"I want to tell you too, that I never forgot what you said, that you would pray for me at ten o'clock every night. Wherever I was, or however occupied, I never forgot you at that time. Even that night at Rorke's Drift, I looked at my watch at three minutes to ten, and thought of you and Evy at Stonecroft, and of Sybil here. It is a great deal to us when we are on active service to know that we are thought of with loving anxiety and confidence at home. Mother, I do mean to be a better fellow than I have ever been. When a man is face to face with death as often as I have been lately, it gives him many queer thoughts. I know poor Harry thought of it continually, though he fell so soon. The night before Isandhlwana, after he had written his letters, I saw him reading from a little book. It was Evy's French Testament, and I found it in his breast pocket, with a bullet through the leaves. I should imagine," he added, with a close pressure of his lips, "that Evy would reckon that among her precious things to the very end of her days. By-the-bye, I was rather disappointed not to meet Will at Southampton. I thought he would be sure to meet us."

"He has been ill all the spring," Rachel answered, with saddened expression. "I am very much afraid that, after all, your cousin cannot live, Clement."

"Poor old Will! He deserves to live. Are they at Studleigh just now?"

"No, at Bournemouth. They have been there since early in May. We have not heard for some weeks how he is, and I am afraid it is because he is too ill to write himself."

"I must take a run down to see him. I hope he will live. Do you know, mother, he said to me that day they left Winterdyne last year, that I must take care of myself, because I would one day be Squire of Studleigh. It gave me quite a turn."

"There was truth in it, though, Clement."

"Well, I hope he will live to be an old man. I don't want the place. I should not know how to take care of it."

"You could not resign the army even to become Squire of Studleigh?"

"Never, never."

There was no mistaking the energy and decision of the young soldier's tone.

"It would be perfect martyrdom to me. No, no, Will is the man or Studleigh. He is happy pottering about among his tenants, and planning improvements in the villages. I should be miserable. I wish he had married. He may recover and marry yet."

"I think not. He loves Evelyn, Clement, and I believe, though I have not much ground for it, that her engagement to Raybourne disappointed him so bitterly that he lost all interest in life."

"Dear me, can that be so? It's a queer world, mother, and life seems all vexations and contradictions. There is Will, a far better fellow than I am, yet he has nothing—while I—I have everything."

"Some would reverse the situation, and say that the wealthy master of a great inheritance like Studleigh had everything, while the poor lieutenant had little worth possessing."

"Nevertheless, the poor lieutenant thanks God for His many mercies, and asks to be made worthy of them," Clement, answered, reverently. "And now, good-night, mother, best and dearest; not even Sybil can take your place."

Had not Rachel compensation for the long years of her widowhood, for the travail and anxiety with which she had reared her fatherless children? They were worthy of her teaching—they were proving themselves already heroes in life's hard battle; and her heart was at rest.

After a few quiet and pleasant days at Winterdyne the little family returned home to Stonecroft. Rachel was still somewhat concerned about Evelyn; indeed, they all wondered somewhat at her calmness of demeanour. Even when Raybourne's name was mentioned, or any little incident occurred to recall the painfulness of his loss, she made no sign. Nobody had ever seen her shed a tear. There was something at once unnatural and alarming in her perfect self-control. She had no comment to make on the story of the battle,

and when Clement put in her hands the little Testament, with the folded letter within, she took it with a faint, quivering little smile and carried it away. Nobody ever knew what was in the letter, nor did she ever speak of it even to her mother. For some things Rachel was glad to get away from Winterdyne. She fancied that Lady Winterdyne thought her callous, and that her love for poor Harry had never been real. Rachel thought otherwise. She was gravely concerned for her child's health. Evelyn betrayed no satisfaction at returning home; she simply acquiesced, and went about her little duties as of yore, with quietness and precision. But there was a difference. Only once her mother saw any sign. She came upon her unawares standing at the drawing-room window looking out towards the lake, where the red sunset lay, and her face was so haggard, so ghastly in its anguish, that Rachel's heart almost stood still.

"Evy, my darling, what is it? Why do you look so? You must be suffering fearfully," she cried, in keen alarm.

But instantly Evelyn looked round, calm, serene, self-possessed, even with a faint smile shadowing her lips.

"I was only thinking, mamma. Sometimes when I look away beyond and think how long I may have to live, it seems hard. Don't look so grieved. I don't think of it very often, only some times."

"My darling, you must try and speak to me. You must not lock your sorrow up like that, or it will eat into your heart. Have I been so poor a mother to you, my Evelyn, that you cannot trust me?"

"It is not that, mamma."

Evelyn's breath came in a strange, sobbing cry.

"I cannot speak if nobody can understand. I will try not to vex you. I will be more cheerful, mother, dear, though I have been trying hard all the time."

"I see that, but you must not try. It is natural that you should grieve. God does not forbid our tears, Evelyn. Christ himself wept with the poor sisters of Bethany. Let that comfort you, my poor child."

"But, mother, I do not want to cry. I feel so still and silent, as if I never wanted to speak again," said Evelyn, looking up with clear, dry, steadfast eyes, "I never sleep any, mother, and that makes me feel so strangely, as if I lived in an unreal world among shadows. I cannot tell you how I feel."

"I notice that you always slip away when Sybil is here. Does it vex you, dear, to see Clement and her together?"

"Oh, no, that would be very selfish and they think of me, I know," she answered, simply.

"Mother, if I could only have seen him once more. I did not tell him all I felt. He did not even know when he went away how I loved him. I will never live down that sorrow till the very end."

"Hush, darling, you promised to be his wife, and such a promise from you involved all the rest. Do not torment yourself about that. I wish I knew how to comfort you—"

"You do comfort me. Is it very naughty of me, mother, to pretend sometimes that I am asleep when you come into my room at night? I just love to feel your presence and your hand on my head. I know just how you look without opening my eyes, and it comforts me far more than anything you could say."

The mother's eyes filled, and for a moment she felt somewhat rebellious for her child. It seemed hard that that fair life, so full of promise, should appear to be early blighted, that that strong, rich depth of womanly affection should be pent in a heart but newly awakened to its own capacity for affection.

"Why, mamma," said Evelyn, suddenly, "there is a carriage! Who can it be? We are not expecting anybody are we?"

"No, dear, unless it be some of Clem's comrades; but he did not intend to have them for a few weeks yet."

They stepped over to the window and great was their surprise to see Lady Emily Ayre alight from the carriage. She had a dark veil over her face, and she walked forward to the door in nervous haste, and was immediately admitted. She threw back her veil as she stepped into the drawing-room and revealed a face so haggard and pale and anguish-lined that for a moment Rachel felt paralysed; only for a moment, however. Then she forgot the grief and humiliation she had suffered at her hands, and remembering only that she was a woman and in trouble took a swift step towards her.

"Lady Ayre, you are in trouble; you are ill; let me help you."

She took the trembling hands in her gentle clasp. She put her arm round the proud shoulders of the mistress of Studleigh, and led her to a couch.

"Yes, I am in trouble," she said in quick hoarse tones. "I am in despair, Mrs. Geoffrey; my son is dying."

"Dying? Oh, impossible!"

Rachel still kept the quivering, nervous hands in hers, chafing them softly, with a tender touch.

"It is true. He cannot live, and he cries so incessantly for your daughter, for Evelyn, that I have come to see if she will humour the whim of a dying man, and return with me. You will not keep her back," she added, looking up with swift, inquiring wistfulness to Rachel's face. "I have wronged and misjudged you, but I am not afraid, see, to come to you in my trouble."

"No, no, Evelyn shall go. I will go, too, Lady Emily, if I can be of the least use," she said, quickly, yet with unspeakable tenderness.

"He loves her, he thinks of her continually," said Lady Emily, looking at the girl's sweet face with a strange feverishness. "I know of her sorrow, how completely her heart must be bound up just now with other sad interests. But surely her own sufferings will make her mindful of the sufferings of others. My son has had a heavy cross to bear all his life."

"I will go, Aunt Emily. Do not say another word."

Evelyn stood by Lady Emily's side as she spoke, and touched her shoulder gently, while her eyes were full of tears. The tears rose also in Lady Emily's proud eyes.

"You have good, true, womanly hearts. You can forgive a great deal," she said, brokenly. "But you can afford to be generous. You have your hero restored to you in health and strength. I am about to be robbed of my all. When can you be ready? Will you go with me to-night, now? We returned home only yesterday, and I left him with his nurse, not saying where I was going, lest I should only bring a new disappointment."

"There shall be no disappointment. We can be ready immediately," said Rachel, quietly. "You shall have a little refreshment and rest, and then we can go. Clement is at Winterdyne. We can leave a message for him to follow us."

Within the hour the carriage was rapidly covering the distance between Stonecroft and Studleigh.

(To be Continued.)

Stray Notes.

SHE was eleven, and he was twelve. They had been earnest lovers, but the time came when all vows were broken, and all golden hopes were dashed ruthlessly to the level of the cold dull earth.

"I will never be yours," she sobbed. "The boy who takes all the jam out of a tart at the first bite is a monster."

"And," blubbered he, "the girl who can eat two coconuts at one sitting, and give her sweetheart the shells for a keepsake, will eat her husband out of home, and leave him nothing but vain and hungry regrets."

And thus they parted; she to the nursery, and he running fit to break his neck to be in time for school.

A man made a bullet out of a piece of plug tobacco, and shot it through the body of a cat. The animal died. Here we have another forcible illustration of the fatal effects of tobacco on the system.