

A LIFE FOR A LIFE.

BY MISS MULLOCK.

CHAPTER XXVI.

But it was necessary, and it was better far that I should have gone through this anguish alone guided by my outer influences, and sustained only by that strength which always comes in seasons like these.

I seem, while stretching on the rack of these long night hours, to have been led by some supernatural instinct into the utmost depths of human and divine justice, human and divine love in search of the right. At last I saw it, clung to it, and have found it my rock of hope ever since.

When the house below began to stir, I put out my candle, and stood watching the dawn creep over the grey moorlands, just as on the morning when we sat up all night with my father—Max and I. How fond my father was of him—my poor, poor father!

The horrible conflict of confusion of mind came back, I felt as if right and wrong were inextricably mixed together, laying me under a sort of moral paralysis, out of which the only escape was madness. Then out of the deeps I cried unto Thee, O Thou whose infinite justice includes also infinite forgiveness; and Thou heardest me.

"When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive."

I remembered these words: and unto Thee I trusted my Max's soul. It was daylight now, and the little birds began waking up, one by one, until they broke into a perfect chorus of chirping and singing. I thought, was ever grief like this of mine? Yes—one grief would have been worse—if, this summer morning, I knew he had ceased to love me, and I to believe in him—if I had lost him—never, either in this world or the next, to find him more.

After a little, I thought if I could only go to sleep, though but for half an hour, it would be well. So I undressed and laid myself down, with Max's letter tight hidden in my hands.

Sleep came; but it ended in dreadful dreams, out of which I awoke, screaming to see Penelope standing by my bedside, with my breast laid.

Now, I had already laid my plans—to tell my father all. For he must be told. No other alternative presented itself to me as possible—nor, I knew, would it to Max. When two people are thoroughly one, each one guesses instinctively the other's mind; in most things, always in all great things, for one faith and love includes also one sense of right. I was as sure as I was of my existence that Max meant my father to be told. Not even to make me happy would he have deceived me—and not even that we might be married, would he consent that we should deceive my father.

Thus, that my father must be told, and that I must tell him, was a matter settled and clear—but I never considered about how far must be explained to any one else, till I saw Penelope stand there with her familiar household face, half cross, half alarmed.

"Why child, what on earth is the matter! Here are you, staring as if you were out of your senses—and there is Dr. Urquhart, who has been haunting the place like a ghost ever since daylight. I declare, I'll send for him and give him a piece of my mind."

"Don't, don't," I gasped, and all the horror returned—vivid as daylight makes any new anguish. Penelope soothed me with the motherliness that had come over her since I was ill, and the gentleness that had grown up in her since she had been happy, and Francis loving. My miserable heart yearned to her, a woman like myself—a good woman, too, though I did not appreciate her once, when I was young and foolish—and had never known care, as she had. How it came out I cannot tell—I have never regretted it—nor did Max, for I think I saved my heart from breaking—but I then and there told my sister Penelope our dreadful story.

I see her still, sitting on the bed, listening with blanched face, gazing, not at me, but at the opposite wall. She made no outcry of grief or horror against Max. She took all in a subdued quiet way, which I had not expected would have been Penelope's way of bearing a great grief. She hardly said anything, till I cried with a bitter cry:

"Now I want Max. Let me rise and go down, for I must see Max."

Then the two women looked at one another pitifully, and my sister—my happy sister, who was to be married in a fortnight—took me in her arms, sobbing, "Oh, Dora—my poor, poor child."

All this seems years upon years ago, and I can relate it calmly enough, till I call to mind that sob of Penelope's. Well, what happened next? I remember Penelope came in when I was dressing and told me, in her ordinary manner, that papa wished her to drive with him to the Cedars this morning. "Shall I go, Dora?" "Yes."

"I intend so." She turned, then came back and kissed me. I suppose she thought this meeting between Max and me would be an eternal farewell.

The carriage had scarcely driven off, when I received a message that Dr. Urquhart was in the parlor.

Harry—Harry, twenty years dead—my own brother killed by my husband! Let me acknowledge. Had I known this before he was my betrothed husband, chosen open-eyed, with all my judgment my conscience, and my soul, loved, not merely because he loved me, but because I loved him, honored him, and trusted him, so that even marriage could scarcely make us more entirely one than we were already—had I been aware of this before I might not, indeed I think I never should have loved him. Nature would have instinctively prevented me. But now it was too late. I loved him, and could not unlove him; nature herself forbade the sacrifice. It would have been like tearing my heart out of my bosom; he was half myself, and, maimed of him, I should never have been my right self afterward. Nor would he. Two living lives to be blasted for one that was taken unwittingly twenty years ago! Could it—ought it to be so?

The rest of the world are free to be their own judges in the matter, but God and my conscience are mine.

I went down stairs steadfastly, with my mind all clear. Even to the last minute, with my hand on the parlor door, my heart—where all throbs of happy love seemed to have been long, long forgotten—my heart still prayed.

Max was standing by the fire; he turned around. He and the whole sunshiny room awoke before my eyes for an instant—then I called up all my strength and touched him. He was trembling all over.

"Max, sit down." He sat down. I knelt by him. I clasped his hands close, but still he sat as if he had been a stone. At last he muttered:

"I wanted to see you just once more, to know how you bore it—to be sure that I had not killed you also—oh, it is horrible! horrible!"

I said it was horrible, but that we would be able to bear it. "We?" "Yes—we."

"You cannot mean that?" "I do. I have thought it all over, and I do."

Holding me at arm's length, his eyes questioned my inmost soul. "Tell me the truth. It is not pity—not merely pity, Theodora?" "Ah! no, no."

Without another word the first crisis was passed—everything which made our misery a divided misery. He opened his arms and took me once more into my own place, where alone I ever really rested, or wish to rest until I die.

Max had been very ill, he told me, for days, and now seemed both in body and mind as feeble as a child. For me, childishness or girlishness, with its ignorance and weakness, was gone forevermore.

I have thought since that in all women's deepest loves, be they ever so full of reverence there enters sometimes much of the motherly element, even as on this day I felt as if I were somehow or other in charge of Max, and a great deal older than he. I fetched a glass of water and made him drink it—bathed his poor temples and wiped them with my handkerchief—persuaded him to lean back quietly and not speak another word for ever so long. But more than once, and while his head lay on my shoulder, I thought of his mother—my mother who might have been—and how, though she had left him as many years, she must, if she knew of all he had suffered, be glad to know there was at last one woman who would, did heaven permit, watch over him through life with the double love of both wife and mother, and who, in any case, would be faithful to him till death.

Faithful till death. Yes, I have renewed that vow, and had Harry himself come and stood before me I should have done the same. Look you, any one who after my death, may read this, there are two kinds of love: one, eager only to get its desire, careless of all risks and costs, in defiance of almost heaven and earth, the other, which in its most desperate longing has strength to say, "If it be right and for our good—if it be according to the will of God." This only I think, is the true and consecrated love, which therefore is able to be faithful till death.

Max and I never once spoke about whether or not we should be married; we left all that in Higher hands. We only felt that we should always be true to one another, and that, being what we were, and loving as we did, God himself could not will that any human will or human justice should put us asunder.

This being clear we set ourselves to meet what was before us. I told him poor Harry's history, so far as I knew it myself; afterward we began to consider how best the truth could be broken to my father.

And here let me confess something which Max had long forgiven, but which I can yet hardly forgive myself. Max said, "And when your father is told, he

shall decide what next is to be." "How do you mean?" I cried. "If he requires atonement he must have it, even at the hands of the law."

Then, for the first time, it struck me that, though Max was safe so long as he made no confession, for the peculiar circumstances of Harry's death left no other evidence against him, still, this confession once public (and it was for had I not told Penelope), his reputation, liberty, life itself, was in the hands of my father. A horror as of death fell upon me. I clung to him who was my all in this world, dearer to me than father, mother, brother, or sister; and I urged that we should both, then and there, fly—escape together anywhere, to the very ends of the earth, out of the reach of justice and my father.

I must have been beside myself before I thought of such a thing. I hardly knew all it implied, until Max gravely put me from him.

"I cannot be you who say this. Not Theodora."

And suddenly, as unconnected and incongruous things will flash across one in times like these, I called to mind the scene in my favorite play, when the alternative being life or honor, the woman says to her lover, "No, die!" Little I dreamed of ever having to say to my Max almost the same words.

I said them, kneeling by him, imploring his pardon for having wished him to do such a thing even for his safety and my happiness.

"We could not have been happy child," he said, smoothing my hair, with a sad, fond smile. "You do not know what it is to have a secret weighing lead upon your soul. Mine feels lighter now than it has done for years. Let us decide: what hour to-night shall I come here and tell your father?"

Saying this Max turned white to the very lips, but still he comforted me. "Do not be afraid, my child. I am not afraid. Nothing can be worse than what it has been—to me. I was a coward once, but then I was only a boy, hardly able to distinguish right from wrong. Now I see that it would have been better to have told the truth at once, and taken all the punishment. It might not have been death, or if it were, I could not have died."

"Max, Max!" "Hush!" and he closed his lips so that they could not mean. "The truth is better than a good name. When your father knows the truth, all else will be clear. I shall abide by his decision, whatever it be: he has a right to it, Theodora," his voice faltered, "make him understand some day that if I had married you he never should have wanted a son—your poor father."

These were almost the last words Max said to this, the last hour that we were together by ourselves. For minutes and minutes he held me in his arms silently; and I shut my eyes, and felt as if in a dream, the sunshine and the flowers, and the loud singing of the two canaries in Penelope's green-house. Then, with one kiss, he put me down softly from my place and left me alone.

I have been alone ever since; God only knows how long. The rest I cannot tell to-day.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HIS STORY.

This is the last, probably, of those "letters never sent," which may reach you one day; when or how we know not. All that is best.

You say you think it advisable that there should be an accurate written record of all that passed between your family and myself on the final day of parting, in order that no further contest of mine may be misconstrued or misjudged. Be it so. My good name is well preserving; for it must never be any disgrace to you that Max Urquhart loved you.

Since this record is to be minute and literal, perhaps it will be better I should give it impersonally, as a statement rather than a letter.

On February 9th, 1857, I went to Rockmount to see Theodora Johnston for the first time after she was aware that I had, long ago, taken the life of her half-brother, Henry Johnston, not intentionally, but in a fit of drunken rage. I came simply to look at her dead face once more, and to ask her in what way her father would best bear the shock of this confession of mine before I took the second step of surrendering myself to justice, or of making atonement in any other way that Mr. Johnston might choose. To him and his family my life was owed, and I left them to dispose of it, or of me, in any manner they thought best.

With these intentions I went to Theodora. I knew her well. I felt sure she would pity me; that she would not refuse me her forgiveness before our eternal separation; that, though the blood upon my hands was half her own she would not judge me the less justly, or mercifully, or Christianly. As to a Christian woman I came to her—as I had come once before, in a question of conscience; also, as to the woman who had been my friend, with all the rights and honors of that name, before she became to me anything more and dearer.

And I was thankful that the lesser tie had been included in the greater, so that both need not be entirely swept away and diannulled.

I found not only my friend, upon whom, above all others, I could depend, but my own, my love, the woman above all women who was mine; who, loving me before this blow fell, clung to me still, and believing that God Himself had joined us together, suffered nothing to put us asunder.

How she made me comprehend this I shall not relate, as it concerns ourselves alone. When, at last, I knelt by her and kissed her blessed hands—my saint! and yet all woman, and all my own—I felt that my sin was covered, that the All-merciful had had mercy upon me. That while all these years I had followed miserably my own method of atonement, denying myself all life's joys, and cloaking myself with every possible ray of righteousness I could find, He had suddenly let me by another way, sending this child's love, first to comfort, and then to smite me, that being utterly broken, broken and humbled, I might be made whole.

Now for the first time, I felt like a man to whom there is a possibility of being made whole. Her father might hunt me to death, the law might lay hold on me, the fair reputation under which I had shielded myself might be torn and scattered to the winds; but for all that I was safe, I was myself, the true Max Urquhart, a grievous sinner; yet no longer unforgiven or hopeless.

"I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

That line struck home. Oh! that I could strike it home to every miserable heart as it went to mine. Oh! that I could carry into the uttermost corners of the earth the message, the gospel which Dallas believed in, the only one which has power enough for the redemption of this sorrowful world—the gospel of the forgiveness and remission of sins.

While she talked to me—this my saint Theodora—Dallas himself might have spoken, apostle-like, through her lips. She said, when I listened in wonder to the clearness of some of her arguments, that she hardly knew how they had come into her mind, they seemed to have come of themselves; but they were there, and she was sure they were true. She was sure, she added, reverently, that, if the Christ of Nazareth were to pass by Rockmount door this day, the only word He would say unto me, after all I had done, would be, "Thy sins are forgiven thee—rise up and walk."

And I did so. I went out of the house an altered man. My burden of years had been lifted off me forever and ever. I understood something of what is meant by being "born again." I could dimly guess at what they must have felt who sat at the Divine feet, clothed and in their right mind, or who, across the sunny plains of Galilee, leaped and walked, and ran praising God.

I crossed the moorland, walking erect, with eyes fixed on the blue sky, my heart tender and young as a child's. I even stopped, childlike, to pluck a stray primrose under a tree in a lane, which had peeped out, as if it wished to investigate how soon spring would come. It seemed to me so pretty—I might never have seen a primrose since I was a boy.

Let me relate the entire truth—she wishes it. Strange as it may appear, though hour by hour brought nearer the time when I had fixed to be at Rockmount, to confess unto a father that I had been the slayer of his only son—still that day was not an unhappy day. I spent it chiefly out of doors on the moorlands, near a wayside public-house, where I had lodged some nights, drinking large draughts of the beauty of this external world, and feeling even outer life sweet though nothing to that renewed life which I now should never lose again. Never—even if I had to go next day to prison and trial, and stand before the world a convicted homicide. Nay, I believe I could have mounted the scaffold amid those gaping thousands who were once my terror, and die peacefully in spite of them, feeling no longer either guilty or afraid.

So much for myself, which will explain a good deal that followed in the interview which I have now to relate. Theodora had wished to save me by herself explaining all to her father; but I would not allow this, and at length she yielded. However, things fell out differently from both our intentions; he learned it first from his daughter Penelope. The moment I entered his study I was certain Mr. Johnston knew.

Let no sinner, however healed, deceive himself that his wound will never smart again. He is not instantly made a new man of, whole and sound; he must grow gradually, even through many a returning pang, into health and cure. If any one thinks I could stand in the presence of that old man without an anguish, sharp as death, which made me for the moment wish I had never been born, he is mistaken.

But alleviations came. The first was to see the old man sitting there alive and well, though evidently fully aware of the truth, and having been so for some time, for his countenance was composed, his tea was placed beside him on the table, and there was an open Bible before him

in which he had been reading. His voice too had nothing unnatural or alarming in it, as without looking at me, he bade the maid-servant "give Dr. Urquhart a chair, and say, if any one interrupted, that we were particularly engaged." So the door was shut upon us leaving us face to face.

But it was not long before he raised his eyes to mine. It is enough, once in a lifetime, to have borne such a look. "Mr. Johnston"—but he shut his ears. "Do not speak," he said; "what you have come to tell me I know already. My daughter told me this morning. And I have been trying ever since to find out what my Church says to the shedder of blood; what she would teach a father to say to the murderer of his child. My Harry, my only son! And you murdered him!"

Let the words which followed be sacred. If in some degree they were unjust, and overstepped the truth, let me not dare to murmur. I believe the curse he heaped upon me in his own words and those of the Holy Book, will not come, for its other and diviner words, which his daughter taught me, stand as a shield between me and him, I repeated them to myself in my silence, and so I was able to endure.

When he paused and commanded me to speak, I answered only a few words, namely, that I was here to offer my life for his son's life; that he might do with me what he would.

"Which means that I should give you up to justice, have you tried, condemned, executed. You, Dr. Urquhart, whom the world thinks so well of. I might live to see you hanged."

His eyes glared, his whole frame was convulsed. I entreated him to calm himself, for his own health's sake, and the sake of his children.

"Yes, I will. Old as I am, this shall not kill me. I will live to exact retribution. My boy, my poor, murdered Harry—murdered—"

He kept repeating and dwelling on the word, till at length I said: "If you know the whole truth, you must be aware that I had no intention to murder him."

"What you extenuate? You wish to escape? But you shall not. I will have you arrested now, in this very house."

"Be it so, then." And I sat down. So, the end had come. Life, and all its hopes, all its work, were over for me. I saw, as in a second of time, everything that was coming—the trial, the conviction, the newspaper clatter over my name, my ill deeds exaggerated, my good deeds pointed at with the finger of scorn, which perhaps was the keenest agony of all—save one.

"Theodora!" Whether I uttered her name, or only thought it, I cannot tell. However, it brought her. I felt she was in the room, though she stood by her sister's side, and did not approach me.

Again I repeat, let no man say that sin does not bring its wages, which must be paid. Whosoever doubts it, I would he could sit as I sat, watching the faces of father and daughters, and thinking of the dead face which lay against my knee, that midnight, on Salisbury plain.

"Children," I heard Mr. Johnston saying, "I have sent for you to be my witnesses in what I am about to do. Not out of personal revenge—which were unbecoming a clergyman—but because God and man exact retribution for blood. There is the man who murdered Harry. Though he were the best friend I ever had, though I esteemed him ever so much—which I did—still discovering this I must have retribution."

"How, father?" Not her voice, but her sister's. Let me do full justice to Penelope Johnston. Though it was she who told my secret to her father, she did it out of malice. As I afterward learned, chanced their conversation into such a channel that she could only escape betraying the truth by a direct lie. And with all her harshness, the prominent feature of her character is its truthfulness, or rather its abhorrence of falsehood. Nay, her fierce scorn of any kind of duplicity is such, that she confounds the crime with the criminal, and, once deceived, never can forgive—as in the matter of Lydia Cartwright, my acquaintance with which gave me this insight into Miss Johnston's peculiarity.

Thus, though it fell to her lot to betray her confession, I doubt not she did so with most literal accuracy; acting toward me neither as a friend nor foe, but simply as a relater of facts. Nor was there any personal enmity toward me in her question to her father.

It startled him a little. [TO BE CONTINUED.] Mr. Francis Jones, ex-M. P., will lecture upon "Astronomy," at Shaftesbury hall, on the 13th and 14th of April, taking the view opposed to the Newtonian System. The Roman Catholic College at Rimouski, Que., was totally consumed by fire on Tuesday morning, entailing a loss of \$60,000, partly covered by an insurance of \$24,000. "THEY ALL DO IT."—To beautify the teeth and give fragrance to the breath use "Teaberry" the new toilet gem. Get 5 cent sample. 1763

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