

A LIFE FOR A LIFE.

BY MISS MURDOCK. CHAPTER XXIV.

Oh, the happiness of knowing that one can make another happy—entirely happy! Oh, how good I ought to grow!

For the events which have caused him so much pain, and which he has yet to tell papa and me—they did not weigh much on my mind. Probably there is no family in which there is not some such painful revelation to be made;

But many a time the thought came, what if I should not be better to-morrow nor any to-morrow? What if, after all, I should have to go away and leave him with no one to make him happy?

Monday came. I was really better, and went about the house with Mrs. Granton all the forenoon. She asked me what time Dr. Urquhart had said he should be here;

After we had shaken hands, we sat down in silence. Then I asked him what he had been doing with himself all yesterday, and he told me he had spent it with the poor Ansdells.

"Yes, I am very glad you went." Dr. Urquhart of course I shall go on calling him "Dr. Urquhart," to people in general; nobody but me has any business with his Christian name.

"Did I? Something was amiss with you—I did not know what—but I saw it in your looks."

"I will tell you the truth; I am happier out of your sight than in it, just at present."

"God grant it." He was very much agitated.

The only woman he had ever wished for his wife. This, I was. And I felt like a wife. Talk of Penelope's long courtship—Lisbeth's marriage—it was I that was in love and soul, the real wife;

How strangely the comic and the serious are mixed up together, in life, and even in one's own nature. While writing this, I have gone off into a hearty fit of laughter at the recollection of papa's face when he saw us sitting there.

"Dr. Urquhart, I suppose I must conclude—indeed, I can only conclude one thing. But you might have spoken to me before addressing yourself to my daughter."

"Sir, I have been very wrong—but I will make amends—you shall know all. Only first—as my excuse," here he spoke out passionately, and told papa all that I was to him, all that we were to one another.

"Doctor, I forgive you; and there is not a man alive on whom I would so gladly bestow this little girl as you."

"My dear," papa interrupted, "go and tell him he may communicate them at whatever time he chooses. When such a man as Dr. Urquhart honestly comes and asks me for my daughter, you may be sure the very last thing I should ask him would be about his circumstances."

"Oh, Max, what is the matter? Oh Max!" I could say no more.

"I tried to make him understand there was no necessity—that papa desired to hear nothing, only wished him to stay with us till evening. That indeed, looking as wretched as he did, I could not and would not let him go. But in vain."

"You are not an aristocratic, but a plebeian family. My thankfulness at learning this, you will understand afterward."

"You are quite better?" "Yes, and it is almost dark—it will be very dark across the moor. You must go."

He rose, and shook hands mechanically with papa and Mrs. Granton. He was going to do the same by me, but I loosed my hands and clasped them round his neck.

So he went away. That is more than a week ago, and I have had no letter; but he did not say he would write. He would rather come, I think. Thus, any moment I may hear his ring at the door.

I mean to communicate it face to face, by word of mouth. It will not seem so awful then; and I shall see the expression of your countenance on first hearing it.

But first I ought to furnish him with full information about things into which I have never yet dared to inquire. I shall do so to-morrow. Much therefore, depends upon to-morrow! Such a crisis almost unnerves me; add to that the very sight of this place; and I went by chance to the same inn, the White Hart, Salisbury.

My Theodora! Some day, when she comes to read a few pages which I seal up to-night, marking them with her name, and "To be delivered to her after my death," she will understand how I have loved her. Otherwise, it never could have been found out, even by her—for I am not a demonstrative man.

In case this letter, and those other letters, do reach you, they will then be your last mementoes of me. Read them and burn them; they are solely meant for you!

Should all go well, so that they become needless, we will, as I said, burn them together, read or unread, as you choose. You shall do it with your own hand, sitting by me at our own fireside. Our fireside. The thought of it—the terror of losing it, makes me almost powerless to write on. Will you ever find out how I love you, my love—my love!

I begin by reminding you that I have been long aware your name is not properly Johnston. You told me yourself that it had been inserted of late years. That you are not an aristocratic, but a plebeian family. My thankfulness at learning this, you will understand afterward."

The town is hardly the least altered—except that I came in by railway instead of by coach, it might be the very same Salisbury on that very same winter's night—the quaint, quiet English town that I stood looking at from this same window—its streets shining with rain, and its lights glimmering here and there through the general gloom. How I stared, boy-like, till he came behind and slapped me on the shoulder. But I have a few things to tell you before I tell you the history of that night. Let me delay it as long as I can.

You know about my father and mother, and how they both died when Dallas and I were children. "We had no near kindred; we had to take care of ourselves—or, rather, he took care of me; he was almost as good as a father to me, from the time he was twelve years old."

Let me say a word or two more about my brother Dallas. If ever there was a better character on this earth he was one. Every creature who knew him thought the same. I doubt not the memory of him still lingers in those old cloisters of

St. Mary and St. Salvador, where he spent eight years, studying for the ministry. I feel sure there is not a lad who was at college with him—gray-headed lads they would be now, grave professors, or sober ministers of the Kirk, with country manors, wives, and families—not one of them but would say as I say, if you spoke to him of Dallas Urquhart.

Being five years my elder, he had almost ended his curriculum when I began mine; besides, we were at different colleges; but we went through some sessions together; a time on which I look back with peculiar tenderness, as I think all boys do who have studied at St. Andrew's. You English do not altogether know us Scotch. I have seen hard-headed, possibly hard-hearted men, grim divines, stern military officers, and selfish Anglo-Indian valetudinarians, melt to the softness of a boy, as they talked of their boyish days at St. Andrew's.

Also, I could show you the exact spot where you get the finest view of the Abbey and St. Regular's Tower, and then away back to our lodgings—Dallas's and mine—along the Scores, where, of moon light nights, the elder and more sentimental of the college lads would be caught strolling with their sweethearts—bonnie lassies too they were at St. Andrew's—or we beheld them in all the glamor of our teens, and fine havers we talked to them along those Scores, to the sound of the sea below. I can hear it now. What a roar it used to come in with, on stormy nights, against those rocks beyond the Castle, where a lad and his tutor were once both drowned!

Finally he let the coach go on without us, and I heard him laying a bet to drive across Salisbury Plain in a gig or dog-cart, and meet it again on the road, and Devises by daybreak next morning. The landlord laughed and advised him to give up such a mad "neck-or-nothing" freak; but he swore, and said he always went at everything "neck-or nothing."

I was persuaded to stay and drink with this man and one or two others, regular toppers, as I soon found he was. He appeared poor too; the drinking was to be at my expense. I was very proud to have the honor of entertaining such a clever and agreeable gentleman.

Once, watching him and listening to his conversation, sudden doubt seized me of what Dallas would think of my new acquaintance, and what he would say, or look he seldom reproved aloud—were he to walk in and find me in this present company. And supper being done, I tried to get away, but this man held me by the shoulders, mocking me, and setting the rest on to mock me as a "milkop." The good angel fled. From that moment, I believe, the devil entered both into him and me.

I got drunk. It was for the first time in my life, though more than once lately I had been "merry," but stopped at that stage. This time I stopped at nothing. My blood was at boiling heat, with just enough of conscience left to make me snatch at any means to deaden it.

Of the details of that orgie, or of those who joined in it, except this one person, I have, as was likely, no distinct recollection. They were habitual drinkers; none of them had any pity for me, and I was utterly "left to myself," as I have said. A raw, Scotch lad, I soon became the butt of the company.

The last thing I remember is their trying to force me to tell my name, which hitherto I had not done, first from natural reserve among strangers, and then from an instinctive feeling that I was not in the most creditable of society, and therefore the less I said about myself the better. All I had told was, that I was on my way to France to join my brother, who was ill. They could not get any more out of me than that. A few taunts, which some English people are rather too ready to use against us Scotch, made me savage as well as sulky. I might have deserved it, or not—I cannot tell—but the end was, they turned me out—the obstinate, drunken, infuriated lad—into the street.

I staggered through the dark, silent town into a lane, and fell asleep on the road-side.

as circumstantially and calmly as I can. But first, before you learn any more about me, let me bid you remember how I loved you, how you permitted me to love you—how you have been mine, heart and eyes and tender lips, you know you were mine. You cannot alter that. If I were the veriest wretch alive, you once saw 'em something worth loving, and you did love me. Not after the fashion of those lads and lassies who went courting along the Scores at St. Andrew's, but solemnly—deeply—as those love who expect one day to be husband and wife. Remember, we were to have been married, Theodora.

I found my quickest route to Pau was by Southampton to Havre. But in the dusk of the morning I mistook the coach; my luggage went direct, and I found myself, having traveled some hours, on the road—not to Southampton but to Salisbury. This was told me after some jocularly, at what he thought a vastly amusing piece of "greenness" on my part, by the coachman. That is the gentleman who drove the coach.

He soon took care to let me know he was a gentleman—and that, like many young men of rank and fashion at that time, he was acting Jehu only "for a spree." He talked so large, I should have taken him for a nobleman, or a baronet at least—had he not accidentally told me his name; though he explained that it was not as humble as it seemed, and expatiated much upon the antiquity, wealth, and aristocratic connections of his "family."

His conversation, though loud and coarse, was amusing, and he patronized me extremely. I would rather not say a word more than is necessary concerning this person; he is dead. As before stated, I never knew anything of him excepting his name, which you shall have by-and-by, but I guessed that his life had not been a creditable one. He looked about thirty, or a little older.

When the coach stopped—at the very inn where I am now writing, the White Hart, Salisbury—he insisted on my stopping too, as it was a bitter cold night, and the moon would not rise till two in the morning. He said that, I might as well.

Now, you see how it was. I murdered him. He must have died easily—instantaneously; he never moaned nor stirred once; but, for all that, it was murder.

Net with intent, God knows. So little idea had I he was dead, that I shook him as he lay, told him to "get up and fight it out;" oh, my God! my God!

Thus I have told it, the secret, which until now has never been written or spoken to any human being. I was then nineteen—I am now nine-and-thirty; twenty years. Theodora, have pity; only think of carrying such a secret—the blood of a man, on one's conscience for twenty years!

If, instead of my telling you all this, as I may do in a few days, you should have to read it here, it will by then have become an old tale. Still pity me.

To continue, for it is getting far on into the night. The first few minutes after I discovered what I had done, you will not expect me to speak of.

The next thing I call to mind is being awakened by the cut of a whip across my shoulders, and seeing a man standing over me. I flew at his throat like a wild creature, for it was he—the "gentleman" who had made me drunk and mocked me, and whom I seemed then and there to hate with a fury of hatred that would last to my dying day. Through it all came the thought of Dallas, sick and solitary, half way toward whom I ought to have travelled by now.

How he—the man—soothed me I do not know, but think it was by offering to take me toward Dallas. He had a horse and gig standing by, and said if I would mount he would drive me to the coast, whence I could take boat to France. At least, that is the vague impression my mind retains of what passed between us. He helped me up beside him, and I dozed off to sleep again.

My next waking was in the middle of a desolate plain. I rubbed my eyes, but saw nothing except stars and sky, and this black, black plain, which seemed to have no end.

He pulled up, and told me to "tumble out," which I did mechanically. On the other side of the dig was something tall and dark, which I took at first for a half-way inn, but perceived it was only a huge stone—a circle of stones.

"Hullo! what's this?" "Stonehenge—comfortable lodging for man and beast—so you're all right. Good-by, young fellow; you're such dull company that I mean to leave you here till morning."

This was what he said to me, laughing uproariously. At first I thought he was in jest, and laughed too; then, being sleepy and maudlin, I remonstrated; lastly, I got half frightened, for when I tried to mount he pushed me down, I was so helpless and he so strong; from this solitary place, miles and miles from any human dwelling, how should I get on to Dallas—Dallas, who, stupified as I was, still remained my prominent thought.

I begged, as if I had been begging for my life, that he would keep his promise, and take me on my way toward my brother.

"To the devil with your brother!" and he whipped his horse on.

The devil was in me, as I said. I sprang at him, my strength doubled and trebled with rage, and catching him unawares, dragged him from the gig, and threw him violently on the ground. His head struck against one of the great stones—and—

Now, you see how it was. I murdered him. He must have died easily—instantaneously; he never moaned nor stirred once; but, for all that, it was murder.

When bitter us from help is our eyes suffering in wait I strength help the or comf their bel omnipot their tor who heat What able, gra we meet power of times shu cal infla reason c presence proch i passes by her is to human more ths Eden of from he delight t trouble than. A true band's them to not irrit cur, wo most me langua quires. prone t let not a anything. ation. needs fo Men fremel uttered ful, too, for whil are rig they are The fi underta thing. inculcat been to the forn cide; b act. I to be pr is easy tuned which a temptat every at the mai most in lute an. 5 ures. he start found someth by the charme caught pace sh Who who, w princip ance a dressed does n enters when l people's their f But th gentlet make mean. woman She is good-p and ni and i knows a yar other balloo She c fashio wings cor; i morni with how firmly afraid she b likes him v she s ters l a lett of hi stio her c tries about mak that her Si thot sent cini