

"She did. I believe there is a refining process going on in her heart. I was greatly struck by her sympathetic kindness that day. Her constant anxiety about her own son is not without its uses. It makes her feel for others. Ah, here he comes," said Lord Winterdyne, with a smile, as Clement again appeared. "We hardly expected you so soon, sir. What has Sybil to say to her battered hero, eh?"

"A great deal more than he deserves," was Clement's answer, as he came swiftly across to his mother's side. "She has sent me back to you, mother, and would not say another word to me."

"I don't suppose you realize what we women have endured on your account during the last few weeks?" said Lady Winterdyne, shaking her finger at him. "Stand up, now, sir, and let us have a proper look at you. Well, you look every inch a soldier! What did Sybil say to the wounded arm, and that scar on your cheek? Did she want to draw back, eh?"

Clement laughed, and that was a pleasant sound in his mother's ears.

"No. I am afraid she is more concerned about these trifles than I have even been," he answered lightly. "Mother, are you not even going to say that I have done my duty?"

He bent his eyes upon her sweet but somewhat careworn face, upon which the anxieties of the past few months had left their mark.

"I expected that. No doubt of it ever crossed my mind," she answered, and moving her head a little, rested her cheek on his sun-browned hand lying on her shoulder. He felt it wet with her tears. "I am glad my son is so worthy of his father."

"Yes, if he had lived he would have been a proud man this day," said Lady Vane, emphatically. "Now, have you anything exciting to tell us? What about the poor Prince. His poor mother's lonely grief will silence many grumbings. What a fearful thing it was. Did you know him, Clement?"

"Yes. He was very frank. He made himself one of us; and there is not a soldier in the ranks who did not feel that he had lost a friend."

"What were they doing letting him wander in the very midst of danger without any protection," demanded Sir Randal, gruffly. "Just like their pig-headedness. Half the misery in this world, especially in war times, is the result of the want of common sense."

"Well, he was hardly supposed to be in the midst of danger. The district was supposed to be pretty clear. He was surprised by treachery, and missed his footing when mounting his horse. His companions ran away. There was no excuse for that. I think if I had been there I would have risked my life for him. He was worth it."

Clement spoke quietly, but with emotion.

"I believe you would, my boy," said Sir Randal, looking with delighted approval on the young soldier's manly figure and resolute face. "He was a brave young fellow. Upon my word, Winterdyne, it makes one feel that old England's day is not over yet, to hear these young ones speak."

"Where's Evy, mother?" whispered Clement. "How has she been? Poor Raybourne spoke of her that very last morning. He thought of her perpetually."

Lady Adela leaned forward in her chair and lifted her eyes to the young soldier's face.

"Tell us everything, Clement. We can bear it, and we shall feel calmer after it. Tell us all you know."

As he spoke Sybil came through the open window of the library, and sat down by her father on the stone parapet of the terrace from the lawn below. Only Evelyn was absent when Clem began to tell his story.

"I can't tell you anything about what happened to him after we parted that morning in the camp at Isandhlwana," he began, "because I never saw him again, and nobody came back from Durnforth's column to tell the tale. About 250 mounted men rode a mile-and-a-half out, to intercept the Zulus at the wagon road and keep them from getting near the camp, and they were cut off to a man. It was

a melancholy business all round. We had not much chance against 20,000 desperate savages, and from the moment of attack we knew it was all up with us."

"You had no defences, I saw from the papers. Not that I ever expected you would have any," put in Sir Randal. "That's a mere circumstance, but go on. You stood out in the open plain and let the Zulus run at you. Wasn't that about it?"

"Be quiet, Randal," said his wife, peremptorily. "Never mind him, Clement; you know his opinion of military men and their tactics; never mind him."

"Well, for once, he is not far wrong, Lady Vane," answered Clement, bluntly. "It *did* just amount to that. Poor Harry, the very night before the engagement, said to me he thought we were frightfully scattered, and would have no chance against a concentrated enemy. The fight of Isandhlwana didn't last more than an hour-and-a-half, and we had to flee in the end. The Buffalo River saved the few who were mounted, for though they pursued us like furies, the Zulus are poor marksmen, and shoot at random. After we got over the river, I rode on to Rorke's Drift, to warn them there. Happily, I was in time; we had about an hour to prepare, and at half-past four they rushed on us, but I needn't expatiate on that, you all read the accounts. We kept the camp, and saved Natal, though I did not know the result for weeks. I was fevered in hospital, and they told me after. I was pretty bad. I could have got home after I was convalescent, but I wanted to see the end of the war, and I wanted, perhaps, more than all, to find out all I could about poor Raybourne."

"And what did you learn, Clement?" Lady Adela asked, with trembling lips.

"I am glad now that I thought of it, because I was able to—to," the young man's brave voice broke.

The brave heart which had never quailed in the most desperate peril, was moved to the depths over the memory of his loved comrade's fall.

"After I got better, I went back to my regiment," he went on, after a moment's painful silence. "And the next engagement I was in was the fight at the Zoblane mountains, which was not unlike the Isandhlwana affair, though the results were not serious. Two days later we beat them hollow at Zambula Camp. If you had seen the Zulus in their mountains advancing straight on our fire you would have thought it a grand sight. The artillery won the day—the victory was undoubtedly theirs, and for a few weeks after we saw little of the enemy, who seemed to have got a fright. All the time I kept thinking of Isandhlwana, wondering how I should manage to get there to see if I could get anything to bring home. It was on the 17th of May we were ordered forward to Rorke's Drift, and thence to Isandhlwana, for the purpose of burying our dead."

"Four months after they fell," put in Sir Randal. "Ay, go on."

Clement paused a moment. Many, many times by the silent, weird glow of the camp fire, and later in the night watches on board the homeward-bound Pretoria, he had pondered upon the words with which he should clothe his sorrowful and somewhat gruesome tale.

"We arrived at the ridge overlooking the scene of the battle about nine o'clock one morning, and found that during the interval the grass had grown so tall on the slopes and in the valleys, that for a little while we could distinguish nothing."

"Ay, ay, Nature had the sense of decency human beings lacked," was Sir Randal's comment, while Lady Alice covered her eyes with her hands and sat very still.

"I don't want to linger on the scene," continued Clement, hurriedly. "We did our work as promptly as we could, and carried away what mementoes we could find. I found Harry just where he fell, by the side of his faithful steed, and I brought home all I thought you would prize."

He took from his breastpocket a little packet, and kneeling before Lady Winterdyne, opened it upon her knee. The soldier's watch intact, in its hunting case, his breastpin and two rings, together with a lock of his hair, were the treasures Clement had rescued from that far-off burying ground under the fierce African sun.

"And two letters, which I saw him writing after we bivouacked the night before—one is for Evy," said Clement, huskily. "That is all I have to give, dear Lady Winterdyne. If I could have saved him, I would."

The blessed tears fell fast from the bereaved mother's eyes as she looked upon these mementoes of her boy; but the father rose up from his place and went away into the house. They saw that he was quite overcome.

They asked no more questions nor did they realise what an awful task Clement had undertaken, that he might be able to bring a little comfort to those at home. He did not say that the sight of that once blood-red field, with its dead—unburied and decaying dead—was the only thing which had blanched his face and sickened his heart since he entered upon a soldier's chequered life.

When he saw the real comfort these precious relics were to the bereaved hearts at Winterdyne, he did not regret it, but felt glad that the opportunity had come in his way.

"We buried him decently there, he and the Colonel in one grave. It is a lovely spot, Lady Winterdyne, for it is a lovely country, though I never want to see it again. A month later we routed them utterly at Ulundi, and the war came to an end," he said, as he rose to his feet. "It's not much more than six months since we went away, but it looks like twenty years, and I feel like an old man."

CHAPTER XXII.—A WOUNDED HEART.

"I say, mother, I can't make out Evy. What does she say about poor Raybourne?"

Clement asked the question when he came into her room, just for a little word before they parted for the night.

"I am not sure, dear, that I can make her out myself. She is very reserved. She has never opened her heart even to me. But, I believe, she has talked more freely to Sybil than anyone. You have won a dear, sweet girl, Clement. I cannot tell you how I love her. She is as dear to me as Evy herself—"

"I think her perfect, mother," was the soldier's quick response. "All the time at Rorke's Drift I thought of her, and I believe the desire to be worthy of her and have something I need not be ashamed of to show for my love, helped me as nothing else could—"

"Nay, nay, the dauntless courage is yours by inheritance," said the proud mother in gentle rebuke. "I am so very thankful you were able to bring those little mementoes of poor Raybourne."

"Mother, that was an awful experience. I shall never forget that scene—the decaying bodies, some of them merely skeletons; the expression of the faces. The whole appalling picture will haunt me till I die. They will never know what it cost me to get those things. I only recognized poor Harry by his clothes and the initials on his sword. He was perfectly unrecognizable otherwise, but I thought if I could cut off a little bit of his hair it would bring before his mother's eyes a picture of natural and peaceful death."

Rachel shivered slightly, her imagination quick to fill in the dismal details of the picture Clement drew.

You have had many strange experiences since you left us. Tell me, are you still devoted to your profession?"

"Why, of course, I simply *could* be nothing else but a soldier. Mother, the defence of Rorke's Drift was simply grand. You should have seen us with our poor little redoubts of mealie bags and walls of biscuit tins, and the cool, calm, noble energy of Bromhead and Chard. They thought of everything, and just did it as easily and perfectly as if it had been play; though all the time we never expected a man of us to escape. It was worth being born to see it."

"I'm rather glad upon the whole that I didn't see you," the mother answered, with a slight smile. "It was sufficiently terrible to read about. It is hard upon the women who wait at home, Clement."

"Yes, mother. I know."

He stooped down and kissed her, with eyes full of love.