

Kopje Alone, Monday Afternoon. My Dear Jimma— Then he looked up into the little glass opposite. It was a youthful face reflected there, with curling brown beard and hair, but in the dark blue eyes there was a look of languid longing that touched him. He redipped his pen and wrote:

When I look up into the little glass that hangs opposite me, I wonder if that changed and sad face— Here he sat still and reflected. It sounded almost as if he might be concealed or unmanly to be looking at his own face in the glass. No, that would not do. So he looked for another pink sheet and began again.

Dear Sister— It is hardly six months since I left you to come to this spot, yet could you now see me I know what you would say. I know what mother would say, "Can that be our Greg—that thing with the strange look in his eyes?"

Yes, Jimma, it is your Greg, and the change has been coming over me ever since I came here, but it is greatest since yesterday. You know what sorrows I have passed through, Jimma; how unjustly I was always treated at school, the masters keeping me back and calling me a block-head, though, as they themselves allowed, I had the best memory of any boy in the school and could repeat whole books from beginning to end. You know how cruelly father always used me, calling me a noodle and a milk sop just because he couldn't understand my fine nature. You know how he made a farmer of me instead of a minister, as I ought to have been. You know it all, Jimma, and how I have borne it all, not as a woman, who whines for every touch, but as a man should—in silence.

But there are things, there is a thing, which the soul longs to pour forth into a kindred ear. Dear sister, have you ever known what it is to keep wanting and wanting and wanting to kiss some one's mouth, and you may not, to touch some one's hand, and you cannot? I am in love, Jimma.

The old Dutch woman from whom I hire this place has a little stepdaughter, and her name begins with E.

She is English. I do not know how her father came to marry a Boer woman. It makes me feel so strange to put down that letter that I can hardly go on writing—E. I've loved her ever since I came here. For weeks I have not been able to eat or drink. My very tobacco, when I smoke, has no taste, and I can remain for no more than five minutes in one place and sometimes feel as though I were really going mad.

Every evening I go there to fetch my milk. Yesterday she gave me some coffee. The spoon fell on the ground. She picked it up. When she gave it me, her finger touched mine. Jimma, I do not know if I fainted—I shivered hot, and she shivered too. I thought: "It is all right. She will be mine. She loves me!" Just then, Jimma, in came a fellow, a great, coarse fellow, a German—a ridiculous fellow, with curls right down to his shoulders. It makes one sick to look at him. He's only a servant of the Boer woman's and a low, vulgar, uneducated thing that's never been to boarding school in his life. He had been to the next farm seeking sheep. When he came in, she said: "Good evening, Waldo. Have some coffee," and she kissed him.

All last night I heard nothing else but "Have some coffee; have some coffee." If I went to sleep for a moment, I dreamed that her finger was pressing mine, but when I woke with a start, I heard her say: "Good evening, Waldo. Have some coffee."

Is this madness? I have not eaten a mouthful today. This evening I go and propose to her. If she refuses me, I shall go and kill myself tomorrow. There is a dam of water close by. The sheep have drunk most of it up, but there is still enough, if I tie a stone to my neck.

It is a choice between death and madness. I can endure no more. If this should be the last letter you ever get from me, think of me tenderly and forgive me. Without her life would be a howling wilderness, a long tribulation. She is my affinity; the one love of my life, of my youth, of my manhood; my sunshine, my God given blossom.

"They never loved who dreamed that they loved once."

And who saith, "I loved once."

Not angels, whose deep eyes look down through "realms of light."

Your disconsolate brother, on what is, in all probability, the last and distracted night of his life, GREGORY NAZARENEN ROSE.

P. S.—Tell mother to take care of my pearl studs. I left them in the wash hand stand drawer. Don't let the children get hold of them.

P. P. S.—I shall take this letter with me to the farm. If I turn down one corner, you may know I have been accepted; if not, you may know it is all up with your heart broken brother.

G. N. R. Gregory having finished his letter read it over with much approval, put it in an envelope, addressed it and sat contemplating the ink pot, somewhat relieved in mind.

The evening turned out chilly and very windy after the day's heat. From afar off, as Gregory neared the homestead on the brown pony, he could distinguish a little figure in a little red cloak at the door of the cow kraal.

Em leaned over the poles that barred the gate and watched the frothing milk run through the black fingers of the herdsman, while the unwilling cows stood with tethered heads by the milking poles. She had thrown the red cloak over her own head and held it under her chin with a little hand to keep from her ears the wind that playfully shook it and tossed the little fringe of yellow hair into her eyes.

"Is it not too cold for you to be standing here?" said Gregory, coming softly close to her.

"Oh, no; it is so nice. I always come to watch the milking. That red cow with the short horns is bringing up the calf of the white cow that died. She loves it so, just as if it were her own. It is so nice to see her lick its little ears. Just look!"

"The clouds are black. I think it is going to rain tonight," said Gregory.

"Yes," answered Em, looking up as well as she could for the little yellow fringe.

"But I'm sure you must be cold," said Gregory, and he put his hand under the cloak and found there a small fist doubled up, soft and very warm. He held it fast in his hand.

"Oh, Em, I love you better than all the world besides! Tell me, do you love me a little?"

"Yes, I do," said Em, hesitating and trying softly to free her hand.

"Better than everything; better than all the world, darling?" he asked, bending down so low that the yellow hair was blown into his eyes.

"I don't know," said Em gravely. "I do love you very much, but I love my cousin who is at school and Waldo very much. You see, I have known them so long."

"Oh, Em, do not talk to me so coldly!" Gregory cried, seizing the little arm that rested on the gate and pressing it till she was half afraid. The herdsman had moved away to the other end of the "kraal" now, and the cows, busy with their calves, took no notice of the little human farce. "Em, if you love me, tell me, do you love me a little?"

must love me—love me better than all. You must give yourself to me. I have loved you since that first moment when I saw you walking by the stone wall with the jug in your hands. You were made for me, created for me. I will love you till I die. Oh, Em, do not be so cold, so cruel, to me!"

He held her arm so tightly that her fingers relaxed their hold, and the cloak fluttered down to the ground, and the wind played more roughly than ever with the little yellow head.

"I do love you very much," she said, "but I do not know if I want to marry you. I love you better than Waldo, but I can't tell if I love you better than Lyndall. If you would let me wait for a week, I think perhaps I could tell you."

Gregory picked up the cloak and wrapped it round her.

"If you could but love me as I love you!" he said. "But no woman can love as a man can. I will wait till next Saturday. I will not once come near you till then. Goodbye, Oh, Em," he said, turning again and twining his arms about her and kissing her surprised little mouth, "if you are not my wife I cannot live! I have never loved another woman, and I never shall—never, never!"

"You make me afraid," said Em. "Come, let us go, and I will fill your pail."

"I want no milk. Goodbye. You will not see me again till Saturday."

Late that night, when every one else had gone to bed, the yellow haired little woman stood alone in the kitchen. She had come to fill the kettle for the next morning's coffee and now stood before the fire. The warm reflection lighted the grave old womanish little face that was so unusually thoughtful this evening.

"Better than all the world; better than everything! He loves me better than everything!" She said the words aloud, as if they were more easy to believe if she spoke them so. She had given out so much love in her little life and had got none of it back with interest. Now one said, "I love you better than all the world!" One loved her better than she loved him. How suddenly rich she was! She kept clapping and unclapping her hands. So a beggar feels who falls asleep on the pavement in a palace hall with servants and lights and a feast before him. Of course the beggar's is only a dream, and he wakes from it, and this was real.

Gregory had said to her, "I will love you as long as I live." She said the words over and over to herself like a song.

"I will send for him tomorrow, and I will tell him how I love him back," she said.

But Em needed not to send for him. Gregory discovered on reaching home that Jimma's letter was still in his pocket, and therefore, much as he disliked the appearance of vacillation and weakness, he was obliged to be at the farmhouse before sunrise to post it.

"If I see her," Gregory said, "I shall only bow to her. She shall see that I am a man, one who keeps his word."

As to Jimma's letter, he had turned down one corner of the page and then turned it back, leaving a deep crease. That would show that he was neither accepted nor rejected, but that matters were in an intermediate condition. It was a more poetical way than putting it in plain words.

Gregory was barely in time with his letter, for Waldo was starting when he reached the homestead, and Em was on the doorstep to see him off. When he had given the letter and Waldo had gone, Gregory bowed stiffly and prepared to remount his own pony, but somewhat slowly. It was still early. None of the servants was about. Em came up close to him and put her little hand softly on his arm as he stood by his horse.

"I do love you best of all," she said. She was not frightened now however much he kissed her. "I wish I was beautiful and nice," she added, looking up into his eyes as he held her against his breast.

"My darling, to me you are more beautiful than all the women in the world, dearer to me than everything it holds. If you were in —, I would go after you to find you there. If you were dead, though my body moved, my soul would be under the ground with you. All life as I pass it with you in my arms will be perfect to me. It will pass—pass like a ray of sunshine."

Em thought how beautiful and grand his face was as she looked up into it. She raised her hand gently and put it on his forehead.

"You are so silent, so cold, my Em!" he cried. "Have you nothing to say to me?"

A little shade of wonder filled her eyes.

"I will do everything you tell me," she said.

What else could she say? Her idea of love was only service.

"Then, my own precious one, promise never to kiss that fellow again. I cannot bear that you should love any one but me. You must not. I will not have it! If every relative I had in the world were to die tomorrow, I would be quite happy if I still only had you. My darling, my love, why are you so cold? Promise me not to love him any more. If you asked me to do anything for you, I would do it, though it cost my life!"

Em put her hand very gravely round his neck.

"I will never kiss him," she said, "and I will try not to love any one else. But I do not know if I will be able."

"Oh, my darling, I think of you all night, all day. I think of nothing else, love, nothing else," he said, folding his arms about her.

Em was a little conscience stricken. Even that morning she had found time to remember that in six months her cousin would come back from school, and she would have to face him.

Gregory was going to make many at-

and she had thought to remind Waldo of the lozenges for his cough, even when she saw Gregory coming.

"I do not know how it is," she said humbly, nestling to him, "but I cannot love you so much as you love me. Perhaps it is because I am only a woman, but I do love you as much as I can."

Now the Kafir maids were coming from the huts. He kissed her again, eyes and mouth and hands, and left her.

Tant' Sannie was well satisfied when told of the betrothal. She herself contemplated marriage within the year with one or other of her numerous "vrijers," and she suggested that the wedding might take place together.

Em set to work busily to prepare her own household linen and wedding garments. Gregory was with her daily, almost hourly, and the six months which elapsed before Lyndall's return passed, as he felicitously phrased it, "like a summer night, when you are dreaming of some one you love."

Late one evening Gregory sat by his little love, turning the handle of her machine as she drew her work through it, and they talked of the changes they would make when the Boer woman was gone and the farm belonged to them alone. There should be a new room here and a kraal there. So they chatted on. Suddenly Gregory dropped the handle and impressed a fervent kiss on the fat hand that guided the linen.

"You are so beautiful, Em," said the lover. "It comes over me in a flood suddenly how I love you."

Em smiled.

"Tant' Sannie says when I am her age no one will look at me, and it is true. My hands are as short and broad as a duck's foot, and my forehead is so low, and I haven't any nose. I can't be pretty."

She laughed softly. It was so nice to think he should be so blind.

"When my cousin comes tomorrow, you will see a beautiful woman, Gregory," she added presently. "She is like a little queen; her shoulders are so upright, and her head looks as though it ought to have a little crown upon it. You must come to see her tomorrow as soon as she comes. I am sure you will love her."

"Of course I shall come to see her, since she is your cousin, but do you think I could ever think any woman as lovely as I think you?"

He fixed his seething eyes upon her.

"You could not help seeing that she is prettier," said Em, slipping her right hand into his, "but you will never be able to like any one so much as you like me."

Afterward, when she wished her lover good night, she stood upon the doorstep to call a greeting after him, and she waited, as she always did, till the brown pony's hoofs became inaudible behind the "kopje."

Then she passed through the room where Tant' Sannie lay snoring, and through the little room that was draped in white, waiting for her cousin's return, on to her own room.

She went to the chest of drawers to put away the work she had finished and sat down on the floor before the lowest drawer. In it were the things she was preparing for her marriage. Piles of white linen and some aprons and quilts, and in the little box in the corner a spray of orange blossom which she had brought from a snouse.

There, too, was a ring Gregory had given her and a veil his sister had sent, and there was a little roll of fine embroidered work which Trana had given her. It was too fine and good even for Gregory's wife—just right for something very small and soft. She would keep it. And she touched it gently with her forefinger, smiling, and then she blushed and hid it far behind the other things. She knew so well all that was in that drawer, and yet she turned them all over as though she saw them for the first time and packed them all out and packed them all in without one fold or crumple and then sat down and looked at them.

Tomorrow evening when Lyndall came she would bring her here and show her all. Lyndall would so like to see it—the little wreath and the ring and the white veil! It would be so nice. Then Em fell to soaping pictures. Lyndall should live with them till she herself got married some day.

Every day when Gregory came home, tired from his work, he would look about and say: "Where is my wife? Has no one seen my wife? Wife, some coffee!" and she would give him some.

Em's little face grew very grave at last, and she knelt up and extended her hands over the drawer of linen.

"Oh, God!" she said, "I am so glad! I do not know what I have done that I should be so glad. Thank you!"

CHAPTER XVII.

LYNDALL.

She was more like a princess, yes, far more like a princess, than the lady who still hung on the wall in Tant' Sannie's bedroom. So Em thought. She leaned back in the little armchair; she wore a gray dressing gown, and her long hair was combed out and hung to the ground. Em, sitting before her, looked up with mingled respect and admiration.

Lyndall was tired after her long journey and had come to her room early. Her eyes ran over the familiar objects. Strange to go away for four years and come back and find that the candle standing on the dressing table still cast the shadow of an old crane's head in the corner beyond the clothes horse. Strange that even a shadow should last longer than man. She looked about among the old familiar objects. All was there, but the old self was gone.

"What are you noticing?" asked Em. "Nothing and everything. I thought the windows were higher. If I were you, when I get this place I should raise the walls. There is not room to walk in here."

"Gregory is going to make many at-

terations," said Em, drawing nearer to the gray dressing gown respectfully. "Do you like him, Lyndall? Is he not handsome?"

"He must have been a fine baby," said Lyndall, looking at the white dimity curtain that hung above the window.

Em was puzzled.

"There are some men," said Lyndall, "whom you never can believe were babies at all, and others you never see without thinking how very nice they must have looked when they wore socks and pink sashes."

Em remained silent. Then she said, with a little dignity: "When you know him, you will love him as I do. When I compare other people with him, they seem so weak and little. Our hearts are so cold; our loves are mixed up with so many other things. But he—no one is worthy of his love. I am not. It is so great and pure."

"You need not make yourself unhappy on that point—your poor return for his love, my dear," said Lyndall. "A man's love is a fire of olive wood. It leaps higher every moment; it roars, it blazes, it shoots out red flames; it threatens to wrap you round and devour you—you who stand by like an icicle in the glow of its fierce warmth. You are self-reproached at your own chilliness and want of reciprocity. The next day, when you go to warm your hands a little, you find a few ashes. 'Tis a long love and cool against a short love and hot. Men, at all events, have nothing to complain of."

"You speak so because you do not know men," said Em, instantly assuming the dignity of superior knowledge so universally affected by affianced and married women in discussing man's nature with their uncontracted sisters. "You will know them, too, some day, and then you will think differently," said Em, with the condescending magnanimity which superior knowledge can always afford to show to ignorance.

Lyndall's little lip quivered in a manner indicative of intense amusement. She twirled a massive ring upon her forefinger—a ring more suitable for the hand of a man and noticeable in design—a diamond cross set into gold, with the initials "R. R." below it.

"Ah, Lyndall," Em said, "perhaps you are engaged yourself—that is why you smile? Yes, I am sure you are. Look at this ring!"

Lyndall drew the hand quickly from her.

"I am not in so great a hurry to put my neck beneath any man's foot, and I do not so greatly admire the crying of babies," she said as she closed her eyes half wearily and leaned back in the chair. "There are other women glad of such work."

Em felt rebuked and ashamed. How could she take Lyndall and show her the white linen and the wreath and the embroidery? She was quiet for a little while and then began to talk about Trana and the old farm servants till she saw her companion was weary; then she rose and left her for the night. But after Em was gone Lyndall sat on, watching the old crane's face in the corner, and with a weary look, as though the whole world's weight rested on these frail young shoulders.

The next morning Waldo, starting off before breakfast with a bag of mealies slung over his shoulder to feed the ostriches, heard a light step behind him.

"Wait for me. I am coming with you," said Lyndall, adding as she came up to him: "If I had not gone to look for you yesterday, you would not have come to greet me till now. Do you not like me any longer, Waldo?"

"Yes; but—you are changed."

It was the old, clumsy, hesitating mode of speech.

"You liked the pinafores better?" she said quickly. She wore a dress of a simple cotton fabric, but very fashionably made, and on her head was a broad white hat. To Waldo she seemed superbly attired. She saw it. "My dress has changed a little," she said, "and I also, but not to you. Hang the bag over your other shoulder that I may see your face. You say so little that if one does not look at you you are an uncomprehended cipher. Waldo changed the bag, and they walked on side by side. "You have improved," she said. "Do you know that I have sometimes wished to see you while I was away; not often, but still sometimes?"

They were at the gate of the first camp now. Waldo threw over the bag of mealies, and they walked on over the dewy ground.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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