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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

U R S U L A.

A TALE OF COUNTRY LIFE.

BY

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CHAPTER XLIV.

THE first waking the next morning would have repaid me for double the pain I had suffered since Roger's absence. It was so wonderfully happy. My nature was not one to dwell long on future troubles, so I took the blessings brought by the present moment, and only felt that Roger was with me and that for the time all must go well. And my feeling was shared by every one in the house. Roger's return was like letting the light of the sun break in upon our sad household. William expanded, as it were, under its influence in a manner which was surprising to me; especially as he had a good deal to make him uncomfortable in other ways. I mentioned that the evening of the wreck he came in shading his face from the light, and putting a handkerchief to his eyes. All that evening he complained of a shooting pain in them, and the next day they were very much inflamed. He had caught cold in them; for in consequence of being so silly as not to take a great coat with him, he had no defence against the snow, and he had been exposed to it a long time. We forced him to send for the Compton doctor, but the lotion which was ordered did no good, and then he said he would see some one in Hove. Instead, however, of letting the doctor come to him, he would go into Hove himself on a day when there was a bitter wind blowing, and of course he returned worse than he went. These things were very vexatious, but I could talk out my troubles to Roger, and that was sufficient comfort to me for the time.

The accounts from Hatton continued very indifferent. Mrs. Morris kept her bed, and Jessie was in constant attendance upon her. Roger and I saw Jessie for a short time the day he drove me over, and she was very pleasant in her behaviour to both of us, — very glad to see Roger, and full of thanks for our coming; but her mind was so engrossed by all the cares pressing upon her, that she did not seem to take in anything else thoroughly. I thought myself how much prettier and more winning she was in this subdued mood than in any of her wilful humours, and I was pleased that Roger should see her to advantage, even though her manner contradicted some of the things I had lately written to him about her. Jessie told me that day that Miss Milicent was actually gone. She had learnt it from some one who came over from Denc, and said that Mr. Macdonald knew it for certain. There was a great deal too much communication kept up still between Denc and Jessie and the Lieutenant. I did not feel at all easy in my mind as to the end.

After Jessie's information, I resolved to make an effort to go and see Mrs. Weir, even at the risk of facing Mrs. Temple, and perhaps offending her. It was a little pleasure to me also whilst Roger was away, for he was obliged to go to London for a few days to see Mr. Pierce's relations. Yet I did not feel comfortable in thinking what kind of reception I might meet with, and I was rather nervous as I rang the bell. The page opened the door, and I asked if I might see Mrs. Weir. He did not know — he would go and see — and he ran off. I stood looking down the road, and saw Mrs. Temple coming up. She was going on beyond the house, but on perceiving me she drew near. I made a curtsy, and said I had walked over to inquire after Mrs. Weir.

"Oh! Mrs. Weir is not at all well to-day."

"I was afraid she might not be, Ma'am," I replied. "Parting with Miss Milicent must have made her anxious."

"Mrs. Weir is too excellent a person to allow herself to be anxious upon any subject," was the answer. "I will tell her that you called."

"I had hoped that I might have seen her, Ma'am," I said. "Having been accustomed to me so long, I fancied it would not make her nervous."

"Mrs. Weir sees no one but her friends," was Mrs. Temple's answer; "I will tell her that you called to inquire, and no doubt she will be much obliged to you."

Just then Mr. Temple and some strange gentlemen came up, and Mr. Temple asked his wife if she was going on farther. I saw she disliked leaving me at the door, and again she repeated, "I will tell Mrs. Weir that you called," — which was as much as to say, "You have come, and now you may go back again," but I kept my stand, waiting for the answer from Mrs. Weir herself.

"Are you ready, my dear?" said Mr. Temple, in his meek voice, and he offered her his arm: she really had no excuse then, and was obliged to depart.

The page came back almost directly afterwards, followed by Cotton. He began telling me that Mrs. Weir was very ill, that she had had a bad night, that she did not see any one, — but Cotton gave him a tap on the shoulder and sent him off to the kitchen, and even before he was out of sight exclaimed, "Little rascal! — he would say his face was copper-coloured for sixpence!"

"Isn't Mrs. Weir ill?" I said. "Can she see me?"

Cotton replied by stepping out into the road, and looking up and down it.

"She is gone. That is her purple bonnet. Now, Miss Grant, if you wish to come you must make the most of your time."

"What does it mean, Cotton?" I exclaimed, "I don't understand."

"Don't ask questions, and you won't have answers. At any rate, seeing you will do my mistress good, for yours will be the first face belonging to any one out of the house, that she has caught sight of for the last three weeks."

"Has she been so ill as that?" I inquired.

"Only learning to be quiet, she will tell you," said Cotton.