

THE STORY OF AN AFRICAN FARM

BY OLIVE SCHREINER

A TALE OF LIFE IN THE BOER REPUBLIC.

(Continued from last week.)

CHAPTER XXVII

WALDO GOES OUT TO SET IN THE SUNSHINE.

It had been a princely day. The long morning had melted slowly into a rich afternoon.

A different life showed itself in front of the house, where Tant' Sannie's cart stood ready "inspinned," and the Boer woman herself sat in the front room drinking coffee.

The young man arose and meekly went out with the baby.

"I'm glad you are going to be married, my child," said Tant' Sannie as she drained the last drop from her coffee cup.

"Perhaps it might not suit all people at all times as well as it suits you, Tant' Sannie," said Em.

"Not suit every one," said Tant' Sannie. "If the beloved Redeemer didn't mean men to have wives, what did he make women for?"

"It's a strange thing," she said, "but you can't love a man till you've had a baby by him. Now, there's that boy there. When we were first married, if he only sneezed in the night I boxed his ears. Now, if he lets his pipe ash

come on my milk clothes I don't think of laying a finger on him. There's nothing like being married," said Tant' Sannie as she puffed toward the door.

"I'm glad you're going to get married," she said. "I hope you'll have as many children in five years as a cow has calves, and more too."

"You see if the sheep don't have the scab this year?" said Tant' Sannie as she waddled after Em.

"I don't know how to tell you, but when I was a little girl, I had a little sister who was just like you. She was so fat and so plump, and she was so happy."

"Yes," said Tant' Sannie. "I had almost forgotten to tell you. By the Lord if I had him here! We were walking to church last sacrament Sunday, Piet and I. Close in front of us was old Tant' Trans, with dropsy and cancer and can't live eight months."

"I'll bring you a glass of buttermilk when it is cool," she called out, and soon her clear voice came ringing out through the back windows as she sang the "Blue Water" to herself and washed the butter.

Waldo did not wait till she returned. Perhaps he had at last really grown weary of work; perhaps he felt the wagon chilly (for he had shuddered two or three times), though that was hardly likely in that warm summer weather, or perhaps, and most probably, one of his old dreaming fits had come upon him suddenly.

She walked away toward the house, but stopped when she had got half way. "I will bring you a glass of buttermilk when it is cool," she called out, and soon her clear voice came ringing out through the back windows as she sang the "Blue Water" to herself and washed the butter.

There are only rare times when a man's soul can see Nature. So long as any passion holds its revel there, the eyes are hidden that should not see her. Go out if you will, and walk alone on the hillside in the evening, but if your favorite child lies ill at home, or your lover comes tomorrow, or at your heart there lies a scheme for the holding of wealth, then you will return as you went out—you will have seen nothing for Nature, ever, like the old Hebrew God, cries out, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

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Well to die then, for, if you live, so surely as the years come, so surely as the spring succeeds the winter, so surely will passions arise. They will creep back, one by one, into the bosom that has cast them forth and fasten there again, and peace will go. Desire, ambition and the fierce agonizing food of love for the living—they will spring again. Then Nature will draw down her veil. With all your longing you shall not be able to raise one corner. You cannot bring back those peaceful days. Well to die then!

"Why is it always so, Waldo—always so?" she said. "We long for things and long for them and pray for them, we would give all we have to come near to them, but we never reach them. Then at last, too late, just when we don't want them any more, when all the sweetness is taken out of them, then they come. We don't want them then," she said, folding her hands resignedly on her little apron.

"No, little one, I will not take it," he said as he planned slowly away. "The time was when I would have been very grateful to any one who would have given me a little money, a little help, a little power of gaining knowledge. But now I have gone so far alone I may go on to the end. I don't want it, little one."

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"Gregory is going to the town tomorrow. He is going to give in our banners to the minister. We are going to be married in three weeks."

Waldo lifted her very gently from the table. He did not congratulate her. Perhaps he thought of the empty box, but he kissed her forehead gravely.

There is a little insect found in New Caledonia called the "insect which counts," and which seems capable of counting to at least six. It is found on the leaves of the banana tree, and when the moment is favorable it may be seen to turn around, with its head as a center, in describing rapid circles.

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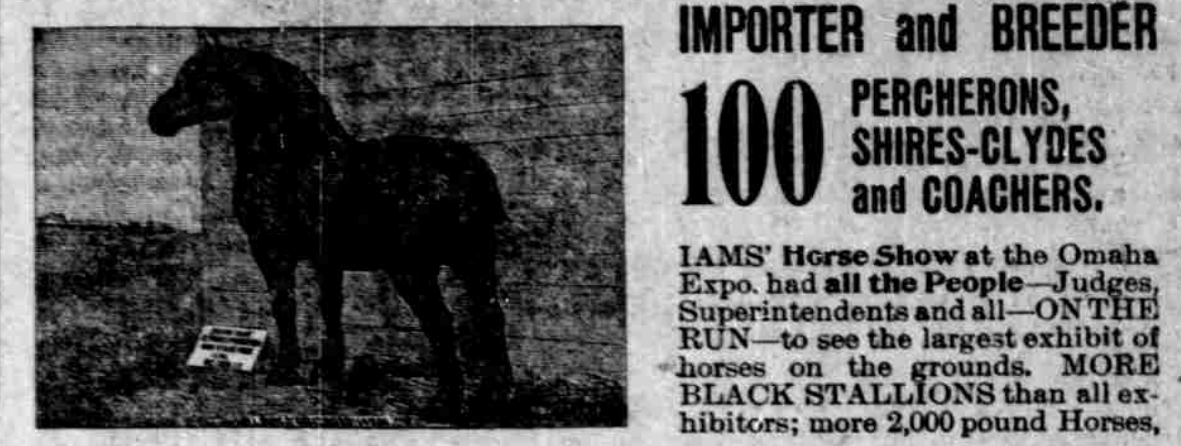
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