

LOST ON THE VELDT

A STORY OF THE BOER CAMPAIGN IN NATAL

By H. B. Mackenzie

CHAPTER IV.—(Continued.)

"Was it anything, dearie?" She uttered an exclamation as she saw Bluebell's white face. "The Boers—they're going to attack us, Bluebell! Is that it?"

"No, no, auntie—not so far as I know," said the girl, with an attempt at a wan smile. "At least, that wasn't what I saw. But don't ask me tonight, auntie, I'm tired, good night." Miss Elizabeth was all of mother she had ever known.

"Good night, God keep you, dearie," the elder woman whispered. Her words remained with Bluebell after she had shut herself into her room.

God keep her! There was one to whom she should turn now for help in this most terrible crisis of her young life. Bluebell threw herself on her knees, burying her face in her hands. Oh, God, show her what was the right thing to do. Help her, oh, God, for there was no other who could tell her what she must do!

Save her father from the consequences of a deliberate crime by selling herself to this scoundrel! It was a fearful sacrifice! Did God demand it of her? Nay, would she be doing right, in making it? Bluebell was a good, sweet, true-hearted girl. She had always shown respect and affection for the most unlovable man who was her father, even when he was least worthy of respect; but she had an unusual amount of common sense for a young girl, and was not likely to be betrayed into any sentimental and maudlin course of action.

As she knelt there a sudden thought came to Bluebell, bringing the warm blood in a palpitating wave over the pallor of her white face, and quickening the throbs of her heart that had been beating so low and despairingly. It was the thought of Adair Rothes.

"If he were only here," Bluebell said to herself, "I think he would help me. He said he was my friend."

Her thoughts wandered from the terrible crisis of the moment to the brief time of happiness in the afternoon when Rothes had first met her. It had not lasted long, that was true; but somehow the memory of Rothes' clasp of her hand, of his long look into her eyes, brought a kind of brief sweetness into Bluebell's heart, which even the pain and sorrow of the present could not quite blot out.

When she rose from her knees her mind was quite made up.

"I shall not marry that man," she said, and her eyes were full of a strange, deep determination. "It would not make dad's sin the less if I did so. It would be a sin on my part to marry a man like that. It would be adding sin to sin. Dad must escape, but it will be in some other way. I will help him to do so. He must escape to England, and auntie and I will carry on the farm here."

This determination brought a certain restfulness to Bluebell. She undressed, got into bed, and presently went to sleep, though it was a sleep disturbed by troubled dreams of Boers attacking New Kelsa, setting fire to it, and trying up all its occupants to stakes in order that they might be burnt also.

Adam Leslie had a worse night than his daughter. He was up at daybreak and riding over his farm. As he was returning about 7 o'clock he saw a tall, dark figure approaching him on horseback. He recognized it at once, and his heart sank.

Moore rode quickly up to him. Mr. Leslie could see some excitement on the usually dark, impassive face.

"News, Leslie—great news!" he exclaimed, as he came close to the other man, and flung himself off his horse. "Listen, man; but first—he dropped his voice—"what of my love affair. How have you succeeded with the little bride-elect?"

Leslie's rufous face blanched, but he endeavored to put on an air of assurance.

"My dear Moore, she will come round; I am not afraid of that. Of course you must allow for a little reluctance at first; but there isn't the slightest fear but she will give in. But you'll give us a day or two more of grace, will you not?"

His tone of abject entreaty told more than his words did to the keen ear of Gerald Moore, who turned aside for a moment, and passed his hand over his lips as if to conceal their expression.

"Yes, I will give you a day or two more," he said presently, "for, there's some work before you, Mr. Leslie, if, as I think, you feel inclined to tell something which the British general at Ladysmith would give his ears to know. In a few days some of the biggest men on the Boers' side may be made prisoners. Ha! is that not tidings worth hearing? I could give the information myself, but I wish you to have the chance of a little glory, and also of a pecuniary reward. You do not need to sell this information under general, hundred pounds."

The eyes of Adam Leslie glistened. Avarice was one of the man's besetting sins. It was the haste to be rich which had landed him in the net of the millionaire, Gerald Moore.

He grasped Moore's arm.

"And you can give me this information?—For pity's sake, let me know all, Moore."

The other man bent his head, and

for a few minutes spoke in a low but deliberate and distinct voice. Leslie drank in every word. His hatred of the Boers was only equalled by his lust for gold, and the two passions, seeing a way to be satisfied here, rendered his rufous face agitated and convulsed with emotion.

"You are willing to inform? Then go, and at once!" exclaimed Moore. "Not a moment is to be lost! It is utterly impossible that the information can be carried to Ladysmith in any other way. I solemnly assure you that no one else knows it but myself. You can reach Ladysmith by 9 o'clock. So then, without more ado, go!"

As Adam Leslie, full of the design that was to deliver the very leaders of the Boer army into the hands of the enemy, hurried within his steading, the other man looked after him with a smile.

"So you have worked into my hands, friend Leslie," he muttered. And he rubbed these useful members together as if Leslie were literally between them.

"Now my path will be easy. Yes, my charming Bluebell, you will find Gerald Moore is capable of revenge as well as love!" And he laughed. "And if you will not yield to persuasion, my dear young lady, why, then, we must needs try force!"

CHAPTER V.

Bluebell had come down prepared to give her father her answer, and to make her proposal to him, in the morning; but to her surprise and consternation, she learned that he had gone off on horseback, no one knew whether, not saying when he should return.

"It was Sam who saw him go," said Miss Elizabeth, in a frightened tone, "and he says he went in the direction of Ladysmith; but of course he may be going much farther than that—he may be going by train. Do you know nothing about it, Bluebell?"

Bluebell shook her head. She was more put about even than her aunt by this new move. What could it mean?

"Dear auntie, you're not afraid of the Boers, are you? They have never done us any harm, why should they now? Though they are fighting with Britons, it is with British soldiers armed themselves, not with helpless, unarmed people, especially women."

The day passed, the women going about their usual avocations; but Adam Leslie did not return. It was not till late in the evening that he rode at a hard pace up the avenue and into the steading, right up underneath the stoop or veranda. Bluebell went down to meet him, then turned away with a shudder, for she could see he was deeply flushed and his eyes blazing, while he staggered slightly as he got off his horse.

"Sam!" cried Bluebell to the Zulu servant who had appeared at the sound of the horse's hoofs, "take my father's horse. Father, take my arm," she said, in a low voice.

But he flung her off with an oath. "Away into the house! You are a disobedient creature, and I will have nothing to do with you!" he snarled. He himself staggered into the sitting room, where he lay down on a couch and fell asleep, without even removing his great riding boots.

Bluebell could not speak to him that night. She crept away, bitterly humiliated and distressed; and Miss Elizabeth came in and endeavored to comfort her; but it was such comfort as one who is ignorant of the real nature or depth of a wound can give.

By the morning her father had slept off his drunken fit. Bluebell managed to get a few minutes alone with him after breakfast, during which he was sullen and silent, not exchanging a word with the women.

Had as Adam Leslie was, he had still a few instincts of a gentleman, and one of these told him that he had been guilty of a base and dishonorable act in selling the information which was to betray the Boer leaders into the hands of an enemy.

"Father, I must speak to you for a minute," Bluebell said, very pale but very determined. "I have been thinking over what you said last night. I cannot do what you wish. It would be a crime to sell myself to a man I loathe and fear. But—but you must escape. This is the time to do it, when all the country is in confusion, and people are leaving every day. You must go down to Durban and get to England. Aunt Elizabeth and I shall stay on here, and we can send you the money we make. The only thing we have to do is to throw Mr. Moore off the scent."

He had been glaring at her with a look that vaguely terrified Bluebell up to this moment. Now he interrupted her in a hoarse, sullen tone.

"You are mad, child! You don't know what you are talking about! I am not going to escape, or to do any such thing, in the meantime. As for you, you will have to make up your mind sooner or later to marry Gerald Moore; but he is not going to insist at once. You will have a week or two in which to accustom yourself to the idea that seems so disagreeable to you."

He turned without another word, and walked out of the room. Bluebell

looked after him, with mingled agony and humiliation in her heart.

He had not always been like this. Bluebell could remember her early years of childhood in far-off Scotland, when a sweet-faced, brown-haired woman ruled the house, and Adam Leslie had been as different from what he was now as day is from night.

Then the sweet mother had died, and Leslie had been turned out of the inheritance he had thought would be his, by a cousin, long supposed to be dead, turning up; and, in a sullen, defiant mood, the man had set off for South Africa, taking his sister with him. The passion for making money had entered his heart, which seemed to have no longer any sweet home affection to soften it since his wife died; and he had become harder and more sullen and more immersed in money making until this fearful end had come.

A day or two passed. Gerald Moore seemed to have disappeared, and Bluebell began to breathe more freely. Perhaps, after all, he was not so bad as she had thought; perhaps her evident aversion to the idea of marrying him had offended him, and decided him to act a more merciful part than he had at first intended.

Meantime, too, they had heard no further news of the invading Boers. One night Bluebell had gone to her own room rather earlier than usual. She had had a headache—an uncommon ailment with her—and, saying to her aunt that she felt sure that there was a thunderstorm coming, she bade her good-night and went to bed; but for a long time she could not sleep.

The night was very hot—an unusual thing at that season, when, though the days are sweetly warm, the nights are correspondingly cold—and there was the strange stillness in the air which precedes a thunderstorm. Bluebell lay waiting for the first sudden clap of thunder, the first dazzling blaze of lightning, all her nerves unstrung, not by fear, but by the overcharged electricity in the air, and her own throbbing temples.

At last Bluebell's ears, strained to catch any noise, detected a strange throbbing sound; but it seemed to be very far away. It was certainly not the rumbling of thunder. Was it a real sound, or did it exist only in her fancy, in the throbbing tympanum of her ear? Bluebell lay still and listened.

No, it was no fancy! She heard it again, and this time more distinct. It was the sound of horses' hoofs—of many horses' hoofs—Bluebell well knew, though the noise produced was not that of several distinct sounds, but of one galloping along the wagon-path of the veldt.

Bluebell started up in bed, a sudden trembling seizing her. The Boers! Of course it was the Boers! She did not have a doubt on the subject. But in what direction were they going. Ah! they were coming towards New Kelsa! She could hear their horses approaching every moment.

Almost mechanically Bluebell threw herself out of bed and dressed herself quickly, then thrust her feet into her slippers. All the house was silent. It was about 1 o'clock in the morning, and every one was in bed. Should she go to wake them? Bluebell hesitated. Perhaps the horsemen would pass right on; they must be going towards Ladysmith. Was it not better that her father should sleep on in ignorance that the hated Boers were so near. If he knew of their proximity, who could tell what bad step his hatred of them might induce him to take?

Bluebell determined to remain where she was and watch. She stood behind the curtain, which alone protected the unshuttered window, watching. Her heart beat fast and unevenly, and nervous little shoots of pain ran through the palms of her hands.

(To be continued.)

With the Eyes of Faith.

Some idea of amateur photography as it was in its early days may be gathered from an incident which the late Bishop Walsham How confided to his note book. Before he became a bishop he used to call together the old men of the parish on New Year's day, and on one occasion he displayed to his guests a photograph of two old men who had long worked at the rectory. They were photographed in their working clothes, one with a spade and the other holding a little tree as if about to plant it. A very deaf old man, Richard Jones, took the photograph in his hands, and looking at it said: "Beautiful! Beautiful!" So the rector shouted: "Who are they, Richard?" "Why," he said, "it's Abraham offering up Isaac to be sacrificed!" The rector tried to undeceive him, and as the old men who had been photographed were sitting opposite him, he said: "You'll see them before you if you'll look up." Richard smiled sorely but all he said was: "Yes, yes, I sees 'em before me—by faith!"—Youth's Companion.

Prophectic.

Mrs. Bingo—"You went to Mickie-man, the palmist, didn't you? And how was he?" Mrs. Kingley—"Wonderful! His powers of divination are really marvelous." What did he say?" "He said I would be without a cook for nearly a month."—Detroit Free Press.

His Drawbacks.

"Dreadful!" exclaimed Cholly Angloman, as he looked at an old painting where the costumes included doublet and hose. "It's picturesque." "Perhaps. But how could a man roll up his trousers like they do in London?"—Washington Star.

TALMAGE'S SERMON.

REWARDS OF ENDEAVOR SUNDAY'S SUBJECT.

From the Following Text—"I Have Finished the Work Which Thou Gavest Me to Do"—John XVII, 4—The Fruits of Well-Won Victory.

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There is a profound satisfaction in the completion of anything we have undertaken. We lift the capstone with exultation, while, on the other hand, there is nothing more disappointing than after having toiled in a certain direction to find that our time is wasted and our investment profitless. Christ came to throw up a highway on which the whole world might, if it chose, mount into heaven. He did it. The foul-mouthed crew who attempted to tread on him could not extinguish the sublime satisfaction which he expressed when he said, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

Alexander the Great was wounded, and the doctors could not mediate his wounds, and he seemed to be dying, and in his dream the sick man saw a plant with a peculiar flower, and he dreamed that that plant was put upon his wound and that immediately it was cured. And Alexander, waking from his dream, told this to the physician, and the physician wandered out until he found just the kind of plant which the sick man had described, brought it to him, and the wound was healed. Well, the human race had been hurt with the deadliest of all wounds—that of sin. It was the business of Christ to bring a balm for that wound—the balm of divine restoration. In carrying this business to a successful issue the difficulties were stupendous.

The Spiritual Uplifting.

In many of our plans we have our friends to help us; some to draw a sketch of the plan, others to help us in the execution. But Christ fought every inch of his way against bitter hostility and amid circumstances all calculated to depress and defeat.

In his father's shop no more intercourse was necessary than is ordinarily necessary in bargaining with men that have work to do; yet Christ, with hands hard from use of tools of trade, was called forth to become a public speaker, to preach in the face of mobs, while some wept and some shook their fists and some gnashed upon him with their teeth and many wanted him out of the way. To address orderly and respectful assemblages is not so easy as it may seem, but it requires more energy and more force and more concentration to address an exasperated mob. The villagers of Nazareth heard the pounding of his hammer, but all the wide reaches of eternity were to hear the stroke of his spiritual uplifting.

So also the habits of dress and diet were against him. The mighty men of Christ's time did not appear in apparel without trinkets and adornments. None of the Caesars would have appeared in citizen's apparel. Yet here was a man, here was a professed king, who always wore the same coat. Indeed, it was far from shabby, for after he had worn it a long while the gamblers thought it worth raffling about, but still it was far from being an imperial robe. It was a coat that any ordinary man might have worn on an ordinary occasion.

Neither was there any pretension in his diet. No cupbearer with golden chalice brought him wine to drink. On the seashore he ate fish, first having broiled it himself. No one fetched him water to drink; but, bending over the well in Samaria, he begged a drink. He sat at only one banquet, and that not at all sumptuous, for to relieve the awkwardness of the host one of the guests had to prepare wine for the company.

Man Without a Diploma.

All this was against Christ. So the fact that he was not regularly graduated was against him. If a man come with the diplomas of colleges and schools and theological seminaries, and he has been through foreign travel, and the world is disposed to listen. But here was a man who had graduated at no college, had not in any academy by ordinary means learned the alphabet of the language he spoke, and yet he proposed to talk, to instruct in subjects which had confounded the mightiest intellects. John says: "The Jews marvelled, saying, How hath this man letters, having never learned?" We, in our day, have found out that a man without a diploma may know as much as a man with one and that a college can not transform a sluggard into a philosopher or a theologian, and yet he proposed to talk, to instruct in subjects which had confounded the mightiest intellects. John says: "The Jews marvelled, saying, How hath this man letters, having never learned?" 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