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## THE FARM IN THE HILLS.

### A TALE OF MYSTERY.

By FLORENCE WARDEN.

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#### SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS INSTALLMENTS

In order that new readers of THE ENQUIRER may begin with the following installment of this story, and understand it just the same as though they had read it all from the beginning, we here give a synopsis of that portion of it which has already been published:

The Rev. Granville Masson, who is traveling in Wales, writes his brother, Dr. Reginald Masson that he is about to go on an excursion in the hills with a wild, uncooled, redheaded guide. After this nothing is heard of the clergyman. Dr. Masson goes to Wales, finds the man from which his brother started and learns that he was going to the house of Mr. Tregaron, owner of Monachog farm, some six miles distant, under the guidance of a man nicknamed Coch Tal. Reginald starts in the afternoon, and in his haste, without a guide, to make his way in face of a snowstorm to Monachog farm. Perceiving a figure ahead of him, Reginald hastens and comes up with a large, redheaded man, who on seeing the doctor, shows signs of great terror and darts ahead. Reginald follows, feeling sure that the man is Coch Tal, and, overtaking him, calls him by that name; but the man again eludes him. He pursues the fugitive down a ravine till he arrives at the edge of a cliff, from the bottom of which comes a groan. Above him he hears a voice calling and, retracing his steps, comes upon a farmer, who conducts him to his house. The man's daughter is ill, and Reginald agrees to take her. On the farmer's finger Reginald sees a ring that had belonged to his brother. The house and the people in it are mysterious. There are an old woman, the farmer's young son, Tom, and a farmhand called Myrick. Reginald goes to the room of the sick girl, Gwyn, and, upon seeing him, she is struck with horror. Reginald sleeps in the kitchen in a chair before the fire. During the night he awakes to find that some one has entered the room and has evidently tried to rob him, suspicion pointing to the farmhand Myrick, who turns out to be Coch Tal, and Reginald goes out to be Mr. Tregaron and the place Monachog farm. Tregaron tells Reginald that he found the ring on a hillside near by. Reginald watches at Gwyn's bedside, and she asks him to leave the place before morning. Everything and everybody about the place is mysterious. The old woman never speaks; it appears to be spying. Coch Tal is moody; while Gwyn is in constant terror. Reginald, seeing Coch Tal climbing a ladder to a loft, follows him, corners him in his bedroom and questions him about his missing brother. Coch Tal admits that he is Granville Masson's guide and says that Masson insisted on climbing where it was not safe. He disappeared, and Coch Tal never saw him afterward. Gwyn rovers and urges Reginald to depart. A heavy fall of snow prevents, and he believes that he will never get out of the place alive. While he is with Gwyn, Coch Tal comes to the door. Reginald goes out to him, and Coch Tal shows plainly that he is in love with Gwyn and jealous of Reginald and threatens him in case he does not depart at once. Reginald pacifies him and returns to Gwyn, but Coch Tal and Jealous of Reginald, he evidently fears him. Reginald feels that she possesses the secret of his brother's disappearance. Reginald discovers a pit on the ground and, while examining it, sees the old woman watching him. She gives a satisfied chuckle.



He was being lifted by the shoulders and by the heels.

household to which she belonged, the earnestness and passion which he had discovered in even so short and restricted an acquaintance, all helped to make an impression upon him to which her personal beauty helped to give both power and charm.

There had come to be a strange sort of freemasonry between these two, expressed in an exchange of looks when he came in or out of confidence on the one hand, of sympathy on the other.

Whatever there might be amiss in the household—and that something was wrong somewhere Masson could not doubt—this one figure of the handsome, open faced girl stood aloof from it, shone out the brighter for her rather dubious surroundings. He was not without a suspicion, too, that this insistence of hers upon his constant presence in the sickroom was a measure of precaution for his personal safety and that the watching at night, upon which she continued to insist, was a maneuver by means of which she could still play the part of guardian angel during the hours which she judged to be the most perilous to him.

However that might be, for the next four days, during which the doctor assured her that her progress toward recovery was steady, while she insisted that it was slow. Gwyn proved herself a most obstinate and refractory convalescent, refusing to sit up or to rise on the plea of weakness and demanding constant attention by day and the watching of her grandmother and the doctor at night.

As Masson continued to help with the work of snow clearing by day and thus got no proper rest he had become on the fourth successive night of his forced and unnecessary watch so utterly worn out by fatigue that he fell into a deep, dead sleep as soon as he had settled himself in his armchair. He was awakened after a short, wild nightmare of a dream that he was drowning, suffocating, crying for help, to find himself bound, gagged, blinded and gasping for air. He was being lifted by the shoulders and by the heels when he awoke. Helpless as he was, he kicked, he struggled, he turned over, only to fall out of the hands which had got him in their grip and to fall with a dull thud upon the floor.

At the same time, just as the hands were seizing him again, he managed to utter a gurgling sound and to kick out at some one or at something, which fell with another dull noise.

Then he heard a sharp cry. It was Gwyn's voice.

There was a moment's awful stillness, and for that moment he found that the hands had released him. The next they closed upon him again, and the cry was repeated. Again he struggled. He tried to speak, but again he was helpless, for his hands were bound to his sides. Again he succeeded only in giving voice to a gurgling, stifled sound.

Then hands touched him again, tearing at the gag which was suffocating him. With a strange thrill of wild joy and relief he felt that the hands were Gwyn's. He heard a long, sobbing breath. He felt her body trembling as it leaned over him.

"Leave him alone! Leave him alone!" cried she.

Again there was silence, a mysterious, awful silence. And suddenly Masson felt that the girl was being dragged away and that she was fighting, struggling, in her turn.

Writhing, panting, striving to free himself, Masson turned himself so that the cloth which had been thrown over his head got looser and looser. In another minute he would be able at least to see.

But at the very moment that he had all but succeeded a rough hand pinned him down again. And still he heard no betraying voice. His assailants were as silent as the dead.

Gwyn, in a voice which sounded new and strange in Masson's ears.

"Listen, listen!" said she. "He loves me, and I love him. He loves me, and he is going to marry me, marry me. You wouldn't kill the man I love?"

There was a moment of horrible suspense, and then the gripping, sinewy hands released their hold. Presently a door was shut, and there was another silence.

But Masson knew as the soft woman's touch came again upon his head that his assailants were gone, that he was alone with Gwyn.

#### CHAPTER XVII.

##### MASSON'S GUARDIAN ANGEL.

Scarcely had the sound of the closing door and the stillness that followed convinced Masson that he was alone with Gwyn when he felt her fingers about his neck and face. In another moment the cloth which had been thrown round his head was drawn off, and he was able to see.

He found himself still in the sickroom at a few paces from the armchair in which he had been sleeping. But the corresponding chair on the opposite side of the fireplace where the old woman had been accustomed to sit was now empty.

At first he could not see Gwyn, for she had got behind his head, which she had placed upon her knees, while her fingers were busy untying the towel with which he had been gagged.

Her fingers were so strong, she worked with such hearty good will, that in a very few moments his head was quite free, and he was able to speak.

All the use he made of this privilege, however, was to utter "Thank you" once or twice in a weak, faint voice.

She bent down over him, gazing into his face with anxiety and distress, which touched his heart. Then, seeing him able to speak to her, she uttered two words, "Thank God!" and without an instant's delay set herself to untie the cords with which he had been skillfully bound. Her hands, which were large and strong and deft, fulfilled their task in an incredibly short time, untying knots and liberating each limb in turn with steady dexterity, which left no time for hysterical outburst or even for a kindly word.

Once, however, she glanced from her work to his face, and the half shy, half bold look in her passionate eyes carried a secret of hers swiftly into his mind. And again, when she bent her head to unfasten one of the knots with her strong, white teeth, while her long, loosened black hair flowed over his arms and breast, he felt her warm lips trembling as they touched his hand, and the knowledge the action gave him thrilled him through and through.

At last he was free, and with a low cry of satisfaction she sprang back and stood up, offering him one hand to help him to rise.

But he found himself for the moment so much benumbed by the pressure of the cords which had so lately bound him that he had some difficulty in getting on his feet. When he succeeded, the girl gave him one glance of passionate thankfulness and pride and joy. Clasp his hands tightly, but with a look which was still shy and modest, she whispered: "I'm so glad, so thankful. You are safe, quite safe, now."

And then, having ascertained that he was indeed, as she said, safe for the time at least, the remembrance that she was in her nightdress, that her feet were bare, that her hair was hanging in disorder about her shoulders, came suddenly to her mind. Casting down her eyes hastily and biting her lip, she seized one of the shawls which her grandmother had left in her chair, and, drawing it quickly round her so that it wrapped her from neck to foot, yet still with the modest affectation of being only cold, not shy, she seated herself in the empty chair by the fire, and with an assumption of acting mechanically and from no mere self consciousness she put her hands up to her head and hastily twisted her long hair into a thick coil, which she tucked into the shawl at the back of her neck.

In the meantime she tried to speak in a matter of fact tone.

"You must think, doctor, that you are in a den of thieves, murderers!" said she. "But I am going to show you that you are mistaken."

Masson made no reply. After the experience he had just gone through, how could he give her even a conventional assurance that he had no such thoughts as she suggested?

"You do think so, don't you?" she asked, her voice breaking a little on this second question.

When at last he found his voice, it was very subdued, very earnest.

"I know," said he gently, "that I am in a house which is honored by the presence of a noble, heroic woman."

At these words a long shivering sigh went through her frame and seemed to convulse her. He glanced anxiously at her and saw that her face was radiant with a strange joy, that two tears were glistening in her eyes.

"Thank you," said she simply in a low voice. "Thank you for your kindness. But what you are good enough to think of me does not alter what you think of—of—"

She stopped, her voice shaking, her lips trembling. Masson then spoke in the same low voice as before and in the same deeply respectful manner.

"I am ready to hear whatever you may have to tell me about any one," said he. "In the meantime you must remember that you are not strong yet, that you must—must get some rest."

She sprang to her feet.

"But you?" said she. "What will you do? Where will you go? I—"

She stopped, drew a long breath and went on in a tone which she tried in vain to make composed and indifferent. "Of course you will be quite safe!"

But when she got as far as these words she broke down, sank again into the chair and, burying her face in her hands, broke into a passion of hysterical sobbing. He put his hand firmly on her shoulder.

"Come," said he in a tone which he made determined and almost stern. "Now I must speak to you as the doctor. You must go back to bed, you must try to sleep, and you may rest quite sure that I shall look after myself very carefully till morning." She was shaking her head, clinging with one hand to his sleeve. "Come," he went on in a gentler, more persuasive tone. "Guardian angels, you know, must take care of themselves. If only for the sake of the persons whom they guard."

"Yes, yes," said she, "I understand. And—and I will. I will rest. I will be careful. Only, only tell me this: What will you do? Where will you go till morning?"

"I shall go down stairs into the kitchen. It is 3 o'clock. I shall not have long to wait before some one is about. And I will be as prudent and as cautious as if my life were as valuable as my best friends seem to suppose."

She listened eagerly, solemnly. When he had finished speaking, he took her hand in his. She was still sitting in the armchair and trembling violently, but the firm grasp of his fingers seemed to exercise upon her a calming influence, and after a couple of seconds the clasp of her own hand was as firm and as steady as that of his.

"Good night," said she in a low voice at last. "I won't say goodby. Take care. And—and tomorrow I will explain. Oh, yes, I can explain!"

She suddenly snatched her hand away from him, and he retreated and stumbled down stairs.

But when he reached the bottom he saw against the dim light which came through the open doorway of the room he had left the figure of the girl as she stood outside, watching him as far as she could, a guardian angel to the last.

#### CHAPTER XVIII.

##### IN THE LOFT WITH COCH TAL.

Masson stumbled into the kitchen, which was quite dark, lighted a candle and sat down, not to sleep again, but to think over the fresh developments of the night.

Who were the perpetrators of the outrage upon him? That question, narrow as were the limits within which it could be answered, was as difficult to solve as ever. He had heard and seen nothing to help him to any further knowledge than this, that more than one person had been concerned in it. The probabilities were, he thought, in favor of the belief that the attack upon him had been made by the lad Tom and Coch Tal, with the connivance if not the actual assistance of the old woman.

That Tregaron had had a hand in it he could scarcely believe. The farmer's conduct throughout had been straightforward, the manner of the other three persons toward himself had been uniformly suspicious and bad.

That their object had been murder he could not doubt. What plunder would he be likely to yield worth such a crime? That was the mystery. Surely some other motive must be sought, and this, he thought, could hardly be other than jealousy on the part of Coch Tal or fear lest Masson should find out the truth concerning his brother's fate.

Here again there was a mystery. Granville had not carried on his person either much money or much property of value, certainly but a poor booty for which to run the risks attendant upon murder.

As for Gwyn, he could not think of her without a softening of the heart, a glow of gratitude and admiration. That this girl had sacrificed her own comfort, her own rest, during the past few nights, he was now convinced beyond a doubt. She had feared some such outrage as that of which he had been made a victim and had conceived the idea of protecting him by keeping him within the range of her own watchful eyes. To do this she had feigned illness when she was on the highroad to recovery.

It was she who had been the watcher and he who had been the watched during those nights when they had all been puzzled by the inconsistency between her favorable symptoms and her vehement complaints of pain and weakness.

What could he do in gratitude to the girl for her splendid conduct, her unselfish care? His heart beat quickly, and his eyes grew moist as he thought of it.

And then he heard a heavy tread in the room over his head and knew that the farmer and his son were getting up.

It was 5 o'clock and still dark. But before many minutes were over the door opened, and the old woman came in with sticks and paper to light the fire.

She stopped short and blinked for the first time in his recollection when she saw the lighted candle and the doctor sitting by the table. But she made no comment as she went down on her knees to her work and then proceeded to prepare the table for breakfast.

In the meantime Masson had heard the voices of Gwyn and of her father in earnest conversation on the stairs, and a little later he heard the farmer

and Tom go out by the back way to their early work.

Presently the old woman disappeared. And he was left alone until it was nearly 7 o'clock.

Then Gwyn came in. She looked pale and fragile, and she walked rather unsteadily, but it was plain that she was much farther advanced on the road to complete health than she had pretended.

They stood silent, both deeply moved, for some seconds until Gwyn, recovering herself and reddening slightly, said in a whisper: "I want to tell you now—what you said you'd hear—the reason—the reason of—of what was done to you. It was very wrong, wicked, unjustifiable, of course, but they would not have done you any real harm. It was only a trick, a trick to frighten you, because of—of jealousy."

As she uttered the last word she turned away and spoke slyly and quickly. Whatever he thought he considered it best to accept the suggestion without open skepticism, so he merely inclined his head.

"Of course it was absurd, most absurd. But I do not understand. So I said—what I did. You heard me, did you not?" Masson bowed his head in assent. "I said it to keep them quiet—to get rid of them, in fact. I won't apologize, doctor, for you know why I did it. You are going to marry me. That is to be taken for granted as long as you are here, but when you go away—and I will find means of getting you away—then I will tell them the truth, and there will be an end of it all, of everything."

He came a little nearer to her and tried to look into her face. And as he did so the door into the washhouse was burst open by a gust of wind from the outer door, which was opened at that moment by the men coming in to breakfast.

Both Gwyn and the doctor started, and as the farmer and Tom and Coch Tal fled in and after the morning's greetings took their places at the tables it was plain enough by the expression of the three faces that the little scene they had witnessed had conveyed a very distinct impression to their several minds.

Coch Tal looked ferocious, gloomy and savage. He kept his eyes away from the doctor, and when Gwyn wished him good morning he answered her only by a curt word without looking at her or offering any congratulation on her reappearance down stairs.

Tom, who looked more sheepish than ever and who betrayed, to Masson's



The old woman came in to light the fire, eyes, by his demeanor that he had been one of the assailants of the night before, grinned and pinched his sister's arm with an ugly, knowing leer.

Tregaron himself shook Masson's hand in a strong grip and said in a low voice in his ear:

"I've heard. I wish you joy. My loss will be your gain, sir, gentleman though you are, and though it's not for me to say so perhaps."

And Gwyn bit her lip as her father kissed her and sat down in her place with a grave face and without so much as a glance at anybody.

The farmer, indeed, was the only person who seemed to be quite at his ease with the doctor. He was pleased and proud of the engagement between Masson and Gwyn, and he spoke freely of the comfort it gave him to think of his little girl being settled in life, with a "real gentleman, and one who had saved her life," to take care of her. He said how much he should miss her himself and how sorry he was that she would go so far away.

"But, then," he added, with a shrewd shake of the head, "maybe it's as well. After all, though, you're too much of a gentleman to be ashamed of us, still we're not grand enough folks for you, sir, when all is said and done. It's only our Gwyn that's fit for you, and there's the truth."

Masson found these remarks rather hard to reply to, but he listened and made such feeble comments as he could. He noted, while he spoke, the piercing eyes of Coch Tal fixed upon him with a penetrating shrewdness which seemed to suggest that the huge, red bearded son of the mountains guessed more than Tregaron himself did.

Or was it that he knew more? It was not until supper time that he had a chance of speaking again to Gwyn alone. He had been working hard out of doors all day, and she had kept out of his way when he entered the house at mealtimes. But he happened to enter the kitchen before the other men, and as he did so he met Gwyn coming down stairs. "Where will you sleep tonight?" she

asked abruptly, in a tone which betrayed that this question had been troubling her.

Masson hesitated. Then a thought struck him.

"In the loft with Merrick, if he'll let me," he answered at last.

But Gwyn was startled by the proposal.

"No, no," said she, "you must not. Let me think!"

"You will never think of anything better than that," said he gently. "Give me an acknowledged enemy rather than a treacherous friend." "What do you mean? Whom do you mean by a treacherous friend?" "I mean no one in particular," answered Masson. "But Merrick is the only person who has shown me open antagonism, and at the same time he is the sort of man to whom I could trust myself."

She seemed much struck by these words, and she looked into his face attentively after he had uttered them. "Perhaps you are right," she said at last in a hesitating voice. "You are wiser than I am, of course, sir."

He opened the door of the kitchen, where they now heard the voices of the others, and followed her in.

Coch Tal, who had begun his supper, scowled at them both.

Masson sat down beside him and at once opened the matter to him by requesting permission to sleep in a corner of his loft. The peasant stared at him in undisguised surprise.

"With me, mister!" cried he in rough, jeering tones. "Why, sure you wouldn't find any feather beds there, nor yet no pillows soft enough for your liking?"

"I think a board and a brick would be soft enough for me tonight," returned the young doctor good humoredly. "And the roof overhead is all the luxury I want."

The farmer had begun to protest and to offer his own room. But Masson would not hear of it. In the midst of the dispute between them Coch Tal's deep voice bawled out as he glanced first at Gwyn and then at Masson:

"All right, sir. You can share my loft if you like."

And in spite of the farmer's angry and offended objections the matter was settled thus.

Before Coch Tal reached the loft in his turn Masson was fast asleep.

He was roused ten minutes later by a rough, fierce shake, and, starting up, he found Coch Tal bending over him, with a savage scowl upon his face. In one hand he held a wood chopper, and with the other he was still clucking the doctor's arm.

"Wake up!" cried he roughly. "Wake up! I've got guilt enough on my soul! I don't want to kill a sleeping man! Wake up! Get up! And help me to keep the devil down!"

And even as he spoke he raised the ax above his head and clinched his teeth in a look of fierce, burning hatred.

In the flickering, misty light of the smoking tallow candle he looked like a demon. Masson thought as he staggered to his feet.

#### TO BE CONTINUED.

##### COMMANDANT CRONJE.

The Free State Commander is Very Unlike General Joubert.

General White has reported that an investigation exonerates General Joubert of responsibility for the firing on an ambulance party, and to all who know the Boer commander-in-chief's character the statement was scarcely necessary. He has won the respect of Englishmen, and few of them would have believed he could have lent any countenance to dishonorable tactics.

It will probably be otherwise in regard to General Cronje, the Boer commander, whose troops have been specifically accused of disregarding the usages of war in the course of their resistance to Lord Methuen's advance. In the war of independence Cronje led the Boer forces to the attack of Potchefstroom, a town just beyond the Vaal river, about 60 miles southwest of Johannesburg. The fort was splendidly defended by Colonel Winslow and a small British garrison.

The method of Cronje's attack earned for him a most unsavory reputation. There were several incidents in that war that did not bring in much credit to the Boers; but no officer offended against the rules of civilized warfare so often and grossly as Cronje. Not only did he order several non-combatant Britishers to be arrested, and afterward had them shot as spies on wholly insufficient grounds; but he repeatedly caused prisoners of war to be placed in the forefront of the besieging force and compelled them to work in the trenches in exposed positions, so that they might be, as many of them were, shot by their own comrades from the walls.

Commandant Cronje's conduct toward the end of the siege of Potchefstroom, however, will ever be remembered against him. When the news reached him that an armistice had been arranged between the British and Boer forces he deliberately withheld the information from the beleaguered garrison and continued the siege with fresh energy. Ultimately Colonel Winslow was obliged to surrender to save the lives of the wounded and the women and children refugees. Cronje's behavior, when it became known, was too much even for Mr. Gladstone, and the Transvaal government was required by Sir Evelyn Wood to allow a British regiment to march up from Natal on the conclusion of peace and reoccupy Potchefstroom as a formal acknowledgment of Cronje's teachery.