

Childrens' Department

LADDIE.

CHAPTER III.

Reader, think of some lovely picture of rustic life, with tender lights and pleasant shadows, with hard lines softened, and sharp angles touched into gentle curves, with a background of picturesque, satisfying appropriateness, with the magic touches that bring out the beauty and refinement and elegance of the scene, which are really there, and that subtly tone down all the roughness, and awkwardness, and coarseness which are also equally there. And then, imagine it, if you can, changing under your very eyes, with glaring lights and heavy shadows, deepening, and sharpening, and hardening wrinkles, and angles, and lines, exaggerating defects, bringing coarseness and age and ugliness into painful prominence, and taking away at a sweep the pretty, rural background which might have relieved and soothed the eye, and putting a dull, commonplace, incongruous one in its place. It was something of this sort that happened to John Carter that night, when the picture he had been painting with the sweet lights of love and childhood's fancies, and the tender shadows of memory throwing all soft tones of long ago and far away, suddenly stood before him in unvarnished reality, with all the glamour taken away, an every-day fact in his present London life.

I am glad to write it of him, that, for the first minute, pleasure was the uppermost feeling in his mind. First thoughts are often the best and purest. He started up saying, "Mother! why, mother!" in the same tone of glad surprise as he would have done fifteen years before if she had come unexpectedly into the shop at Martel; he did not even think if the door were closed, or what Mr. Hyder would think; he did not notice that she was crumpled and dirty with travel, or that she put her pattens down on his open book and upset the glass of violets; he just took hold of her trembling, hard-worked hands, and kissed her furrowed old cheek, wet with tears of unutterable joy, and repeated, "Mother! why, mother!"

I am glad to write it of him, glad that she had that great happiness, realising the hopes and longings of years past, consoling in days to come when she had to turn back to the past for comfort, or forward to the time of perfect satisfaction. There are these exquisite moments in life, let people say what they will of the disappointments and vanity of the world, when hope is realised, desire fulfilled, but it is just for a moment, no more, just a foretaste of the joys that shall be hereafter, when every moment of the long years of eternity will be still more

full and perfect, when we shall "wake up" and "be satisfied."

She was clinging meanwhile to his arm sobbing out "Laddie my boy, Laddie!" with her eyes too dim with tears to see his face clearly, or to notice how tall, and grand, and handsome her boy was grown, and what a gentleman. Presently, when she was seated in the arm-chair and had got her breath again, and wiped her foolish old eyes, she was able to hunt in her capacious pocket for the silver-rimmed spectacles that had descended from her father, old Master Pullen in the almshouses, and that Laddie remembered well, as being kept in the old Family Bible, and brought out with great pomp and ceremony on Sunday evenings.

"I must have a good look at you, Laddie boy," she said.

And then I think her good angel must have spread his soft wing between the mother and son (though to her mind it seemed only like another tear dimming her sight, with a rainbow light on it), to keep her from seeing the look that was marring that son's face. All the pleasure was gone, and embarrassment and disquiet had taken its place.

"However did you come, mother?" he said, trying his best to keep a certain hardness and irritation out of his voice.

"I come by the train, dear," the old woman answered, "and it did terrify me more nor a bit at first, I'll not go for to deny; but, bless you! I soon got over it, and them trains is handy sort of things when you gets used to 'em. I was a good deal put to though when we got to London station, there seemed such a many folks about, and they did push and hurry a body so. I don't know whatever I should adone if a gentleman hadn't come and asked me where I wanted to get to. He were a tallish man with whiskers, a bit like Mr. Jones over at Martel, and I daresay you knows him; but he were terrible kind however."

John Carter did not stop to explain that there were many tallish men with whiskers in London.

"Why didn't you write and say you were coming?"

"Well, there! I thought as I'd give you a surprise, and I knew as you'd be worrying about the journey and thinking as I'd not be able to manage; but I'm not such a helpless old body, after all, Laddie."

"Who have you left in charge of the cottage?"

"Why I've give it up altogether. Farmer Harris, he wanted it for his shepherd, and he give me notice. That's why I come all on a sudden like. I says to myself, says I, Laddie's got a home and a welcome for his old mother, and it is only because he thought as I was pretty nearly grown to the old place, and couldn't abear to leave it, that he ain't said as I must come and keep house for him long ago. But, bless you! I've been thinking so of the

pleasure of seeing you again that I've pretty nearly forgot as I was leaving my master's grave and all."

"And when must you go back?"

"Not till you gets tired of me, Laddie, or till you takes me to lay me by the old master, for I'd like to lay there, if so be as you can manage it, for I've heard tell as it costs a mort of money buryin' folks out of the parish as they dies in, and maybe it mightn't be just convenient to you."

John Carter busied himself with making the fire burn up into a blaze, while his mother rambled on, telling him little bits of village gossip about people he had long since forgotten or never heard of, or describing her journey, which was a far greater exploit in the old woman's eyes than Lieutenant Cameron's walk across Africa; or dwelling on the delight of seeing him again. He paid little heed to what she said, pretending to be intent on placing a refractory piece of coal in a certain position, or coaxing an uncertain little flame into steadiness, but his head was busy trying to form some plan for getting himself out of his difficult position. He did not want to hurt her, or to be unkind in any way; but it was altogether out of the question having her there to live with him. It would ruin all his prospects in life, his position in his profession and in society; as to his engagement, he did not venture to allow himself even to think of Violet just then. He knew some doctors whose mothers lived with them, and kept house for them, received their guests, and sat at the head of their table, but they were ladies, very different. The very idea of his mother with three or four servants under her was an absurdity. And this thought brought Hyder's grin before his mind. What had happened when his mother arrived? Had she committed herself and him frightfully by her behaviour. No doubt that impudent rascal was giving a highly facetious account of it all to the maids in the kitchen. Chattering magpies! And how they would pass it on! How Mary Jane would describe it through the area gate to the milk-woman next morning, and cook add a pointed word or two from the front steps as she cleaned them! He could almost smell the wet hearthstone and hear the clinking of the tin milk-pails as Biddy hooked them to the yoke and passed on with the story of his degradation. And he could fancy what a choice morsel it would make for Hyder to tell Sir John Meredith's solemn red-nosed butler, behind his hand, in a hoarse whisper, with winks to emphasize strong points, and an occasional jerk of the thumb over the shoulder and a careful avoidance of names. This thought was too much for his feelings, and the tongs went down with an ominous clatter into the fender, making the old woman jump nearly off her chair, and cutting short a story about the distemper among Squire Wellow's pigs.

Toronto, 1886.

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A TOUCHING INCIDENT.

The still form of a little boy lay in a coffin, surrounded by mourning friends. A mason came into the room and asked to look at the lovely face.

"You wonder that I care so much," he said, as the tears rolled down his cheeks; "but your boy was a messenger of God to me. One day I was coming down by a long ladder from a very high roof, and found your little boy standing close beside me when I reached the ground. He looked up in my face with childish wonder, and asked frankly, 'Weren't you afraid of falling when you were up so high?' and before I had time to answer, he said, 'Ah, I know why you were not afraid—you had said your prayers this morning before you began your work.' I had not prayed; but I never forgot to pray from that time to this, and by God's blessing I never will."

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