

FAYETTE'S RIDE.

BY CLARA F. GUERNSEY

(Continued)

"O, Fayette!" cried Sue, helplessly; but she made no further objection, and Mrs. Ford had not heard the hurried consultation.

Fayette would give herself no time to think. She was a nervous little thing, and she dreaded the long ride through the windy night more than she had ever feared anything in her life.

She was not a very daring rider, though at the little frontier post where she had passed two years with her parents, her father had taught her to manage a horse with a reasonable skill, and she had ridden many a mile with him over the prairie.

"O, if father were here now!" she said, a sob suddenly rising.

Then she was doubtful about her own power to manage Phœbe, the great chestnut mare, the pride of her uncle's heart, strong, swift, spirited creature that she was.

For two years Phœbe had borne away the prize at state and county fairs and the horse-racing world had tempted her owner in vain. Fayette had mounted her more than once, ridden round the yard, and up and down the road, but always with some secret fears. She had never dared even to try a canter; and now, to mount at "mirk midnight," and go as fast as might be, off into the darkness alone on Phœbe's back, seemed an awful thing to poor Fayette.

She knew that the mare was gentle, and she had often petted her, and led her to water. She did not much doubt but that Phœbe would submit to be saddled and bridled by her hand, but still it was with many a misgiving that she put on her hat and jacket. She did not take time to find her habit, and, lighting the lantern, went out to the barn.

Phœbe was not lying down. Disturbed, perhaps, by the loud-blowing wind, she was wide awake; and as Fayette entered with the light, she turned her head with a low whinny, as though glad to see a friend.

Fayette went into the stall in fear and trembling; but she loosened the halter, and led Phœbe out unresisting.

The mare was so tall, and Fayette so short, that she was obliged to stand up on a box to slip on the bridle; to which Phœbe submitted, turning her soft, intelligent eyes on the girl with mild, wondering enquiry. The saddle was harder to manage, but Fayette strained at the girth till her wrists ached, and hoped all was right.

Some faint encouragement came to her, as she saw how gently the mare behaved. "O, Phœbe, darling," said Fayette,—"you will be good—I know

you will. You are the only one that can help us now."

Petted Phœbe, used to caresses as a house cat, rubbed her dainty head on Fayette's shoulder as if to reassure her.

Poor Fayette put up one brief, wordless prayer for help and courage, and then she led Phœbe out of the stable, mounted her by the aid of the horse-block, and rode away into the night.

Sue, watching forlorn, heard the mare's hoofs beating fainter down the road; and relieved that at least Fayette had got off without accident, listened till the last sound died away on the wind.

CHAPTER II.

It was a wild March night. The wind blew loud and cold, though there was in the air a faint breath of Spring, and the brooks were coming down with fuller currents every hour to swell the Susquehanna. There

and deeply-furrowed road as soberly as an old cart-horse.

The Ford farm-house lay half way up the side of a high hill, and the farm extended into the valley below in pasture and meadow land. Here for a space, was a hard gravel road; and Fayette, yielding to the spur of the moment, let Phœbe canter, which she was only too willing to do, and was relieved to find how easily she kept her seat, and how gentle was the motion.

In a few minutes the bounds of the farm were passed, and Fayette's heart sank low as they drew near the roaring, sounding wood through which the road lay. The trees stood up like a black wall, with one blacker archway, into which the path ran, and was lost in the darkness beyond.

People who have never been allowed to hear the word "ghost," who know nothing of popular

that it was only a loon calling, but for all that it frightened her. There came over her that horrible feeling which most people have experienced once in their lives at least—the sense that some unseen pursuer is coming up behind. In a sudden spasm of terror, she very nearly gave way to the impulse that urged her to rush blindly on anywhere to escape the dread follower. Nerves and imagination were running wild; but Fayette, from her earliest years, had been trained to self-control and duty. She checked the panic that urged her to cry and scream for help. She used her reason, and forced herself to look back and assure her senses that, so far as she could see the dim track, she and Phœbe were the only living creatures there.

"I am doing what is right," she said to herself. "God is here as much as in my room at home. It is folly to fear things that are not real, and as for living beings, not even a wolf could catch me on Phœbe."

Resolutely rousing her will, she grew more used to her situation, and, more able to control her terrors, she sternly refused to give rein to her frightened fancy. She drew a long breath, however, when once the wood was passed, and the road began to climb the opposing hill, behind which, and across the creek, lay Springville. She thought of William of Deloraine and his ride to Melrose, and smiled at the remembrance of that matter-of-fact hero.

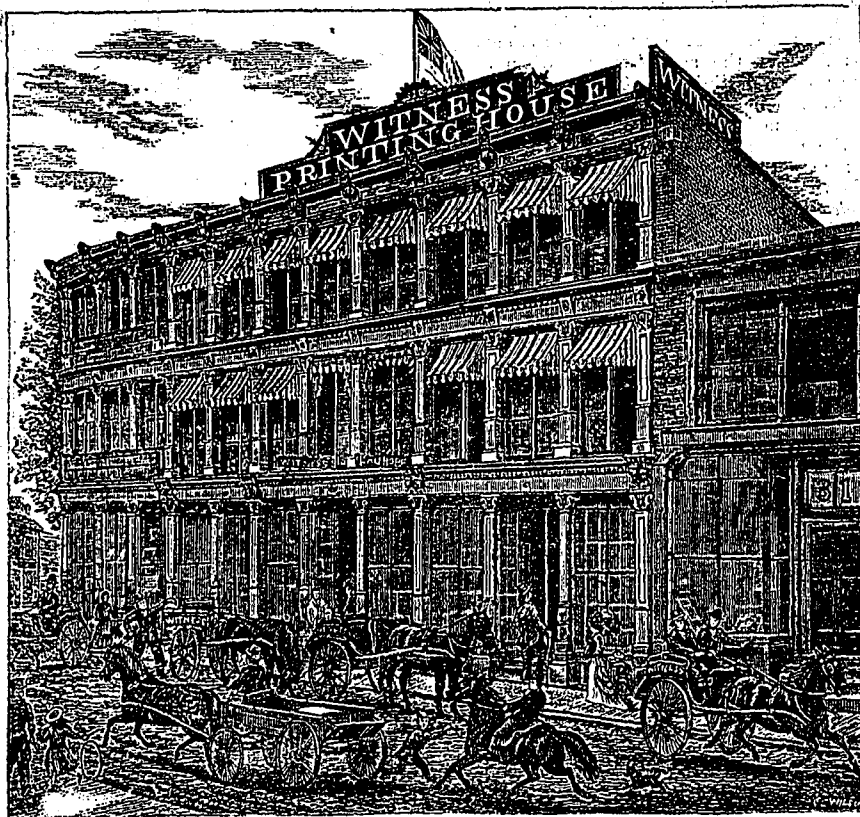
"It's a good thing, Phœbe dear, that you and I have no deadly feud with any one," she said; and then she patted the mare and praised her, and Phœbe quickening her pace, broke into a gallop, and took the hill road with long, sweeping strides that soon brought them to the summit.

Fayette began to enjoy the swift motion, and a sense of independence and safety in Phœbe's gentle compliance with her will; but at the hill-top she checked the pace, fearing a stumble down the deeply gullied hill, which was still sending rivulets to the creek. The amiable Phœbe chose to obey, and picked her way, careful both for herself and her rider.

Now rose a new voice on the wind. It was the sound of angry waters, a long roar rising louder from time to time.

"How high the creek must be!" thought Fayette; and as the roar increased, she began to have a sort of fear of the bridge, which she knew must be crossed; but she classed the feeling with her ghostly terrors, and soon found herself drawing near the bridge, the noise of the water almost drowning that of the wind.

As she came to the bank a heavy cloud came over the moon, involving the whole landscape in sudden and dense blackness; and at that instant Phœbe



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had been heavy rains for the last few days, and the roads were deeply gullied, and somewhat dangerous by night.

The wild, white moon, nearly at the full, was plunging swiftly through heavy masses of grey cloud, that at times quite obscured her light, and the solid shapes of hill and wood, and the sweeping, changing shadows were so mingled that it was hard to distinguish what was real earth and what was but the effect of cloud and wind-blown moonshine. All the twilight world seemed sound and motion.

Phœbe, as well as her rider, perhaps, felt some of the influences of the time; for she snorted and turned her head homeward, as if minded to return to her warm stable; but she gave way to Fayette's voice and hand, and striking into a steady pace, picked her way down the steep

superstitions, who are strangers to ballad-lore and to Walter Scott, will, nevertheless, be often awed and sometimes panic-struck by night, and darkness, and wind, and that power of the unseen which laughs Mr. Gradgrind himself to scorn.

Fayette, however, had not been properly brought up, according to Mr. Gradgrind's system. She had read all sorts of wild tales, and listened to them from the lips of a Scotch nurse. She knew many a ballad, and many a bit of folklore, and old paganism,—pleasant enough puppets for imagination to play with under the sunshine, but which now rose up in a grim life-likeness quite too real.

The owls began to call from the shadows, and once and again came a long, wild scream, which, in the darkness and wind, had an awful sound.

Fayette knew perfectly well