

For the Pearl.

LUCY CLARKSON.

A TALE OF SIMPLE LIFE.

Chapter II.—The Flight.

At the borders of the forest, four horses awaited the lovers, and with them, a young man from the neighbourhood, who had been procured to act as guide,—and Julia, who had agreed to accompany her young mistress, and who had hastily left the cottage, and arrived betimes at the place of meeting.

The simplicity and grace learned at the Prairie cottage, well became the maidens, as they sat the eager steeds, enveloped in large mantles, whose hoods, not ungracefully shielded their heads from the night dews.

Julia and the guide, Eben Heartwell, led the way, followed at a short distance by those who felt the chief excitement and responsibility of the moment.

Darkness was ill-suited to rapid travelling through the wilderness, but after the first hour of flight, the moon emerged above the leafy horizon, "Apparent queen,—and shadowy set off the face of things." A short time prior to her appearance a leaden dullness lay on every thing, there was no positive light or shade, but a chaotic sameness so favourable to the skulking ills and vague fears, of night. Now, Cynthia's silver beams streamed luxuriantly on hill and rock, and rustling leaves, sweetly illuminating one portion of each, and throwing the other into deep shade:—thus, elegantly defining the outlines of every object, while suppressing the minor details,—and making the picture of simple and expansive effect, yet rich in finely traced form, in light and shade,—and along the sky, in deep tints and tones, gradations and blendings, of colour. How audibly did her arrowy beams seem to address the avaricious, and the apathetic, and the grossly sensual in any of the feelings or passions:

"Sleep on, and be thy rest unmov'd,
By the white moon-beams' dazzling power,—
None but the loving and the lov'd,
Should be awake at this sweet hour."

But not even all these who might have claim to the titles, loving and loved, could enjoy the sweets of that placid hour. A feeling of security and innocence should pervade the breast, shedding a light of its own over that little world, if the charms of the outer world are to be properly appreciated.

The moonlight scenes which made the labyrinth of wood and glade romantic, and which would have many attractions at other times for some of the travellers, were but little heeded under the circumstances of their flight. The one great object of Reynall's thoughts, the success of his elopement scheme, excluded other matters except in a very subordinate degree,—and Lucy had neither eye nor ear for anything except her flight from home. She had suddenly awoke to new feelings, and they painfully absorbed her faculties. She had, by her breach of some engagements, and her unwarrantable contraction of others, and by her cruel flight from old friends and sister and father, tasted of the tree of evil; and perceptions, unknown before, were called into existence. Her wonted peace of mind was gone,—and what a gnawing guest was the consciousness of crime in her young bosom. Her dearest, and until lately, her only, friends, had now become objects of distrust and dread,—her beloved home had put on the aspect of a prison,—and she was fleeing, with a comparative stranger, to an entirely strange world. As the little cavalcade moved more slowly, when well removed from the prairie, she had better opportunity of examining her feelings, and of appreciating her situation. She almost shuddered to find how isolated her mind had become,—nothing past, or around, gave her the pleasure which was wont to attend every scene,—she clung to one point only for refuge, and knew not what to anticipate of the foreboding future. She might have been a gayer adept in folly or crime, had not education and habit fixed the perceptions of propriety and of true satisfaction, too deeply for immediate eradication.

The forest began to decline, the trees were less high and less close, and glimpses of the distant brightening sky could be seen between the trunks of fir and oak. The travellers soon rode out freely on an open plain, where the breezes of morning swept refreshingly. The moon, pale and ineffectual, had approached the horizon in one direction,—and along another the saffron tints lay, warning momentarily, and beautifully intimating the approach of day's monarch. Already a solitary herdsman traversed the common, guiding a patriarchal host of flocks and herds to some distant town, or, happier, to quiet waters beside green pastures. Several houses marked the verge of the expanse, and the household smoke curling up gracefully, told of the industrious occupants, who toiled and spun, and sowed also, and reaped, and gathered into barns,—that they might be fed and arrayed;—not indeed like Solomon, but like his simple ancestors, who made the fields their home, and found in their pastoral abundance, as much satisfaction as he did in his armouries of golden shields, or in the cedar walls of his palace.

As the indications of society appeared around, the travellers adjusted their dresses, and seated themselves more firmly, and

reined up while they urged their horses,—and exhibited in various ways, some of that homage, which all, more or less, pay, to the opinion of their fellow creatures.

Conversation, which had been carried on at intervals during the night journey, was renewed with this change of scene.

"Lucy my love you will soon now get shelter and rest, let us hasten across this barren, and we may reckon on safety. We should not be overtaken here. But why those tears Lucy? This is unkind,—or has fatigue oppressed you?"

"A country maiden, Charles, need not fear a few miles toil,—but why should I have cause of fear? And whose pursuit should I dread? Alas does not duty even now call on me to retrace my steps?"

"This, love, if an expression of altered views, comes too late,—but do not let me believe that your views have altered. Let it be timidity or suspense, but not a withdrawal of that confidence and affection which had elevated its object above his former self. But, for your own sake, if not for mine, bid farewell to the girl, and put on a woman's resolution and spirit. Would Lucy's home be again what it once was, if she now returned? Would she subject herself to the remarks and sneers of the settlement? and would my rival prize her as he once did?—surely you are not in earnest or have lost sight of the annoyance and feeling of degradation, which would be consequent on return,—which would so ill become Lucy Clarkson,—and which I would die rather than allow her to be subject to, except as her own choice."

"No Charles, though too hastily, I chose you freely, and I abide by my choice;—you speak truly, also, about retracing my steps;—I feel I am your affianced partner,—none shall separate us, if my will can have effect,—your good is my good now, and your trouble also mine. May forgiving heaven bless a union which has, unfortunately, commenced in some breach of duty, and in dread rather than joy."

"You are mine then for ever,—my wife, my love. The morning air has already refreshed you,—let us hasten, and another half hour may give you repose. Go on Eben, the nags, as well as ourselves want refreshment."

At this intimation the horses were instantaneously put into a more rapid pace; they seemed aware of approaching forage and rest, and pressed on cheerfully, their hoofs soon beat merrily on the level sward, now enlivened by the first beams of the sun, which cast the shadows of the cavalcade, fantastically, on the dewy herbage.

The travellers at length drew up opposite a long low building, which apparently blended the character of tavern and farm-house. A sign swinging from the end of a long pole, and exhibiting the appropriate figure of a Moose,—was indicative of the former; while groups of cattle, and stacks of hay and corn, gave evidence of the latter. After a few moments spent in seeing Lucy comfortably provided for, Reynall stood at the door in conversation with his guide. A scrutinizing look in the direction which they had travelled satisfied him that all was quiet in that direction,—except being specked with a scattered flock of sheep, above which a sportsman's eye could detect some wheeling plover, nothing animated disturbed the intense repose of the scene. It was an expanse of moss and heath, flanked by the distant forest, and canopied by the slow sailing clouds and the azure arch of heaven.

"All's right, hitherto, Eben, if the old man had discovered his loss before retiring to rest last night, they would be hot on our trail ere this. They will not now overtake us sooner than the afternoon, and we will then be where one man's right arm will be as good as another's, provided the muscle be not wanted."

"Clarkson is known at many places along the road, and may get help to recover his property,—my advice would be to push on, and place as much ground between you and him, as you can."

"So think not I. It would never do for him to follow me to my cover, and make a noise in B—,—we will have the scene out in the field, Eben. Your occupation is gone with the forest, I will be my own guide now,—yet, accompany me, if you will, give me your assistance, and become citizen instead of prairie boor. If not, I will fight it out myself, I have no doubt, having got this far."

"I'll try the town awhile, I think; last night's job, if discovered, as doubtless it will, would earn me the gauntlet from the prairie lads; and, to tell you the truth Squire, I have been running away with Julia all the night, while you were doing the same with her mistress. But what are we to do with the horses,—we must not have more law than we can manage on our hands."

"Good, about Julia, Eben;—as to the horses, make yourself easy. They were a speculation of mine. I purchased them last evening, and beside being of good service in an emergency, they will give me fair interest for the dollars they cost, when I reach home. Let's us in now for an hour,—and to-night we will sleep on the Buffalo barren."

"The Buffalo barren?"

"Yes, I will leave the beaten track, and cross to Zoar, dropping a clue by which the pursuers will be put on the right scent. They will, no doubt, overtake us during the evening, as I will not push on now, and the barren will see out this discussion.

There, no road-side meddlers can interfere, or prate about the skirmish. Will you stand by me?"

"Aye, or I would not have come this far. What's old Clarkson to me, and why should not the young lady follow her own bent? Freedom I say,—and farewell to axe and plough. I would not mind a tussel myself, just to show the Prairie, that idle Eben can stir himself as well as any, when he likes the work."

"Look to the horses then, and to yourself, for one hour at the Moose."

The scene was neither of Prairie, nor Forest, nor cultivated glade. The ocean freedom of the first, and its wild, rich, art-disdaining herbage,—the deep cavern shades, and fantastic labyrinths of the second,—and the junction of peace and comfort and mild beauty indicated by the last,—were all absent on the picturesque solitude of the Barren. It had a most broken surface, patches of level turf, clumps of bare blue rock, reedy swamps, moss covered blocks of stone, small pools, streams trickling along flinty beds, with here and there clumps of fir and spruce, giving a wild grace to what would be else too sterile, formed the scene through which our travellers passed. The sky was in good keeping with the landscape,—the clouds were broken in fine chaotic masses,—and the sun sent down his beams, palpably, through the interstices, marking the bold surface below with lines of golden light, which contrasted with the cloud-shaded parts,—like lines of laughter on a countenance habitually grave and stern.

Lucy was more cheerful, although more fatigued, than during the first hours of flight. Her resolution taken, she cast the pains of doubt and hesitation aside, and aroused her mind to act with becoming spirit, the new part which she had chosen for herself. She alighted from her horse at noon, with a more buoyant air, and seated at the side of a bubbling spring, partook of refreshments,—while her wonted vivacity, blended with the intelligence and grace and maiden modesty which had been inculcated in the Prairie cottage, shed their usual charm around her little circle. At times the weight, of which remains still lingered around the heart, seemed coming back with all its force, and a shade overspread her countenance, as the dark breeze ripples over a sunny lake,—and a sigh escaped her finely formed lips, which seemed altogether unfitted for the expression of care in any of its soul-oppressing forms. This, however, was but momentary she threw of the intruder with an effort, and became more elated by the re-action of her feelings; as the bent spring, when released, flies beyond its usual place of rest. Reynall had put on a gay and rather reckless air, which had been contracted in a frontier city, and which, although perhaps the most dangerous, was the most becoming phase of his character. Of ordinary intelligence and sensibility, he only rose above mediocrity under the influence of his animal spirits, and a tone of dashing enterprise which had become habitual in situations favourable for its development.

The other travellers, Julia and Eben, felt as the moment required,—relieved from any high responsibilities and anxious anticipations of a distant day, they heartily yielded to passing impulses. They were of that class of human beings whose habits supply the link between the absorbing cares of civilized society, and the unsolicitous instincts of savage life, and to whom the present time seems the all-important period. For that class, the dance, or song, or rest,—or the danger, trouble, or toil, of the passing day, is sufficient,—and they are alike below and above, those petty arts and cares, by which the magnates of society carry on the more splendid game of their existence. The attendants of the lovers chatted and laughed together, and awaited the call for renewed exertion, as thoughtlessly as Rolla, their canine friend, who reposed at the feet of his master, wearied by the night's unusual exertion.

As the sun approached the western horizon, his ardour appeared to dissipate some of the cloud musses, and to roll up the more heavy from his path. He entered on a field of unusual glory, the cloud-haze was imbued with crimson and gold, in every variety of tint, from the brilliancy which dazzled, to the delicate distant tone, which soothed and charmed. Above him appeared the bank of vapour, its edges elegantly bordered with glowing saffron colour, and the prominences over its expanse enchantingly defined by exquisite, pink-tinged, pencilings.

Reynall and Julia rode, rather slowly in front, as Eben's guidance was no longer needed. The scene was, and had been for some miles, bold and barren. But few trees broke the broad monotony of the solitude, and among those were some of the tall bare trunks, which depict sylvan old age, or rather death, and which are the very emblems of desolation and decay. Black, blasted-looking, they stretched abroad their leafless arms, rattling in the breeze, as if in hideous mockery of the verdant tenants of the waste, and as if prognosticating decline and death to those which now appeared so flourishing. Man's busy hand had not been on the scene,—and nature, in every direction, bore evidence that she was allowed to work out her own changes undisturbed. The moss clothed the block of granite,—the slime mantled the pool,—the tree decayed, and fell where it grew, and lay rotting where it fell, and the narrow track in which the travellers moved was only distinguished from the expanse around, by observing