

THE LIGHT OF COLD-HOME FORD.

CHAPTER XXXIII.—CONTINUED.

"One, two, three, four, five! Blyth had so far gained, and old Berrington above on the bank saw fair play, and enjoyed the sport counting aloud for them. Presently a little lad called out that a man was riding up to the farm-house.

"It is young Steenie Hawkshaw," said old Berrington, shading his eyes, for Blyth was too far off to look up. "He will have come to wish you a welcome home, Blyth, for he was over here lately just before you returned. Will you not leave off now and go to see him?"

"No," said Blyth, shortly, his face having hardened at the name. "He may come to see me if he likes."

"Is it worth while to keep dogs and yet to bark one's self, my son?" said the old man, in a low voice that only reached Blyth's ears, who was nearest him.

"Yes, father, it is," said Blyth, just pausing one moment to wipe the sweat from his brow, and going on again. "If the dogs are watch dogs and don't give warning, or sheep-dogs and won't guide, it is worth while to teach them their duty. Then if they won't learn get rid of them!"

Ten! fifteen! twenty! Blyth had still kept his word, working grim and silent, and the men, seeing that, had become half surly, half admiring. They were going their best now, but he did better. Mortal man could not have worked harder; only that but a few sheep remained, he could not have held on at that rate much longer.

Time was passing, and still young Hawkshaw tarried up at the Red House. Blyth was wrathful and jealous in heart, but, because of pride, would not stir a step to greet his possible guest. At last his old father announced like a speaking watch-tower,

"Here they come—Joy and that fellow Steenie. Will you not come out of the water now, and get your coat on? The young sprig is fine enough for a wedding."

Blyth raised his eyes, and saw a pair pacing softly down the meadow by the hedgerow side, with such a dainty, easy motion and mutually agreeable air that there and then he almost hated his rival, as if the latter were Agaz, who came delicately; and if Blyth would not have altogether hewed him to pieces, yet he verily gnashed his teeth upon him in secret.

"I will not leave off until every sheep is washed—not for any man," he said desperately; temper and pride had kept him in a false position after hearing who the new-comer was. And now—

"What, Blyth, are you there?" cried Joy, clear, flute-like voice, astonished, from the bank.

Gazing up as he held a struggling sheep in his strong grasp, his arms and massive throat bared, his yellow hair feeling damp upon his brow, Blyth, with naught cool about him but the fouled brown water in which he stood immersed, knew that the beautiful, dark-eyed girl above him must needs be contrasting himself as a lover with his rival at her side. Gazing through the level sunlight, Blyth saw that Steenie Hawkshaw was handsome, indeed, though with a devil-may-care, licentious look in his restless black eyes. He wore a riding-coat and a new hat, and kept clapping his boots in a swaggering, dandified way with a hunting-whip.

"Hallo! Berrington, my old friend Blyth; devilish glad to see you back! Hard at work already, eh? like—the best laboring man among em all," he cried, patronizingly, in answer to Blyth's gruff enough greeting (for they two had never been friends).

Blyth held his peace, but there was a hoarse laugh among the men, and Dick allowed himself to make reply.

"He is right enough there. I tell 'ee this, young Hawkshaw, not another man on the moor could do the like. Her has beaten us all fairly."

A murmur of grim assent went up from the other men, which so heartened old Berrington that, with his face shining and ruddy, not unlike a setting sun, he explained the matter.

"Capital! excellent! You have come back still just as much a farmer as ever from Australia, I see," cried the young man, nodding with a most irritating air of lightness, or so it seemed to Blyth. "I came to bid you welcome back especially,

but 'faith the dairy, where I found Miss Haythorn, was so pleasant, and the garden too, that it was impossible to hurry. Indeed, we should only have disturbed you, it seems, ha, ha!"

"That was precisely why I did not hurry up to the house to meet you. I had no doubt you were both enjoying yourselves, or you would have come down to seek us sooner," retorted Blyth, with a fine air of carelessness, if not contemptuous, good-humor. Joy blushed rosy-red, and half cried,

"Indeed, Blyth, it was only—" then stopped herself.

"I fear I must be going soon," said Steenie Hawkshaw.

"Not without something to eat!—nay, or at least to drink in my house," put in old Berrington, hospitably. And pressing the point so as to overcome the young man's slight and assumed unwillingness, the good farmer hobbled slowly, with help of his stick, to the Red House.

"I will be with you in a few minutes," called out Blyth. "This is my last sheep." He did not wish to go with them dripping like a wet dog, and all disordered in dress, as he was, for Joy to note still further contrasts.

In a few minutes, once they were out of sight, he leaped on dry earth, and going up the Chad to where the river ran clear as crystal, there among some hawthorn bushes that made a hidden arbor he rapidly cleaned himself. Then feeling fresh and cool again, however rough his toilet had been, Blyth hastened with long strides toward the Red House.

He was late, however, for on entering the farm-yard, there was Steenie Hawkshaw already mounted on a handsome, well-bred mare.

At that moment old Dick, who had left the sheep just before Blyth, on pretext of his other farm-yard duties (in reality because he felt dry and wanted cider), passed by, leading the new pony, Blackberry. The old fellow believed Blyth still safely down by the river, so was disobeying orders, partly from love of contradiction, but also to spite Steenie Hawkshaw. If the latter did ride a fine hunter like the mare, at least he should see that the Red House boasted a pony not to be matched on the moors.

The pony that was still as wild as a hawk came by snorting with excitement, straining at his halter, and showing off at his best to Dick's secret triumph. Suddenly, seeing the strange mare, Blackberry wheeled round and, with mannerless mischief, sent up his heels against her in a sound kick, just to show he hated in his free heart all such well-trained servility.

Steenie Hawkshaw uttered a big oath. He brought down his hunting-whip with a furious lash upon the pony's back, and in his rage might have done so a second time, but that next moment Blyth intervened. He caught Blackberry by the head in an iron grip; for with some maddened plunges the pony was almost breaking loose from old Dick's hold, and was backing wildly towards the stable wall; against which Joy stood pressed, too frightened to stir—indeed, not knowing what side to fly to, as the startled animal dashed now here, now there.

The girl put up her hands, as if to shield her face, and knew nothing for a few seconds of confusion and outcries. Then came a hush around her. Opening her eyes, she now saw Blyth holding back the still struggling pony in a corner, and soothing it. His eyes were blazing, his rough farmer's coat torn at the shoulders; for Blackberry had forced him back upon an iron hook in the wall, while Blyth himself was protecting Joy. On the other side, Steenie Hawkshaw, on his mare, which he had now succeeded in calming, offered a still but striking contrast. He himself so spick and span, the mare well-groomed and well-bred, though a trifle weedy, while Blyth and his maddened pony looked like a struggling centaur, rude and wild—so one were they, man and beast, in that fight.

"Go to the house-door, Joy; go now, dear," quietly called out Blyth, adding, between his teeth, "If you can't keep your hand from striking, Hawkshaw, you might at least control your tongue."

"I owe you no apology for that brute of yours nearly laming my mare," retorted Steenie, hot and quick. "As to Miss Hay-

thorn, she will forgive me, I'll answer for it, for a mere hasty word."

He was off his mare in a jiffy as he spoke, and with profuse murmurs of penitence and comfort after her fright, gallantly led Joy, who had not yet stirred, to the shelter of the house. Then he took off his hat with a deep bow, remounted, and rode away, with a farewell nod to his rival, and an air of gay flourish. Blyth, meanwhile, looking on, dared not leave his wild charge, and was maddened with foolish wrath that Hawkshaw should have struck his lady-love's property, and then have so impudently ventured to console her. He told himself he was only angered lest Blackberry's temper should be spoiled at the outset of training; but he did not believe himself.

After soundly rating Dick—which relieved his mind a little—he went to seek Joy. But Hannah, who was in the kitchen, told him shortly enough he might spare his pains, for her young mistress had gone upstairs to her own room and was crying.

"Crying, is she?" returned Blyth aghast. "Why—why—she was startled, no doubt; and yet she did not use to be so timid. Why, Hannah, what is the matter?"

For the old nurse turned, and looked upon him with an eye of scorn.

"You are a fool, Blyth Berrington!"

"Perhaps so, Hannah; but still it is not very civil to say so, for no one is as clever as they would like to be," said Blyth, with grave satire. Then he saw the old woman's eyes held tears, which she dashed away with her knuckles.

"Why do you go and demean yourself, then, this day into looking like any working-man, just when Steenie Hawkshaw comes here as fine as a Jay? It's enough to vex any girl who may be trying—not that I know—to make up her mind. And when one is fond of your father and you and the farm as any woman can be, it's heart-breaking to see you spoil your chances!—oh, go away out of my kitchen, now, do! The bread is burning in the oven—I smell it."

On which Mistress Hannah flung open the oven and banged it to again, and whisked all available kitchen utensils out of her path so energetically that Blyth knew no more would be got from her then, so slowly, sadly took himself away. He scarcely saw Joy that evening, who pleaded a headache. How fallen was he from his first joyfulness of home-coming! All things seemed to go amiss with him.

Poor Blyth!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"The dance of last Whit-Monday exceeded all before. No pretty girl for miles about was missing from the floor; But Mary kept the belt of love, and oh but she was gay! She danced a jig, she sang a song, that took my heart away."—W. ALLINGTON.

It was a summer night of hospitality and merry-making at the Red House.

Old Farmer Berrington had invited all his neighbors and friends round—ay! as far as Moorstown—to rejoice with him over his son's return. The parlors were full of guests. A great supper-table just now groaned with food, which had cost Hannah a week's cooking; also had frothed, cider flowed, jaws had wagged busily on the part of the elders, while the young folk let their tongues and laughter loose. And now the good cheer had been cleared away and dancing had begun.

Joy had adorned the house with flowers and wreaths till the doors seemed bowers, and dressed herself to seem more distractingly pretty than ever in the young men's eyes. Many a whisper told her so; many a glance or sigh. But among all her suitors, she recked little of what any thought of her excepting Blyth Berrington and Steenie Hawkshaw. These two rivals strove hard against each other for her favor, urged her to dance, and, while beating all the rest from the field, yet would neither give way an inch. Joy's eyes were flashing, her cheeks flushing, and pulses beating, for love seemed to breathe round her like the sweet smoke of incense, making her reason giddy, and admiration was offered her as in a brimming cup, of which she might drink deep.

Every maiden in life almost has her hour of triumph. This was Joy's.

To-night she would surely make up her mind which of these two she could love best and like to live with her all her life. As yet she did not know—and to-morrow was midsummer's eve!

Blyth was so strong and handsome, and

had been so good to her for years. But again Steenie Hawkshaw was handsome too, with a reputed dash of devilry in his behavior that was no disfavor in women's eyes; was looked on as a young squire, and the best match in the country. She did not know! She held back her love perforce as yet till her mind decided, feeling that then her soul's whole force and passion would rush forth to be poured in happy libation at the foot of her master, never to be taken back.

But as yet she was queen of herself, though this night must decide.

"Neighbor Berrington," uttered old Hawkshaw, patronizingly, "this is the finest supper I have ever sat down to in these parts in any farmer's house. I say so—I declare it is!—you may be proud of it!"

"Well, well, if the fatted calf was rightly killed for the return of the prodigal, one may well do as much when the best God ever gave comes home safe with His blessing," said George Berrington, solemnly enough, yet slowly smiling and puffing a cloud of smoke. For the elders had tired to finish their ale and cider at leisure in the big kitchen, while the young people were footing it merrily in one parlor, as the matrons gossiped and watched in the other.

Meanwhile no one looked outside, at the hills, the moor, and sky, while in-doors so much feasting and revelry. Yet, being farming folk all, who live depending on the influences and changes of earth and sky than other men, had they done so they would perhaps have been an uneasy band among them, with the meadows all fall-tall grass ready for cutting, and the tender crops green in the fields. It had been a yet gentle-seeming afternoon; yet with the last hour had come a more brooding ominous quiet in the air, while the sky was overcast with a heavy glooming, and animals seeming frightened, either roosted still or had crept away to shelter.

Presently it grew very dark; a few drops of rain fell; then suddenly—with a mad dash down the valley, and a sound in the air as if of mighty spirit's wings rushing by—came the wind! There was a silence among the young folk, who gazed at each other almost awe-struck.

"What is it?—a storm?—why, who knows it coming?" they cried.

But—as in the middle of questions—answers the open doors were furiously slammed, and the windows, which had been set wide for air, banged wildly to and fro there was too hurried a running in the house to set all straight, for answers. Then the old folk, peering out at the darkness that were bending and swaying before a fury of the blast, shook their heads ominously recalled to each other what "grat wind" this or that one remembered in such a year, and the darkness thereby done. All were anxious enough to be at their own homes to see what mischief might be happening; but, as old Berrington declared, "what was quickly come was be quickly done—and only mad folk would start out in such weather."

So they all piously agreed to trust Providence watching over their barns, and seeing them selves could not do so; and settled down to cider and ale again with great resolution to make the best of the matter.

On a whisper from Blyth, who himself slipped outside, Joy likewise led off to dance once more. In a few minutes afterwards no one in the Red House seemed heeding the storm.

Blyth was busied outside putting the safe in the farm-yard, meantime, in a quarter of an hour. The last of a wicker of hay was caught up and whirled spirally aloft, before his very eyes, scattered among the tops of the oak-trees. He could not save it, and was glad to hold fast by a fence.

"Talk of cyclones in the tropics! this one, sure enough; and I have now seen 'em all," he said to himself.

He went back to the kitchen door, and was just entering the house when he heard a gasping cry in his ear, as of some one who had lost all breath, and felt a hand on his arm. Turning, he saw Rachel Estlin, her long black gown, her face deadly white under her hood.

"Help me! Magdalen has escaped from the cottage—a little while ago! It was one of her attacks. It never happens before," she uttered, with difficulty. Her sister broke away from her, and got

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