

THE LIGHT OF COLD-HOME FORD.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"Come with the springtide forth, fair maid, and be
This year again the meadow's duty.
Yet, ere ye enter, give us leave to rest
Upon your head this flow'ry coronet.
To make the best distinction from the rest,
You are the prime, and princess of the feast,"
Hannah.

"A letter for Farmer Berrington—it be
from furrie parts, I reckon," said the
parcel-carrier, who was also in a brass way
postman, stopping his shaggy pony at the
Red House Farm gate, and addressing Dick,
who was gently resting from immediate
labor in the picturesquely old and, it must
be owned, somewhat untidy farm yard, as
is the manner of those parts, though all told
of ease and plenty. Dick, like his fellow-
laborers, found hearty spells of rest com-
forting after toil, unless, indeed, the eyes of
his master were on him, when pride, no
doubt, will urge a man to greater exertion.
But the Berringtons, father and son, were
in the meadows, where the hay makers had
begun.

"A letter," said Dick, taking it between
a most inquiring natured finger and thumb;
but as the latter had learned no more how to
read than had his head, this was little profit.
However, he had the solace of a prolonged
easy conversation with the carrier before
observing, "Well, goodmornin'." Mistress
Hannah, hur be in the kitchen, and I'll take
un to her."

Hannah was busy, as always, shelling
peas into a fair basin of spring water, and
she did not fail to reproach Dick's laziness
in gossiping at the gate. Her northern
energy was terribly untiring to these easy
southerns. Then she called Joy in turn,
who was busied up-stairs in the dark wain-
scoted passage-way, putting rose-leaves to
dry in the sun, for which the deep window-
seats and sills of the broad, ancient casements
were useful.

"A letter! I'll run and give it to him,"
cried Joy, clinging on her sun-bonnet, and
running out past the bees and through the
orchard down into the meadow.

There were the mowers in rows, toiling in
their shirts, with bared, vigorous arms.
Blyth led the row as was right, by reason
of his strength and powerful scythe-sweep,
no less than because he was the younger
master. Joy stopped to watch him.
Swish! with a sweep again. And the grass
and clover softly fell in long, green swathes,
so different from the meadow's pride of the
mourning that Joy was quite sorry to see it.

Seeing her, Blyth stopped at the edge of
the field, and made a feint of using his sharp-
ening-stone on the scythe edge with a cir-
cling sound, not to seem idly fond of talking
to a young maid in men's eyes.

"Have you brought me some rider, Joy?"
said the young giant, eying thirstily the far
cans under the shade of the oak-tree.

"No; a letter," returned Joy; then,
guiltily blushing, "but, oh, I forgot; it is
not for you. It is for the father, only I—
I—don't see him here."

"Why, he is over there, under the hedge,"
returned Blyth, but now looking himself in
the direction indicated; rather slowly star-
ing, thinking how well her blush became
Joy's clear, olive skin.

"Oh, I see. Now, why should you not
tell me that before?" pouted the girl.

She turned, leaving Blyth with a man's
natural justification stopped short on his
very lips, and ran, light and lissom, across
the meadow to where Berrington was ex-
amining a gap in the wildly luxuriant tangle
of native holly, honey-suckle, briar, thorn,
and traveller's-joy atop of a high bank,
which Blyth called a hedge, while it was
truly a screen of flowers and foliage.

"You come flying like a fawn, when I've
seen the red deer out on the hills," said old
Berrington, slowly, smiling at the girl with
her dark, liquid eyes. "What have you
there?"

"It's a letter for the master. And I'm
wondering what's in it."

"Spoken like a woman. Well, writing,
Joy—I should—think."

So saying, Berrington slowly turned and
turned the letter round, examining the
post-marks with great deliberation.

Joy felt the blood rise again under her
dark skin. The child—for so she still was,
in spite of her seventeen years—remembered
suddenly that, though no such letters
had ever come within her knowledge to Red
House Farm, that was no good reason for

herself, in reality still a guest, to pry into
the good man's correspondence. She
generally called Berrington, after a pretty
notion of her own, "the father when speak-
ing to Blyth, and "the master," in a
laughing, roguish way to himself and to
others. It was hard to say what else or
better she could have called him, for
"Mister Berrington" would have been truly
stiff.

She felt embarrassed, but the farmer's
hand was laid caressingly on her shoulder. A
shout from Blyth relieved her. He had
ceased mowing, having come on a belated
landrail's nest, and just escaped the vexation
of injuring the faithful mother bird.

"I must go—I am coming," cried Joy,
loving all animals and birds tenderly, but
especially fond of hearing the hoarse croak
of these meadow-watchers through the
summer nights.

Away she sped, and heard no more about
the letter till after supper-time. Then,
wandering with Blyth out in the gloaming
to find a strayed galin poul or guinea fowl,
feminine curiosity got uppermost again, and
Joy asked.

"Well, did your father get any news to-
day, Blyth?" His letter had Australian
postmarks, I did not know he had any
friends out there."

"He has not chosen to tell me anything
about it yet anyway," said the young man.
"My mother's brother went out to Australia.
I believe."

The evening was dark and cool, and
fragrant with white mountain ash blossoms
that swung overhead and scented the air;
yet Joy felt suddenly hot and ashamed and
displeased with herself and the night. For
she had secretly fancied the letter might
have contained some news for herself. It
might have had reference to—her father. In
truth, it was for that same thought that
Farmer Berrington had been so slow to open
it when with her.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Like a fawn dost thou fly from me, child,
Like a fawn that astray on the hill-tops,
Her shy mother misse and seeks,
Vaguely scared of the wood and the forest."
Lord Byron's *Horace*.

Next day was Sunday; and after church
and mid day dinner Blyth asked Joy would
she take a walk with him over the moors.

The farmer was fast asleep, with a
handkerchief over his face, in his big chair
in the parlor, which was dark and cool this
summer's day, being wide if low, and wain-
scoted all in dark wood after the fashion of
good Queen Anne's days. Hannah was
likewise roasting in the kitchen among her
bright array of tins and coppers, with her
Bible on her lap, and a low fire banked up
till it should be time for tea. It was dull
and silent in-doors, even in the pleasant old
house. Outside the animal world was rest-
ing, too, chewing the cud, and the birds
still in the rookery heat; yet the breeze
was fresh, and the insects danced, and the
river rushed by, gurgling an unceasing
song, telling of motion that was life, life,
life, of the hurry of each water-drop to do
Nature's work, out from the earth's bosom,
down to the sea, up to the clouds, falling on
the grain, and beginning again in a ring
eternal.

The farm stood with one foot on the moor,
so to speak, an invigorating fresh breeze could
always be felt from the hills; the heather
was springy under foot as they left the
meadows, and the sheep ran over the first
fuzzy hill.

Away went Blyth and Joy over the up-
land they both loved so well, and drew in
long draughts of the breezy high air. Down
into gorges full of oak scrub, up again on
heights overgrown with bracken for a mile
or two, till a wide, lone valley spread before
them, with not a sign of human or animal
life in it, or on the violet, heather hills
beyond, save a few half wild cattle browsing
here and there.

The Chad was running merrily through
the valley, young and brown yet, from its
source among the peat-bogs higher up in the
hill's wild heart.

Blyth silently led Joy still on to where,
half a mile away, the little river's banks be-
came picturesquely rugged with high bowl-
ders stemming the current and piled in con-
fusion along the stream's edge, while the

rowan-bushes grow in and out of the rocks
where their roots could find hold. Bushes
they were up here, not trees; vegetation had
dwindled.

"Shall we sit down a little while, Blyth?"
said Joy, as they came up to the rocks,
which offered pleasant seats, with cushions
of springy heather for one's feet, and where
the small cup-moss she loved to look at
raised its tiny crimson fables over the
surface of the old, grim stones. She went
on, with gay pettishness, suddenly turning
to her comrade with a flash of her dark eyes
and a bright smile.

"I am tired of walking, and not talking.
At least this livelong day I have always
had to answer myself. You are quite strange
and silent."

"I know. But I have something to tell
you by-and-by," assented Blyth, gravely,
to her surprise. "Will you mind sitting on
the tolmien this last for this time I am
fond of it."

Midmost of the brown brook a great
whitish bowlder lay, with a large hole
through its upper end, worn smooth by the
dash of wintry floods for ages. It was per-
haps no true tolmien after all, but such some
Moortown antiquarian had supposed it to
be, wandering thereby, and the name had
fastened to it. They clambered easily
enough on the great holed stone from the
other rocks, for now the Chad was low with
summer's drought. Joy took off her broad
straw hat and let the gentle wind cool her
young brows and rattle her hair. She wait-
ed in silence, with growing impatience. But
at last, as her companion did not speak, she
cried out, thinking him dull and herself
injured.

"Well, Blyth? You said you had some-
thing to tell me?"

"I have." Blyth straightened his back
and looked her full in the face. "Should
you mind much if I had to go away from
the Red House?"

"What? and my holidays not over yet?"
murmured Joy, in dismay. "Oh! I know;
you are asked over the moors to stay for the
big sheep-fair with some of the farmers you
met last time. But that is not till next
week, and I go back to lessons and prim-
mishness in three more days for another
whole half year. There are to be some
junketings, I suppose, you don't want to
miss. Well, go—but I call it very unkind,
Blyth—I do, indeed."

She was near crying. The pleasures of
the farm life, of even being with the old
farmer and Hannah, both of whom she loved,
faded suddenly at thought of losing her strong
slave—young tyrant that she was.

"No, it was not the sheep fair. I am
going, said Blyth, slowly "to Australia for
two or three years."

Joy gave such a start that he quickly
caught her round the waist, or she might
have slipped down into the water.

"Going!—why?" she exclaimed at last,
with a gasp. "Oh, Blyth, I know—it was
that dreadful letter. I wish I had put it in
the kitchen fire."

She burst into thick sobs now, not heed-
ing hardly that Blyth drew her closer to
himself, and petted and coaxed her, his own
heart indeed being far more sore than her
own. She only felt irrationally that was the
end of his having been her big brother all
these years, and she his loving little sister,
and now half the world was to part them, and
sorrow come and desolation?

"My mother's brother has written—my
uncle," Blyth explained. "He is a lonely
man, and childless, so he wants to see me;
and speaks of leaving me his sheep-run. He
seems well to do."

"I don't care—ho he is, nor what he has,"
went Joy, unconsoled. "Once you go out
there, I believe you will forget all about us,
and never, never come back."

She turned away, and bent her face so
low over her knees Blyth could not see it,
being so much taller as he sat beside her.

Next instant he dropped his body through
the great hole of the tolmien, finding foot-
hold below on a slippery rock; and so bring-
ing his visage on a level with Joy's pretty face,
rather to her surprise, wound his arms again
around her slender waist.

"Look here, Joy," he said, reddening,
"I swear to come home—if you will have
me—to marry you. And, if not, the I
don't care. I never see the farm or my old
father again; yet you know how I love them
both! Say: will you marry me?"

Joy pouted, half laughing in his face, with
the tears, arrested by surprise, still hanging
on her long lashes. She did not feel herself
mistress of the situation, being fast held

there; and besides, though she had
up insensibly with the thought that
could never bear to part from Blyth,
she rapidly remembered the romantic
learned from her school-comrades.

She should be wooed before being
Now Blyth, to her mind, was only a
tall boy, still, wrapt of his having re-
ached the one-and-twenty years of
hood, had surely never rightly
her.

But Blyth, looking at her with big
all gleaming, feeling a mighty rush of
hood's strength of purpose within
thoughts of facing the great world,
to himself to have been wooing
through his young life.

"Speak, Joy—dear—surely there
one that you like better, he rather
clasping her tighter.

"Why, that is it. I have seen so
sides you, Blyth," replied the school-
with dignity. Then, seeing, by the ten-
sion of the muscles round his mouth,
by his eager eyes—dividing too, with
loving heart—how much it cost her
boy-companion to go away across the
waters, Joy cried, torn asunder betwixt
supposed self-duty of pride and
affection.

"Oh, don't look like, that Blyth! I
will promise to marry no one till you
back; and then, if I have seen none
I like better; why—why—"

Joy stopped, blushing, she did not
know why. After all she had known
Blyth all her life, and to agree
thus always together seemed quite a
matter, she thought, in a child's
She considered her lover rawboned
ward, and not at all romantic.

"Will you put your hand in mine
promise me that?" urged Blyth,
taking his eyes off her.

Joy laid her small palm in his,
sweetly.

"I promise."

"Will you kiss me now?" said
very low.

"Oh, yes," replied Joy, who ere
of her life was quite accustomed to
Blyth a flying kiss, aimed at white-
of his cheek or forehead, was at-
since he generally bent his head to-
ashamed of her caress before his father,
and Hannah and the servant maid. But
Blyth's lips touched hers for the first
and of his own accord, for many a
with a close, eager pressure, it was
quite different.

He drew back then an instant, and
seemed to the young girl as if the
sun had transfigured the young girl
yellow hair shone like gold; his
noble; his face strange—that of a
moonland.

"Let us go," she said, "in a
voice, wishing to laugh at her
but feeling as if something she
what, happened to them both.

For a moment Blyth seemed
would fain have kissed Joy again;
ing her discomposed face and
quivering in doubt how to take
controlled himself, and only pres-
little hands in a grip that nearly
ery out. Then, raising himself by
of his arms, with a strong swing,
holed stone, he helped her off the
they went gravely homeward by a
way.

They hardly spoke again; and
did, it was with constraint, and
the corpse by long voyage and Australia.
Joy did not understand Blyth's
time; and he felt that it was so, le-
was truly a child still.

Slowly they skirted the stream, and
came to a strange bridge, a big
black laid across the Chad. The
other such stone nearer than the
the sacred circle far away yonder
hill rise, and yet the rude bridge
gone ages had put it simply
where the river was too deep to
were a plank. Blyth, crossing the
surface steadily, turned and
hand to lead Joy. Often enough
had tripped lightly across, remem-
yet many a time had taken his
ing nothing of such slight help-
Sunday she hesitated, drew back
moment, seeing Blyth looked
silent, she gave him her hand,
another impulse, and so follow-
lushful and ill at ease. So the
the swelling ground towards the
to, so-called because these birds
the mass of rock that crowned
crest like a huge mushroom.

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