

ROSAMOND'S ADVENTURE

A
CANADIAN
STORY.

BY LILIAN CLAXTON.

CHAPTER I.

THE scene was a curious one. Imagine yourself in the wild Bush country; on either side rise thickly wooded hills; the smoke of little shanties curling up here and there amongst the trees shows how scarce is the population. Within a stone's throw of a certain small settlement has been erected a strange, roofless building, open to the northward. Here the inhabitants of the surrounding country have been thronging for the past month to get themselves immortalized by a mysterious instrument within its precincts—an apparatus regarded with awe by the good folk of Calanoosie, with its triple legs, black cap, and the air of calm superiority with which it faced so many palpitating hearts.

The photographer was young and good-looking; moreover, of the feminine gender. She stood, at the moment this story opens, within the rough log enclosure, one hand resting lightly on the camera, while in the other she held an open letter. Her eyes, which were grey, and very pretty, were fixed thoughtfully upon a youth of some ten summers, who stood eying the photographic apparatus.

"Who lives in the little white house just beyond the ruined school house on the Lonerock Road?" she asked.

"Dunno," said the youth, not raising his eyes from the camera.

The dealer in sun pictures tapped him sharply on the shoulder.

"Yes, you do," she said; "wake up, stupid, and tell me."

Thus admonished, her companion started, gasped a little, and then remarked, "Why, there ain't no one a-livin' there."

"H'm," said the girl, "that's funny! Was this all the mail for me?"

The boy nodded, and departed slowly, walking backwards. The girl retained her position, still glancing in a puzzled way at the note she held. We will take the author's privilege of glancing over her shoulder. It ran thus:

"The writer would be much obliged if Miss Ferrier would kindly take three photos, for him, of the old white house on the Lonerock Road, just beyond the old ruined school house. He would like the three views taken from different points. One from the Calanoosie side, another from the front, and the third from the side of the house that faces Lonerock Mountain. If the writer might make so bold, he would suggest some time about sunset for the last two views, and about seven a.m. for the first. Enclosed find \$3.00; if not sufficient, please notify bearer, who shall call for photos within a week."

"It is queer," she commented; "well written, well spelt. Who can it be in this outlandish place? Three dollars, too! My gentleman is reckless with his money."

With an eye to business she produced her purse from her pocket, deposited the bills therein, and dropping it into her pocket again, knelt down beside the camera, which she began to unscrew. She took the pieces into the 'dark-room,' a corner boarded off and roofed over, placed them in a strong box, or chest, which she carefully locked; then, shutting the door after her, she strolled down the road to the Stopping House, which stood in the centre of the small settlement of twelve houses.

The young photographer entered the open door leading into the front room, tossed aside her hat, and took her seat at the long table spread for dinner, a noticeable figure in that motley group, not by reason of her dress, which was plain even to shabbiness, but by the general air of repose and refinement, only acquired by years of careful education, which was visible in every turn of the well-poised curly head. Nevertheless, she seemed to have merged herself into the company, for the men present—lazy, easy-going fellows in a small farming line—teased her a little in a good-humored way, while the women as often as not called her by her Christian name, and she looked up and answered readily enough. In a few minutes the other occupants of the room finished their meal and departed, the women to the cook house, the men strolling away in different directions, and a new comer sauntered in through the doorway—a young man who looked at that moment decidedly discontented with his career in life. He was in his shirt sleeves, a straw hat was pushed to the back of his head, and he was mopping his face vigorously with a red and white spotted handkerchief. It was generally a pleasant, good-humored face, bearing some likeness to the girl at the table, but of a fairer, blue-eyed type.

"Feeding, eh?" he remarked, unceremoniously, sinking into a chair.

The girl nodded, finished the pie on her plate, and leaned back.

"Clement," she asked, "do you know a white house near the ruined school house on the Lonerock Road?"

"I ought to, seeing that it is the only house of its kind in the township. What of it? Do you want to rent it for the summer?"

"Goose! Is it empty then?"

"Yes, been empty for years, I should say; certainly ever since I came to teach school here."

"I should have thought people would have preferred a house like that to these frame and log shanties."

"Oh, it's lonesome—out of the way; folks don't care about moving, and there are no new comers. What did you want to know about it for, Rosamond?"

"Oh, n-nothing," said the girl, looking at him doubtfully. She knew that if she confided to this young man about the note she had received, all Calanoosie would know of it before sunset. For some reason which she could hardly define, she preferred to keep her knowledge to herself. Her companion heaved a long sigh and produced his handkerchief again.

"I hate my very existence this weather," he said. "I should like to spank those brats into the middle of next week. If by dire mishap the cholera should visit this country, I hope it may start amongst the youngsters in Calanoosie."

"Oh, Clem, what a wicked thing to say!"

"I can't help it; school teaching is demoralizing me, and Mrs. Longton pitches into me all evening because you preferred to board at the Stopping House, instead of staying with her, when you started this wild idea of coming down to photograph the natives."

"I had to make some money somehow with my camera, Clem, and this was the best place to come to, as I had friends here. I wish I could have stayed at Mrs. Longton's; it would have been far nicer than being alone here, but it is so out of the way I should never have got any sitters. I must keep in the centre of the place. Oh, there goes your school bell."

The unhappy young man groaned.

"No rest for the wicked! Say, Rosamond, will you be up at our place this evening?"

"N-no, I have an engagement to-night."

The young man looked at her rather curiously, but asked no more questions, and departed.

Rosamond returned to the scene of her artistic labors. A group had gathered and were awaiting the master touch. A young man in a plaid shirt, with a look of patient endurance on his face, sat on a straight-backed chair. He was perspiring freely, and gripping a knee nervously with either hand. Two young women, wreathed with artificial forget-me-nots, stood one on each side of him, presumably to give him the devotion due to his sex. Other sitters were looming in the distance along the irregular dusty road. Rosamond worked hard till six o'clock, then returned to the Stopping House for supper. That finished, she went to her studio again, reached a small portable camera out of the chest, locked up the larger one once more, with all her chemicals, and started to walk briskly in the direction of Lonerock Mountain.

Over the hill, past the school house where her cousin Clement taught, was a road winding westward—a picturesque road, but lonely, with flat, marshy land and cedar swamps on either side. It would have looked weird in the twilight, but just now the evening sun was blazing in Rosamond's eyes. After a while the swampy land came to an end, tall fir trees rose on each side of her, the ruins of a log shanty appeared in the distance. At the same moment, a wagon came rumbling along the road, overtook Rosamond, and came to a standstill. The driver, who had been singing, stopped, and raised his hat. This was an unusual gesture in the backwoods. Rosamond awaited further developments.



"You have quite a load," said the driver; "do let me give you a lift. There is a seat here beside me. Hand me up that gentleman." He pointed to the camera in an authoritative manner.

Before Rosamond quite realized what she was doing, she was seated on the high perch, and the springless wagon was rattling over the uneven road, at a rate which nearly brought her heart into her mouth. There was nothing to hold on to but the driver, and she clutched his arm tightly.

"Oh, oh, oh! Make them go slower."

The driver laughed, and pulled up his team.

(To be continued.)