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For the Pearl.

LUCY CLARKSON.

A TALE OF SIMPLE LIFE.

Chapter I.—The Frairie.

William Clarkson was an industrious settler on the borders of a frontier prairie, in the state of I———, North America. Here, with his family of two daughters, and three trusty servants, he lived remote from splendor and from care: the splendor and the care of art;—for nature spread her beauties unsparingly about the settlement,—and the cares of rural life were not wanting,—but they pressed lightly,—as the garment which warms without loading, and which is not esteemed a burthen until wholesome vigour has departed. And how much advantage, in this respect, had the lonely man over the dweller in cities;—his cares were lighter, and the pomp of his situation was greater than those which depressed or excited artificial life. The deep shaded woods lay in one direction, sheltering his cottage,—in another the ocean-like prairie, waving with summer flowers, spread the lovely tints of its aerial perspective,—and over it, in great magnificence, the firmament of heaven displayed its ever varying, but ever attractive face,—presenting, to the well-attuned mind, endless beauties of form, and motion, and colour,—of strong contrast, and of elegantly delicate gradation.

The woods extended right and left far as the eye could reach; blending all greens, from the first departure from blue, to the golden russet, in its beauteous belt. Along this belt—this splendid rampart, as it were, between the shaded and the unshaded wilds—a range of farms were placed. They were not so near Clarkson's dwelling as to destroy the sweet retirement of the scene, nor so far as to remove all feeling of companionship. From one, the cackling of the poultry could be distinctly heard, and the mottled cattle be easily seen, as they ranged about the enclosures,—another sent its lowing only, at the calm eventide, or the bark of its dog during the night watches,—and the curling smoke from its domestic hearth marked the dark background of trees, to the morning gazer,—while others only specked the deep green with their white walls: But each conveyed a scene of peace, and humble plenty, and cheerful labour, to the spectator's mental vision.

Deep lines seemed to circumscribe the whole range of farms; these were furrows, cut for the purpose of preventing the occasional burning of the prairies from extending to the fences and improvements.

The different processes of a prairie farm were in operation in different parts of Clarkson's little domain;—in one the rich herbage was formed, or in course of formation, into high stacks,—in another the corn lay scattered ready for the gatherer,—in another the large yellow sheafs specked the russet field with picturesque effect;—and in an outer patch, four yoke of oxen were slowly carrying the ploughshare through the virgin soil, preparatory to the action of the winter's frost, and the next spring's cultivation: a cheerful and a graceful train did this line of patient brutes form, as they bent their broad shoulders to the yoke, directed by the ploughman's voice, or soothed by his melodious whistle. Beyond those, but still inside the protecting furrows, the land, saved from the scorching flames, had already sent up a small growth of trees, which formed a miniature grove, intersected by numerous easily made paths.

This was the scene of the gentle labours and simple pleasures, of Maria and Lucy Clarkson. The latter, the elder, a graceful, lively, but rather volatile girl,—the former, less elastic in her form and mind, had more of the reflection and sedateness which life in every situation requires. They both had the marks of intelligence and virtue in their expansive foreheads, and beaming eyes, and lips, to which smiles or placid expression had become habitual. Light tresses and deep blue eyes, chiefly distinguished Lucy from her sister, whose almost raven locks and jet black eyes better suited the greater firmness of her character.

The sisters did not want other causes of feeling beside those which the dairy and flocks and garden presented; feeling tinged with tender melancholy and with hope,—with hues which the dim past and the dim future can impart. On a rising ground, reached by a long serpentine path, and commanding views of the forest vistas, and of the distant prairies, a group of willows marked the grave of a beloved mother. Years had intervened to deaden sorrow, and the death of Mary Clarkson was that of those who rejoice in hope; yet occasional visits to the flowery mound were not without the sweet tears which welled up from the busy memory. Within view of the cottage, the white walls and other marks of a comfortable settlement, also formed a point of attraction for one of the sisters,—and from a little natural terrace in the garden, the other could discern even the blossoms of the orchard which surrounded a dwelling that had claims on her sympathies. From the first mentioned spot, James Osburn, and from the second Harry Fairfield, frequently wended their way, on evenings, and on Sabbaths, to talk with William Clarkson, and mayhap to whisper, by the parlour ingle, or in woodland paths, with Lucy and Maria.

Thus life passed, surrounded with the simple and healthful sources of existence,—and the prairie settlements seemed to forget, that vice and wretchedness still held sway in the distant city.

The tender leaves of the forest had yielded to the cool winds of October, and strewed the turf in countless numbers,—while those which were more tenacious, put on a variety of hues, as if the wilderness giants were becoming emulous of the tulips and hollyhocks and roses of the garden. The pensive thoughts which the fall of the leaf might inspire, were relieved by the gaiety of those which remained, and the mind was rather pleased and surprised than shocked, at the cheerfulness with which nature decked the death of the year.

A young man slowly passed through these luxuriant vistas, and seemed entirely reckless of the reflections which the decay of the foliage was fitted to excite. He was dressed in light brown hunting clothes, and his horn and net, and long rifle, left no doubts of the nature of his mission into the wilderness. His step was firm, and his countenance had the lines and tints of manly comeliness. He hummed a cheerful ditty, and his eyes wandered carelessly from side to side, examining the features of the scene, or seeking for marks on which to exercise his sportsman's skill. The doggrel song which he sung was indicative of his character or habits;—it ran thus:

The green wood glade, the green wood glade,
Though passing fair to see,
Is not my home, I love to roam,
About the city free.

From pebbly brook, I gladly look,
To the stream where rocks the mast,—
And from cottage small, to princely hall,
Emprise and project vast.

The disparaging rhyme which so ill-suited the scene, and was in such discordance with the poetry of nature, was suddenly checked, for the stranger perceived, as the path assumed a more straight line, a young woman some distance before him. Impelled by gay curiosity, and also by a wish to make enquiries respecting his way, he mended his pace. He had to walk quickly, and for some time, before his purpose was accomplished, for the young woman had evidently perceived him, and was stepping out, gaily and swiftly, as became a forest maiden, to keep ahead of the intruder. It was Lucy Clarkson; she had been on a ramble to one of the neighbouring settlements, and was returning home. The stranger approached, and called out:

"Well, young woman, you trip like a woodland fairy,—will you be kind enough to answer a question?" Lucy paused, and waited for the enquiry. The stranger continued:

"Can you direct me the way to William Clarkson's farm,—I see no end to this lovely wood, and am doubtful that my last director set me in the right road."

"You are not far from the cottage," said Lucy, timidly eyeing the stranger, "and the wood will be soon past. Through this opening (pointing along the path) the prairie is already visible, and as I live at William Clarkson's I will show you the door."

Thanks were returned, and the stranger congratulated his good fortune at throwing him so opportunely in the way of so fair and so efficient a guide, and the remainder of the road was occupied with the pleasing small talk which only young people know how to use, or how to enjoy. Taciturnity comes from reflection, or pride, or care,—but the young and gay can chatter pleasingly and freely, and sometimes perhaps senselessly, as the chattering jay.

They arrived at Clarkson's cottage ere the shades of evening had made much progress up the woodland horizon, and while the deep crimson still seemed to lie on the prairie's edge. The stranger, Charles Reynall, had an introduction to the farmer,—he was a resident of the town of B ——, and was on a solitary excursion in search of pleasure and health. He received a kind reception; and his dog, Rolla, was soon domicilled with the trusty Wolf and Watch of the farm.

Lucy felt the awkwardness of her situation before they reached the door, and the mantling blush with which she met her sister's gaze as she introduced the stranger, told how unsophisticated her feelings were, and how little she had practised the art of disguising them. Sadness of heart was wont to bring a shade on her countenance, cheerfulness a smile, and awkwardness of position a maidenly glow; she had not learnt, viciously, and had not been taught by a cruel or sneering world, the habitual hypocrisy, which, perhaps, in some circles is called good breeding.

Reynall's visit to the Farm made considerable alteration in the routine of the cottage. He was gay and intelligent, and of a reckless cast of mind, and endeavoured to amuse the daughters of his host, particularly her with the light ringlets and blue eyes, very assiduously. His sportsman capabilities were not often placed in requisition; the farm, and the garden, and walks with the sisters, formed his chief attractions. Lucy's conduct underwent a marked change. For the first few days that her new acquaintance made one of their circle, she was more light-hearted even than usual, as if the similarity of their dispositions gave an additional spring to her gay habits. But this gradually altered, and she became by degrees, more sedate and less communicative, until her conduct wore an air of sadness and thought very unusual to it. She had evidently received some new impressions, and these had rapidly developed some latent dispositions. She appeared almost suddenly, to have ripened from the playful girl, into the dignified woman; to have put on responsibility and care, when these clogs to life could not have been expected even to cast their shadows before. They come, inevitably, to all; foolish is the individual who endeavours to combat or to laugh them away, or to sink listless under them,—but to take them by forethought is the work of philosophy, or folly, or the instincts of nature. This premature ripening can love, or hate, or perhaps any of the more ardent passions accomplish,—and sometimes the indefinite grouping of new and impending and future events, absorbs the mind when no strong passion exercises individual sway.

A balmy day in autumn, such as raises the heart, of even the dull and sordid, to the great Source of Good, cast its peaceful hues over the prairie, and the forest,—and over the gardens and fields of the Farm. The master of the little domain was out superintending the important labours of that time of the year,—his men-servants attended him, and Reynall was on the prairie, seeking to intercept some wild turkeys, among the verdant hollows, or slowly pacing the stream which crept near the settlements, and which induced the duck and brant to loiter luxuriating on its banks, reckless of the lone fowler who watched their motions intently. The cottage was silent, Julia, the female servant, was engaged in the dairy, and the two sisters sat at their needlework in the neat parlour, about whose window the woodbine and multiflora blended their exquisite forms and hues and fragrance, while the only sounds it admitted were the hum of some wild bees among the flowers, the call of the oriole, or mocking notes of the cat-bird, or, occasionally, the balmy wind making sweet music in the neighbouring shrubbery.

After a silence much longer than was usual until within the last ten days, the sisters entered into conversation.

"Well," said Maria, "after other more bustling employments, is it not a treat to get down quietly, in this manner, to the needle, while all is so peaceful around us?"

"Yes," answered Lucy, "change is pleasing, they say; but peacefulness, as you call it, may be loneliness and dulness sometimes."

"Ah! Lucy, I hope we will not begin to consider Maryville dull, after spending so many happy days here,—what other world do we know of, and what other should we wish for?"

"I do not exactly wish, Maria, but surely other places may be as good."

"Yes, but what have we to do with them, and should we cherish the less the blessings which we have, because other blessings equally great may be in existence? I trust not, I trust we are not about to let the cankerer, discontent, and discontent without cause, enter into our retreat to blast its peace."

"You need not make so much of a mere word, sister, you were not wont to do so."

"Nor would I, dear Lucy, but, forgive me, I have imagined an altered tone of feeling and conduct creeping over you lately, and I would draw you from it, if I could,—pardon me Lucy, it is love that urges me to offend, if I offend now."

"And perhaps it is *love*, which has made me offend, if I have offended, lately, by my altered tones."

"I do not like to hear my sister speak so lightly of what are really very serious matters, *love* for whom?