

## THE LIGHT OF COLD-HOME FORD.

## CHAPTER XVII—CONTINUED.

But I'll not meddle with the butter, said Hannah, "for its clean against the principles in which I was brought up as a young girl to use a tub for a churn and turn my hand to be a churn-attrick," she had said. She had loved putting the fresh milk into a vast churn and hearing the dash of the dipper, while afterwards there was no drink like fresh buttermilk or evening meal like upping sowens, to her mind. Still with all her prejudices, Hannah could not resist oversteering the big pans of Devonshire cream mantling and wrinkling as they were scalded on the hot hearth, or having a sharp eye on the pounds of golden butter sent to Moortown market. Also she loved the big dishes of junket rarely, and soon learned to make them as if to the manner born. Then no one could turn out a more excellent weekly hatch of loaves, or had a lighter hand with the pastry of the big pies, or knew so many kinds of hot cakes, the secret of which she had learned in the land of her birth. Thus, what with spring and autumn great house-cleanings and weekly scrubblings and scourings, preserving, pickling, mending nappery, seeing to all the washing and the poultry of all kinds, calves, and sighing over Blyth's torn jackets and Joy's new frocks, tatters of which adorned all the bushes within miles, besides knitting for all the household, Hannah verily had her hands full. Her norther energy astonished the easy-going, rather lazy, gentle people around her.

Little Joy, however, was the life and light of the Red House. She had fairly nestled herself into the innermost core of Berrington's big heart. Though he grew more taciturn, as he became broader and redder, every year, yet he seldom failed to have a full-moon smile to greet her; and would always unlock his lips to say slowly, "Well, my little sunbeam." Joy was alike his plague and darling.

By and by Joy too trotted down the lane with her satchel to a dame's school, and the quiet that ensued in the farmhouse for two hours was "amazin," said Berrington. He quite missed her footsteps following him round the fields and farmyard in the mornings; but the sisters up in the glen had willed it so.

At first, Miss Rachel had hoped they might themselves have taught the child, but the experience failed in three days. Magdalen frightened little Joy by her impatience and occasional outbreaks of anger during the lessons, as well as by her equally capricious fits of passionate affection. Her light, bright nature, that had itself flashes of wayward genius, could not endure the slow unfolding of the young, immature brain. Then, if for once the child sat on the floor, with her feet stretched before her (almost unnaturally quiet, Rachel thought, for she was generally like the trickiest spirit of mirth and mischief imaginable), Magdalen would break into a tiff at finding she was, after all, only watching a black-beetle crawling, or studying with interested big eyes the antics of the queer-looking cricket that came out on the hearth.

On this Joy would rush passionately to Rachel's knee for protection, who was always so sweet, so tender; the child herself being as violent in her emotions as her mother, but with already, the promise of a far deeper feeling and stronger understanding. The scenes of jealousy that ensued were painful and hurtful. From the last one the child escaped unnoticed for the moment, and, young as she was, ran back towards the farm fast as her small legs could carry her, meeting Hannah half-way who had come to fetch her, and was scandalized.

Then Rachel sorrowfully saw that the young spirit would only look on them as its task-mistresses and tormentors, or else being disunion between herself and the poor suffering sister she loved as her own life. So it ceased.

At times there would be a little feast spread on the bare cottage table, of bilberries with tea, or perhaps some delicacy of short-cake smuggled by Hannah for that purpose into the basket left on certain days at the Logan-stone. Then Joy would come with her nurse, learning by the latter's admonition as she grew yearly older to dissemble her affection for "Miss Rachel" and pretend more towards "Miss Magdalen;" and at such times Magdalen, being pleased, could take a fair winning manner, so seductive, so strangely fascinating (though

capricious), that she did really charm the child for brief happy spaces. Then Hannah's love for the mistress, who was always young to her, returned in full admiring flow; and Rachel, whose love never wavered through good or evil times, smiled, glad to see the black cloud lifted from the being dearest to her.

But still often little Joy tired. The brown cottage was so still, the hooded sisters so weird; her young mind quickly pined for Blyth, who was never allowed to come thither, and for the many delights of the Red House.

Ah, no one knew, and Joy least, how those short visits were as sunbursts in the chill life of the tall, dark woman at Cold-home. No one guessed, when at rare times she met the child alone—by no mere accident, it seemed—and would hug her to her heart with wet, deep eyes, that she had been waylaying its path in fear of offending her other beloved one up yonder in the glen.

And how often—how often when the opportunity came, the poor hungry soul was disappointed, and had to go back to the terrible stillness of the glen, and to the mean little brown cottage, disappointed, and furtively wiping away the tears that fell thick and fast under her hood!

"Oh, Joy—little Juanita, if I had been your mother nothing should have parted us, my child, my child," she thought. After all, however strong, she was only a woman, with woman's longings, capacities, and little heartaches. Then Rachel would cross her threshold wearily as the shades of night fell, and light the old lantern. Its rays shone in the darkness over the ford where so few travellers came. The lone light seemed like an emblem of her life—wasted.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

"Call me no more,  
As heretofore,  
The music of a Feast;  
Since now, alas,  
The mirth that was  
In me, is dead or east.  
"But Time, Al me,  
Has laid, I see,  
My Organ fast asleep;  
And turned my voice  
Into the noise  
Of those that sit and weep."

—HERRICK.

On Saturday half-holidays, which were among their happiest days, Blyth used to take Joy long, rambling excursions over the moors, or up the hills to explore the rocky fastness of some tor.

One day, when Joy was about nine years old, and Blyth some four years more, they amused themselves by tracking the Chad down from its spring three miles away, up among the dwarfed mountain ashes, and the heather and rocks. And thus, following the stream, they had presently found themselves where the waterfall leaped down white into the green darkness of the narrow glen here almost a chasm or rift, where hardly a ray of sun found its way. In general, both boy and girl avoided the neighborhood of the cottage by mute consent; for laughter and play died away as if banned at sight of the lone cottage and dark-hooded women. But this day they vowed to follow the river all the way down its bed, without flinching from obstacles, till they reached the Red House Farm. To their childish imaginations, to draw back now would have implied loss of honor; so, promising themselves to steal past Cold-home with hushed footfall and bated breath, they plunged with daring recklessness down the steep cliff-side, where the noise of falling water roared in their ears, and the green, gloomy shade of the trees that filled the chasm grew darker and denser, while their foothold became more difficult every minute; but safety lay seventy feet below them, for they could not climb up again!

It was a very difficult descent—so difficult that none but themselves, or the badgers, leaving their holes to feed at night and returning at dawn, and perhaps an occasional fox, ever had tried it.

The sides of the glen were indeed as dangerous all the way, to its mouth. Therefore, as none of the superstitious country-folk or moormen cared to pass the lone cottage of the wisht\* sisters, as they now called

\*wisht means weird or uncanny, in these parts

Rachel and Magdalen (fearing the evil eye or some unknown harm), the glen was as much the undisturbed retreat of the latter as if it were a little park in their own domestic.

"Oh! Blyth, help me. I can't get down!" cried Joy, in dismay hanging by one arm to a slender oak-tree, whose roots seemed riven in a mass of rock that hung for a few feet sheer below her, while on either side was only a fearful tangle of brushwood, bramble, and no foothold to speak of.

"I'm coming," gasped Blyth, rather breathless himself.

But, before he could come, Joy had loosed her hold, and somehow dropped on a ledge a little below, being as lithe as a wildcat.

"Why, there you are!" grumbled the boy. "First you say you can't do it, and then you go and do it. That's just like a woman."

What did he know of women? That was spoken like an embryo man. Joy who was breathless too, shook back her dark curls, her cheeks being flushed like a damask rose, and held out her small brown hands, that were cruelly rasped by the oak bark, before his face.

"But I'm frightened now, Blyth. Help me; I'm so tired, too."

"Why, it's as easy, as easy now," jeered Blyth, jumping down lesser big boulders and holding up his arms to help the little girl, who slid after him. "But that's you always, Joy. When there is any real danger, you're a dare-devil; Dick said so only yesterday. Why, my heart was jumping up and down inside me when you were hanging over that big rock; you might, have broken your neck. And now here, at these, little hop-o-my-thumb places, you ask for help."

Joy only looked at the gruff young Saxon, with laughing, sweet, black eyes. She was as fearless and self-reliant as any woodland nymph, following this mad sylvan adventure with a faun; but as caressing and full of wiles, too, as the earthiest of little Delilahs. In this lay her charm. So she only clasped Blyth's hand tighter in silence, until, hot, exhausted, and with large rents in their clothes, both found themselves at last at the foot of the waterfall that here sank, with final white hiss and ceaseless rush, into a deep, dark pool.

"Show those poor little hands of yours now, and I will wash them," said Blyth, kneeling on the edge of the rock-basin; and, though his words were curt, schoolboy-like, his action was tender as his heart was soft.

"How strange it is here; how dark and wild! Do you think any persons have ever been here before ourselves?" murmured Joy, shrinking close to his side and looking timidly round, her more fervid imagination, of Southern root and tropical birth-influences, impressed, as was not Blyth's steady, sterner nature.

The glen was dark. On either side the trees almost met across the high cliffs; while here and here and there crannies, among rocks and bushes, looked black as midnight caverns, open by day. In front, the foaming white water came billowing down, leap upon leap, from a far, narrow streak of light up there among the foliage, which alone told of upper world, air, and freedom in the moors.

The waterfall's spray wet the children's heads as they knelt; the rocks were slippery under them. Long fringes of ferns hung thick and moist along the walls of rock. Long water-grasses waved in the hurrying water, with sinuous motion like the feelers of some half-animal plant. There was hardly a sound, little air, in this cool, green obscurity, where tradition said the sun never shone down but for one mid-day hour in the year. And what that day is no man knoweth.

The children rose, and wandered farther along by the stream's side. Here the glen began to widen; the light to break down. Presently, the banks on either side became little open glades, with a greensward as old as fairy days, though only the rabbits kept it so short and sweet now, and pattered over it on summer nights. Bosky underwood was dotted here and there; hawthorn-trees so old, gray-bearded with lichen, and stunted, they might have seen Merlin, stood in clumps, rejoicing in fresh leafage. For it was the time of spring, and all the woodland sides of the dell, and every nook and cranny, too, were bursting out in tender green, while golden primroses made libations in treasure spots of happy brightness, or shone elsewhere in scattered stars, like

"Fancies that frolick o'er the earth."

Tender bluebells hung on their hollow stalks in the thickets, gleaming azure in shy company. There was a twittering and singing everywhere to be heard from brazen and brake in this sweet, secluded hollow, where no rough winds came down or disturbing foot of man trod. This narrow moorland rift, rather than glen, was like a little bit of Eden on this spring evening, here where it rejoiced in the kindly warmth of sunlight, God's chiefest blessing on earth; the birds hopped about more fearlessly than elsewhere, and the rabbits, settling with jerking white tails, sat up and gazed curiously at the children, thinking, each and all, it seemed, "We know Magdalen, we love Rachel, but who are you?"

"What is that?" both Blyth and Joy had exclaimed simultaneously, as a strain of strange music faintly reached their ears. They paused, looked at each other, wondering in hushed murmurs what this might mean; then hand-in-hand the boy and girl stole on together, keeping behind the shelter of the bushes as they approached the elin sound. It was delicate music, played on strings, for certain: as now and then the air seemed picked out with a slightly twanging sound, then by fits and starts the hand would be swept up and down with a rush and wild shake or two, and then again it would strike the instrument with a deep sound that intensified the bass, like the drum in a band of shrill light pipings.

Holding their very breath with exquisite delight, for such music had never been known in all the country round about, they parted the bushes and peered through.

In the sunniest little open of all, Magdalen sat on the river's bank. Her hood was thrown back, her dress was loosened at the throat, and her sleeves were rolled up as if to show the rounded whiteness of her arms.

She had placed a fantastic garland of bluebells and ferns on her fair hair, and bunches of starry primroses in her bosom; and so, believing herself secure from all eyesight, bent over now and then to see her dark reflection mirrored in a still, clear pool below, as well as might be. Sometimes she would wave her arms and raise then in graceful attitudes, admiring the outline as she gazed. Then she would snatch up a guitar in her lap, and playing it with fitful passion, draw forth the sweet, maniac music that had enthralled the children's ears, now wailing, sobbing, or in plaintive murmurs; madly merry, like a gypsy's carousal song, sung to the sound of castanets and tambourine—a snatch, no more, for too soon the broken, doubting chords began again.

But hark! some memory of an air crossed her distracted mood, for she raised her head, played a prelude with a light laugh and lingering fingers; once more, with growing passion and a wilder, more rapid, yet assured touch. Then looking up to the sky and woods for inspiration and audience, she began to sing,

"Taza be taza,  
No be no."

It was the famous Gazel of Hafiz, familiar to all nautch-girls in India who have sung and danced to "Mutriva Khush, his sweetest song," so the words begin, perhaps since ever the poet's lips first uttered them, five hundred years ago.

The listeners still listened, entranced, after the last notes had died away. But then—

Up sprang Magdalen, flung down her guitar, and, as if intoxicated with the praise and applause of an unseen audience, she smiled in ecstasy, bowed to all sides, pressed her flowers to her heart with a pretty gesture of deprecation yet triumph. Then daintily holding out her skirts with her finger tips, she began to dance on the short green turf. First she moved airily, with measured steps, courtesying, crossing, taking hands in graceful windings and turnings with imaginary partners, at whom she threw coquettishly bright or languishing glances, poor soul! But soon possessed by her own music, that had mounted to her brain, her feet moved faster and faster, as if impatient, till presently she was dancing in a maddened whirl, with flying steps that beat their own time, on the greensward. Round and round, with upraised arms, Magdalen, with heaving breast and hair now fallen down in loose, disordered light masses still, like a maned, went on, on! in that wild dance; with many circlings and windings, and frenzied, yet always instinctively graceful, alluring gestures, till the brains of the children grew giddy as they watched from their ambush.

One last convulsive whirl; then her muscles flagged, and with laboring breath,