A MOONLIGHT ESCAPADE.

CHAPTER V.

It was a week later, and Effie Dering was making her way through the pine-wood in the middle of the night with a heavy basket on her arm.

The girl had been driven to this course of action by Hector's reproaches at her long absences by day, and t e very great difficulty she had in making excuses for them. She preferred risking a midnight walk ; so, the next time she had occasion to take Joe his food, she hid her basket in a bush on the lawn, and, when she imagined the household was asleep, stole softly down the stairs and out through a little postern-door.

She had no fear. Country born and bred as she was, there was nothing to alarm her at the thought of a stroll through the woods at midnight. She would probably not meet a soul, or, if she did, it would be only some belated labourer ; and she might avoid any contact with him by keeping in the shade of a tree or hedge. As for poachers, they would naturally avoid her.

The path up the stream was more difficult than usual, both on account of the shadow thrown by the trees on each side, and of the increase of water owing to heavy rain having fallen the day before. But what it lost in ease it gained in picturesqueness, as the silver moonlight fell upon it here and there. It was a weird, lovely scene, and Effie could not help stopping now and then to admire it ; but she had other things to think of than the beauties of nature just then To begin with, Patience was much worse—very feverish, even wandering sometimes, her grandmother said—and Effie did not know whether she ought not to tell Joe of his wife's state.

She had gradually told him of the fact of his wife's broken leg, but had been able to reassure him by bringing him a few lines from the sufferer; but she could see that he was horribly anxious, and she thought that he ought to be aware of this change for the worse. And yet, supposing he insisted on coming to see Patience and got arrested, it would be her—Effie's—fault. It was all terribly perplexing. Hector too had developed a jealousy of Harold Parkinson that to Effie was utterly unaccountable. It alternately amused and made her angry ; but she could not understand it. Even had she been as desperately in love as was Hector, she could not have found it in her heart to be jealous. Where she gave her love she gave her trust, and she could not at all imagine a man being jealous because the girl he loved was admired by other men.

Effie reached Joe's hiding-place without meeting with any adventures. She had feared that Joe would not come in answer to her call, but she found him outside the cave, pacing up and down. Truth to tell, Joe was very hungry. Effie had always been so punctual in coming that he had finished the last stock of provisions that morning, thinking himself sure of a good meal in a few hours, and had had to subsist on blackberries since then: and Joe's appetite required more substantial food.

"Oh, there you are, Joe!" said Effie, with a sigh of relief, as he came forward and with profuse thanks took the heavy basket from her. "I was afraid you might be asleep, but I could not come before."

"It is no use my thanking you, miss, for what you are doing for me and Patience," said Joe. "If I were to talk for ever, I could not say what I feel; but I beg you never to come here again at this time of night, I would rather die of hunger or risk being caught going in search of food. Patience can't know of this, or she would never let you do it."

"Don't scold Patience about it," said Effie, trying to speak gaily, though at heart she began to fear that he might never have a chance to scold Patience again ; "she knows nothing about it. Now, Joe, I can't stand talking here, but I have thought of one thing. The nights are getting cold ; don't you want blankets or rugs? How can we get them here?"

"I want a great deal that I can't get, miss," was the reply.

"But these I think I can give if you will venture a little way from your den. You know that old ruined cottage down by the stream where one turns off to come up through the woods? I could get that little deaf and dumb boy to carry a bundle of blankets for me there, and you could surely with safety come down there at night and fetch them away."

"I would gladly risk that, if you would be so kind, miss."

"Very well; I will come here the day after to-morrow, and bring Tom with me as far as the cottage. Now 'Good night' Joe."

"Let me follow you to the end of the wood, miss ; there will be no one about now, and it is so lonesome for you till you get down by the stream."

Effie thought that it would not be much less "lonesome" there, but she did not say so.

"No, no, Joe," she said gaily. "I have taken care of myself hitherto ; it is not worth while for you to risk even the very remote chance of detection, and I should not be able to look Patience in the face again if you got into danger through me."

And, with a hasty "Good night," she turned homewards.

She hurried down the woodland path and by the side of the stream for some time, till she came to a spot where two poles had been placed over the water at a little distance apart, to enable any one possessed of a good head to cross over to the other side. It struck her that, by taking this way, she would avoid the little village through which she must pass otherwise ; and, though she had been lucky in going through unnoticed an hour or so ago, she thought it advisable to avoid a risk a second time.

Getting across was not much of a feat for an active country-bred girl, and she was soon scrambling up through the brambles and undergrowth on the other side. Here again her way lay through a wood ; a fir plantation stretched nearly to the high road she had to cross before getting into the fields that surrounded her father's place.

She hurried along till she came to a clearing in the plantation, and stopped short in delight at the scene before her. The moon shone full upon the rank grass of the clearing and the young firs that here and there reared their heads above it. A family of rabbits sprang about and around, apparently glorying in their immunity from peril at that hour. Effie had not the heart to stop their gambols ; she remained for some time in the shade of the trees on the edge of the clearing.

Suddenly the report of a gun sounded through the stillness of the night, and one of the rabbits sprang up wildly into the air, then rolled over in the agonies of death Effie impulsively started forward, and, as she did so, found herself face to face with two men who had emerged from the trees on the right. They both uttered imprecations, and the taller one seized the terrified girl by the arm.

"Hallo, who have we got here?" he cried, peering into her face. "What are you doing here at this time of the night, my lass?"

"You won't split on a poor fellow what's trying to make his living, will you, my dear?" said the other.

Just then the first speaker recognized Effie and drew back with an execration.

"Danged if it ain't Squire Dering's lass!" he exclaimed. "I say, miss, you must not split on us."

"Promise you won't," said the other.

Till now Effie had remained silent in utter terror and perplexity, but there was a slight menace in the tone of the last speaker that roused her pride.

"Let me pass, please," she cried, drawing herself up to her full height.

"Not so fast, if you please miss," said the taller man. "We can't let you off without a promise of silence."

"I will promise nothing!" said the now enraged girl. "You dare not hurt me, even if you were ruffians enough to wish to do so!"

"I don't know that," began the short man. "What do you say to this, my lass?"

And he pointed his gun at her.

Effie's blood was up ; she did not flinch even then.

"You dare not kill me," she said, "and you know it! Bluster as much as you like, you would not care to risk hanging, I suppose ; but I would rather die than give in to you!"

"She's a rare plucked one," said the tall fellow, below his breath. "We must let her go, Ned ; but we trust to your honour, miss, not to tell on us," he added, turning to Effie.

"I decline to let you trust me at all," said the angry girl ; "and lift a finger on me at your peril! The police might be more active this time than the last."

And, with this parting shot, she hurried on, leaving the men speechless at her daring.

But, brave front though she had kept with them, the girl had had a terrible fright ; and, once out of sight, she ran as fast as her trembling limbs would allow her out of the wood, through two fields, and, dashing out through a gate that opened into the road, nearly fell into the arms of Harold Parkinson.

Harold had been riding home from a dinner-party, had dismounted to take a stone out of his horse's foot, and had just put his foot into the stirrup to mount again, when he caught sight of Effie's flying figure. He did not at first recognize her, and mechanically took his foot out of the stirrup again and remained watching her, merely out of curiosity, as she approached. When he saw who it was—which was not until she dashed through the gate, for he was rather short-sighted—he almost gasped for breath.

"My dear Miss Dering," he exclaimed, without thinking, as soon as he could speak, "what are you doing here?"

It was not the most tactful speech he could have made in the circumstances, perhaps ; but then the circumstances themselves were quite enough to drive tact out of a young man's head for the time being.

Effie's next action did not lessen his astonishment. She simply put her hands before her face and burst into tears.

"Oh, pray don't!" cried young Parkinson, utterly bewildered. "I wish you would not cry, Miss Dering."

He could think of nothing better to say, yet he was conscious that it was not a particularly brilliant remark.

Effie soon stopped crying, heartily ashamed of the momentary weakness.

"You must think me very foolish," she said, "but I have just had rather a fright. I met some men in the fir-plantation, and they were uncivil."

She had no wish to send young Parkinson off on an a poacher-chase, but, as she spoke felt that it was rather a feeble statement, and that she ought to give some explanation of her wandering about the country at that time of night alone. What could she say? She was too truthful to invent a story, even had her powers of imagination permitted her to do so ; and, reading the wonder in his eyes, she cast down her own, blushing deeply.

"You must let me see you safe home," said Harold, after a slight pause ; "I have been dining at the Etheridges'," he added, "and am glad I chose this way home."

"So am I," said Effie frankly, looking up into his honest face ; "and I shall be very glad of your company till I reach our own grounds. You must think it very strange of me, being out here alone at such an hour, and I can't tell you the reason," she added simply.

This was rather the reverse of an explanation, but Harold Parkinson was one of nature's gentlemen.

"I know that you must have had a sufficient one," he said. "Pray don't think that I would dream of—— You are trembling still," he cried, suddenly breaking off in his polite remark. "What can I do for you?" You are not fit to walk home.

"Oh, yes, I am," said Effie resolutely ; "and I want to get back as quickly as possible!"—and she moved forward.

Harold walked by her side, leading his horse. He found, now that the first awkwardness was past, the situation a very pleasant one ; and they chatted away freely, until the sound of a horse coming along at a sharp trot caused Effie to shrink into the shade of the hedge.

"I wish I could get into the fields," she said.

But there was no gate near, and they had to walk on.

"Shall I ride on and leave you?" asked Harold. "I will do whatever you think best."

"Oh, no!" said Effie her pride roused at the idea ; and they walked on to meet the advancing horseman.

He dashed round a turn of the road and pulled up with an exclamation of astonishment. It was Hector Lyndhurst.

It was an awkward situation. Effie felt as if the end of the world had come, and Harold Parkinson began to wonder what more surprises were in store for him. Hector had been to a rival dinner-party, and, as only a very young lover would have done, had made a detour so as to ride within sight of the abode of his beloved one. He little thought that he was to be blessed with the sight of her, however, and by no means thought it now an unmitigated blessing.

Parkinson was the first to speak.

"Hallo, Lyndhurst!" he said, as if there was nothing unusual in this encounter in the small hours of the morning. "I am glad you have turned up; Miss Dering will have two people to escort her home instead of one, for I suppose you will turn back that way."

Hector paused for a moment before replying. He was pale with rage and almost feared to speak lest he should make a scene. At last he said quietly—

"Thanks; my way lies in the opposite direction."

And, raising his hat, he was off at a hand-gallop before Parkinson could say another word.

"Oh, how angry he must be," said Effie naively, "to ride on at that pace!"

Harold could not help laughing; the scene had been so ridiculous.

"You will have to be extra kind to him to-morrow to make up for it, Miss Dering," he said.

Effie did not reply ; she knew that this time Hector had really cause for jealousy, and that she could not explain matters to him. After the first angry astonished glance he had given her, he had not looked towards her while he and Harold had exchanged the few words ; and the girl knew that there would be a very heavy reckoning for her on the morrow.

She walked on silently by Harold's side till they came to the gate opening into the field she had to cross ; then she held out her hand.

"Good-night, and thanks for coming with me," she said. "I am in our own grounds now and shall get home quite safely."

"I wish you would get on to my horse and ride round to the lodge-gates," Harold said wistfully. "I hate to see you going alone in this way."

"There is nothing to hurt me," she said, trying to smile ; but the attempt was rather a failure. "Good night again!"

And, with a little bow, she left him.

"Poor little girl," thought young Parkinson, as he mounted his horse and pursued his solitary way ; "I'm afraid she's in for a miserable time with Lyndhurst to-morrow! I could not have thought the fellow could have scowled as he did just now. Well, if I had the luck to be engaged to that pretty little girl, I would forgive her a much graver fault than this. I wonder what she has been up to, though ; it was a queer adventure, but I'm sure that she will be able to explain it satisfactorily, all the same. He had better not begin by upbraiding her, however ; it is easy to see that she is as proud as Lucifer, and Master Lyndhurst may get his conge if he doesn't take care."

After which soliloquy, Mr. Harold Parkinson lighted a cigar and jogged on his homeward way, still meditating upon the "queer adventure."

Meanwhile Effie was speeding through the fields with an almost breaking heart. She felt that Hector would never forgive her unless she told him all that had occurred—and that she could not do. What may he think of her? Indeed, what must both men think of her?

She reached home without any further incident and crept noiselessly up-stairs. Long after she had shut herself in her room she remained sitting in a dazed sort of way in the armchair into which she had dropped on entering, too weary and hopeless for tears ; and it was not until there were sounds of moving about the house in the early morning that she sought her couch, where habit prevailed, and she fell into a troubled sleep.

CHAPTER VI.

When Effie Dering's trim maid brought her young mistress her tea the next morning, the girl roused herself to look her situation in the face. It did not need the note in Hector's well known handwriting, which lay amongst her other letters on the tray, to bring the events of the past night vividly before her. Long before Sims came to call her she had started from her sleep, feeling as if some terrible misfortune had befallen her. She collected her scattered senses, and gradually the whole scene came back to her. She lay there vaguely wondering how it all would end, sometimes falling into a doze, then starting up again, till the maid's presence completely roused her.

After Sims had left the room, she with trembling fingers, opened Hector's note. It was short and to the point, merely saying that he hoped to see Effie when he came over that morning, and that she would be able to give him some satisfactory explanation of the strange scene of the night before.

Effie got up and dressed as if she were in a dream. She feared that her altered looks might be noticed ; but her parents, fond though they were of her were very unobservant people and did not remark the droop of the little mouth and the absence of her usual brilliant colour. She wandered on to the terrace after breakfast, unable to settle to anything, until she remembered Patience ; and the idea struck her that she would run down and see how the girl was getting on. If she were out when Hector came so much the better—the awkwardness of the meeting would be less ; if she met him on the road better still.

She ran to get her hat and was soon down in the village. Patience was no better—indeed decidedly worse—and, though there was no immediate danger, the doctor said, Effie felt more uncomfortable than ever regarding the secret she was keeping. Clearly a man, in any circumstances, ought to know of his wife's state when she was as Patience was now. Effie decided that she would risk a great deal to go that afternoon and tell Joe Davis, unless Patience became very much better in a few hours.

She went at once and asked a pleasant-looking girl who lived a few doors off if she would undertake to nurse Patience for a few days, as the old grandmother seemed quite worn out ; and she felt happier as she saw the deft way in which Rosie Gray arranged the invalid's pillows and tidied up the little room ; then she took her departure and proceeded slowly towards home.

It was one of September's most glorious days. A blazing sun lighted up the gorgeous autumn colouring of the surrounding woods, the brambles in the hedgerows were glistening with dew and festooned with myriads of gossamer webs, which floated in the still air across Effie's path. But the girl had no eye for the beauties of nature that day ; she was dreading the inevitable explanation, or rather the demand for it, which she would have to refuse.

Well, lingering along the road would do no good, Effie thought, so she walked on resolutely to meet her fate.

She met it at the lodge gate—at least, Hector stood there awaiting her. He had been to the house, and had been told there she had gone out, and that she had left a message to the effect that he was to wait for her. But waiting was never Hector Lyndhurst's forte ; and, in his present state of mind, he could not endure to sit and listen to Mrs. Dering's platitudes. So he hurried down the avenue to intercept his little love on her way back.

He saw her coming along before she caught sight of him, and his heart went out to her at the sight of her pensive downcast face. Such an innocent little face too! How could one connect with it any thought of harm or deceit? For the moment his resolution faltered. Should he greet her as usual, casting suspicions to the wind, and letting her bide her time till of her own accord she told him what had taken her out that night? But this Quixotic idea did not linger in his mind. As his suspicions were aroused, Effie was bound to clear them up at once.

He took the hand she held out timidly to him but did not hold it lovingly in his clasp, as he would have done the day before ; and when he relinquished it, they walked slowly side by side up the avenue in silence for a time. When they reached a bench under an elm-tree—a constant resort of theirs—they sat down as if by mutual consent ; and Hector began abruptly.

"Well Effie, what have you to tell me?" She did not attempt to fence with him.

"About last night, you mean?" she said.

"Certainly. You must know that your conduct requires some excuse or explanation."

"I can tell you nothing but this, Hector," she replied firmly, though her heart seemed to stand still as she spoke. "I met Mr. Parkinson as I was returning from a long walk and was very glad of his company for part of the way back."

"Did you meet him by appointment?"

"Hector," cried Effie, the blood rushing to her cheeks, which had grown paler than ever as she began to speak, "how dare you ask me such a question?"

"That is no answer, excuse me," he rejoined. "You must allow that, in the circumstances, my question is quite justifiable."

"It would not be justifiable in any circumstances," was the proud reply, "and I decline to answer it!"

"You must either be out of your senses, Effie," said Hector sternly, "or you must care even less about me than I supposed, to adopt this tone! Look at the facts of the case. I find you and a man whom I believe to be desperately in love with you walking together far from your house at a time when all decent people ought to be in their beds, and you decline to tell me whether it was by appointment or not! Put yourself in my place and tell me what you would do or say in such a case."

"I cannot imagine myself suspecting you of anything dishonourable," said Effie. "Where I give my love I give my trust. Hector," she went on passionately, "the last time we said 'Good-bye,' you made me put my arms round your neck and kiss you on the lips. Can you think so badly of the girl you say you love as to imagine that the very next day she would make an appointment with another man?"

Again Hector's good angel got the better of him for a moment. Truth shone through the tears in Effie's eyes, rang in the accents of her trembling voice.

"I know I am a jealous brute," he said, taking one of the girl's cold hands in his ; "but you must bear with me, Effie. Tell me, darling, you did not willingly meet this man?"

The girl hesitated. She knew that she had but to say one word to make the situation less strained, but that word her pride refused to let her utter.

"I must ask you to trust me," she said, in a low voice ; "or"—in a tone of relief—"ask Mr. Parkinson how he met me."

"Ask Parkinson!" ejaculated Lyndhurst. "As if I would speak to him on the subject! Besides, in any case, he would be in honour bound to support you."

"In honour bound to tell a lie, always supposing that we met by appointment?" asked Effie contemptuously.

"Leave him out of the question," said Hector impatiently ; "all I want is your own word!"

"And that I have said I will not give."

"You really mean that, Effie?"

"I do, Hector. I will not be mistrusted! I am tired of your unreasonable jealousy, and, if you can't conquer it, I am sure we should never be happy together."

"Then if you really think so, it would be better to part before it is too late!" said Hector, in a rage.

His words struck like a knell on Effie's heart. She would have given worlds even then to have thrown herself into his arms and again begged him to trust her ; but pride restrained her. She remained silent.

"I see that you agree with me," said Hector, after a pause. "So be it, then! May Heaven forgive you, Effie ; you have broken my heart!"

He rose from the bench and moved away like a man in a dream. The young fellow really felt, as he looked, broken-hearted. But Effie did not look at him ; a mist swam before her eyes ; she saw nothing distinctly. She heard his retreating footsteps ; he was going towards the lodge ; he was leaving her forever! But she could not recall him ; she let him go farther and farther still—till he was lost to sight.

How long she sat there after he had left her she never knew ; but it was far into the afternooon when she entered the house. Mrs. Dering was looking out anxiously for her.

"My dear child, where have you been all this time?" she said. "And what have you done with Hector?"

"He has gone home," Effie replied, in a dull voice.

"But you did not come in to luncheon. Have you had anything to eat?"

For Effie was rather erratic in her habits, and the only meal at which punctuality was required was dinner.

"No, mother ; but I don't want anything. Pray don't get me anything"—for her mother turned to the man-servant, who had come in with a note, and was about to address him—"I really could not eat!"

"Then we will have tea at once," said Mrs. Dering and gave orders accordingly. "You are looking quite pale, darling ; you can at least drink some tea."

Effie was glad of it and forced herself to eat the hot cakes her mother pressed upon her. She did not intend to give in to the terrible feeling of languor that had come over her, and did not wish Mrs. Dering to notice that there was anything amiss. She could not bring herself to believe that everything was really over between herself and Hector Lyndhurst ; he would come round in a day or two and beg for forgiveness. It was impossible that he would be unforgiving—that he would let the incident of last night influence so sadly both their lives.

As soon as she felt rested Effie rose to go again to inquire after Patience, and was relieved to find that she was decidedly better and that there would be no need to seek Joe that day. The weary hours dragged on, there was no sign of Hector anywhere ; and Effie retired to rest, as early as she dared after dinner without exciting comment, with a heavier heart than she had known in all her young life.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Before Your Eyes.

A recent biographer of Carlyle states that when he was writing his history of the French Revolution it was his habit to paste on a screen in his work room engraved portraits, or wood-cuts, if no better could be had, of the people about whom he was writing. The image of the man was thus steadily in his view. Carlyle held that an author must have a clear image of his subject in his mind; otherwise he could not make it clear to the reader.

Here is a significant hint to schoolboys and girls who are expected to express their ideas in compositions or essays.

One of Agassiz's pupils stated lately that when he first went to the summer school at Penikese he brought boxes of text-books on natural science. He told the great teacher, when they sat down to dinner on the first day, that he was provided with all of the best authorities, and inquired :

"With which shall I begin?"

"Leave the authorities in your trunk, and begin with that crab before you," was the reply. "Your own eyes and fingers will bring you closer to nature than all the books written by other men."

The boy who sits down to write an essay on the Triumphs of Genius or Democracy in Europe will find his ideas are hazy, and that words lie in secret corners of his brain and hide themselves, and have to be dragged out of his memory by force ; but let him tell of the last political meeting in his village, or argue some class difficulty, and he finds no trouble in expressing himself clearly and fluently. The right verbs and adjectives leap to the pen.

Until he has obtained command of language, then let him confine himself to subjects which are thoroughly known and familiar to him.

Neither nature nor art will tolerate a middle-man. If you would learn these secrets, or if you would interpret them to to the world, you must see with your own eyes and hear with your own ears and speak with your mother tongue out of your own heart.

Surplus Wheat.

The Minneapolis Miller has been making an estimate of the surplus wheat of the United States and other wheat-growing countries, and the requirements of the countries that do not grow enough wheat for their own consumption. The surplus of the United States and Canada it sets down at 170,000,000 bushels. Allowing that Canada will have a surplus this year of say 25,000,000 bushels, this will leave the United States with 145,000,000 bushels to sell to the foreigners. The surplus of the whole world the Miller sets down at 331,000,000 bushels. The requirements of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland are estimated at 155,000,000 bushels. So Great Britain wants a good deal more wheat than the United States has to sell, and she needs more than all the other grain purchasing nations of the world put together. All require 329,000,000. Of this, Great Britain needs 155,000,000 bushels, leaving for the rest of the world 174,000,00 bushels. President Harrison bragged the other day about what he had done towards finding a market for the farmers' crop in South America by what he called his Reciprocity policy. The Miller does not give the requirement of South America, but lumps them with those of China and the East Indies ; and how much of the wheat crop of the American farmers are these three countries expected to take? Just 20,000,000 bushels. Great Britain wants, for herself, 155,000,000 bushels of wheat, while the Latin-American Republics take a part only of 20,000,000 bushels. Yet the Latin-American countries are petted and favored by the United States, while Great Britain is treated as a commercial enemy. It is just possible that our neighbors will find out, when it is too late, that they have been pursuing towards Great Britain a foolish and short-sighted policy as well as an unprincipled one.

China in the East.

The most careless reader of foreign news and affairs most have noticed that the threatened collision between the Russian advance on the one side and Afghanistan and England on the other, over the desolate mountain top of the Pamirs has suddenly died away. Yet neither England nor Afghanistan has done anything. The Ameer at Cabul remains in mortal peril from insurrection to the South and North. The Anglo-Indian army has moved no troops and could move none to those inaccessible heights save with tenfold the expenditure of men and money in any past Afghan war. The region remains, as before, part of the shadowy realm over which the Ameer of Bokhara, now a Russian subject, once claimed jurisdiction because the Kirghiz, who sought its pasture valleys in Summer, in Winter sought his plains, and this gigantic table land, to which the highest plateaus of Montana or Colorado are mere hills, continues in spite of this Russian claim, patroled by Afghan outposts, though practically independent. If Russia withdraws there is no reasonable doubt it is because China protests. For us China seems a weak nerveless, impotent power, but on the great Central Asian plateau, China is the equal of either Russia or England. Peking forced the surrender of Ili from Russia, keeps Thibet barred to English trade, and crushes any power which raises its head over vast regions closed to European traffic, travel and exploration. Without limit in the number of its troops, the patience of its commanders or the relentless rigor of its policy, China has been able to stay the advance of Russia when it is altogether probable neither England nor Afghanistan could have done so.