

ГЕНРИК СЕНКЕВИЧ

LILLIAN MORRIS, AND
OTHER STORIES

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Lillian Morris, and Other Stories

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Henryk Sienkiewicz

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LILLIAN MORRIS

DURING my stay in California I went with my worthy and gallant friend, Captain R., to visit Y., a compatriot of ours who was living in the secluded mountains of Santa Lucia. Not finding him at home, we passed five days in a lonely ravine, in company with an old Indian servant, who during his master's absence took care of the Angora goats and the bees.

Conforming to the ways of the country, I spent the hot summer days mainly in sleep, but when night came I sat down near a fire of dry "chamisal," and listened to stories from the captain, concerning his wonderful adventures, and events which could happen only in the wilds of America.

Those hours passed for me very bewitchingly. The nights were real Californian: calm, warm, starry; the fire burned cheerily, and in its gleam I saw the gigantic, but shapely and noble form of the old pioneer warrior. Raising his eyes to the stars, he sought to recall past events, cherished names, and dear faces, the very remembrance of which brought a mild sadness to his features. Of these narratives I give one just as I heard it, thinking that the reader will listen to it with as much interest as I did.

Chapter I

I came to America in September, 1849, said the captain, and found myself in New Orleans, which was half French at that time. From New Orleans I went up the Mississippi to a great sugar plantation, where I found work and good wages. But since I was young in those days, and full of daring, sitting in one spot and writing annoyed me; so I left that place soon and began life in the forest. My comrades and I passed some time among the lakes of Louisiana, in the midst of crocodiles, snakes, and mosquitoes. We supported ourselves with hunting and fishing, and from time to time floated down great numbers of logs to New Orleans, where purchasers paid for them not badly in money.

Our expeditions reached distant places. We went as far as "Bloody Arkansas," which, sparsely inhabited even at this day, was well-nigh a pure wilderness then. Such a life, full of labors and dangers, bloody encounters with pirates on the Mississippi, and with Indians, who at that time were numerous in Louisiana, Arkansas, and Tennessee, increased my health and strength, which by nature were uncommon, and gave me also such knowledge of the plains, that I could read in that great book not worse than any red warrior.

After the discovery of gold in California, large parties of emigrants left Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and other eastern cities almost daily, and one of these, thanks to my reputation, chose me for leader, or as we say, captain.

I accepted the office willingly, since wonders were told of California in those days, and I had cherished thoughts of going to the Far West, though without concealing from myself the perils of the journey.

At present the distance between New York and San Francisco is passed by rail in a week, and the real desert begins only west of Omaha; in those days it was something quite different. Cities and towns, which between New York and Chicago are as numerous as poppy-seeds now, did not exist then; and Chicago itself, which later on grew up like a mushroom after rain, was merely a poor obscure fishing-village not found on maps. It was necessary to travel with wagons, men, and mules through a country quite wild, and inhabited by terrible tribes of Indians: Crows, Blackfeet, Pawnees, Sioux, and Arickarees, which it was well-nigh impossible to avoid in large numbers, since those tribes, movable as sand, had no fixed dwellings, but, being hunters, circled over great spaces of prairie, while following buffaloes and antelopes. Not few were the toils, then, that threatened us; but he who goes to the Far West must be ready to suffer hardship, and expose his life frequently. I feared most of all the responsibility which I had accepted. This matter had been settled, however, and there was nothing to do but make preparations for the road. These lasted more than two months, since we had to bring wagons, even from Pittsburgh, to buy mules, horses, arms, and collect large supplies of provisions. Toward the end of winter, however, all things were ready.

I wished to start in such season as to pass the great prairies lying between the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains in spring, for I knew that in summer because of heat in those open places, multitudes of men died of various diseases. I decided for this reason to lead the train, not over the southern route by St. Louis, but through Iowa, Nebraska, and Northern Colorado. That road was more dangerous with reference to Indians, but beyond doubt it was the healthier. The plan roused opposition at first among people of the train. I declared that if they would not obey they might choose another captain. They yielded after a brief consultation, and we moved at the first breath of spring.

Days now set in which for me were toilsome enough, especially till such time as men had grown accustomed to me and the conditions of the journey. It is true that my person roused confidence, for my daring trips to Arkansas had won a certain fame among the restless population of the border, and the name of "Big Ralph," by which I was known on the prairies, had struck the ears of most of my people more than once. In general, however, the captain, or leader, was, from the nature of things, in a very critical position frequently with regard to emigrants. It was my duty to choose the camping-

ground every evening, watch over the advance in the daytime, have an eye on the whole caravan, which extended at times a mile over the prairie, appoint sentries at the halting-places, and give men permission to rest in the wagons when their turn came.

Americans have in them, it is true, the spirit of organization developed to a high degree; but in toils on the road men's energies weaken, and unwillingness seizes the most enduring. At such times no one wishes to reconnoitre on horseback all day and stand sentry at night, but each man would like to evade the turn which is coming to him, and lie whole days in a wagon. Besides, in intercourse with Yankees, a captain must know how to reconcile discipline with a certain social familiarity, – a thing far from easy. In time of march, and in the hours of night-watching, I was perfect master of the will of each of my companions; but during rest in the day at farms and settlements, to which we came at first on the road, my rôle of commander ended. Each man was master of himself then, and more than once I was forced to overcome the opposition of insolent adventurers; but when in presence of numerous spectators it turned out a number of times that my Mazovian fist was the stronger, my significance rose, and later on I never had personal encounters. Besides, I knew American character thoroughly. I knew how to help myself, and, in addition to all, my endurance and willingness were increased by a certain pair of blue eyes, which looked out at me with special interest from beneath the canvas roof of a wagon. Those eyes looked from under a forehead shaded by rich golden hair, and they belonged to a maiden named Lillian Morris. She was delicate, slender, with finely cut features, and a face thoughtful, though almost childlike. That seriousness in such a young girl struck me at once when beginning the journey, but duties connected with the office of captain soon turned my mind and attention elsewhere.

During the first weeks I exchanged with Miss Morris barely a couple of words beyond the usual daily "good morning." Taking compassion, however, on her youth and loneliness, – she had no relatives in that caravan, – I showed the poor girl some trifling services. I had not the least need of guarding her with my authority of leader nor with my fist from the forwardness of young men in the train, for among Americans even the youngest woman is sure, if not of the over-prompt politeness for which the French are distinguished, at least of perfect security. In view, however, of Lillian's delicate health, I put her in the most commodious wagon, in charge of a driver of great experience, named Smith. I spread for her a couch on which she could sleep with comfort; finally, I lent her a warm buffalo-skin, of which I had a number in reserve. Though these services were not important, Lillian seemed to feel a lively gratitude, and omitted no opportunity to show it. She was evidently a very mild and retiring person. Two women, Aunt Grosvenor and Aunt Atkins, soon loved her beyond expression for the sweetness of her character. "Little Bird," a title which they gave her, became the name by which she was known in the caravan. Still, there was not the slightest approach between Little Bird and me, till I noticed that the blue and almost angelic eyes of that maiden were turned toward me, with a peculiar sympathy and determined interest.

That might have been interpreted in this way: Among all the people of the train I alone had some social refinement; Lillian, in whom also a careful training was evident, saw in me, therefore, a man nearer to her than the rest of the company. But I understood the affair somewhat differently. The interest which she showed pleased my vanity; my vanity made me pay her more attention, and look oftener into her eyes. It was not long till I was striving in vain to discover why, up to that time, I had paid so little attention to a person so exquisite, – a person who might inspire tender feelings in any man who had a heart.

Thenceforth I was fond of coursing around her wagon on my horse. During the heat of the day, which in spite of the early spring annoyed us greatly at noon, the mules dragged forward lazily, and the caravan stretched along the prairie, so that a man standing at the first wagon could barely see the last one. Often did I fly at such times from end to end, wearying my horse without need, just to see that bright head in passing, and those eyes, which hardly ever left my mind. At first my imagination was more taken than my heart; I received pleasant solace from the thought that among those strange

people I was not entirely a stranger, since a sympathetic little soul was occupied with me somewhat. Perhaps this came not from vanity, but from the yearning which on earth a man feels to discover his own self in a heart near to him, to fix his affections and thoughts on one living beloved existence, instead of wasting them on such indefinite, general objects as plains and forests, and losing himself in remotenesses and infinities.

I felt less lonely then, and the whole journey took on attractions unknown to me hitherto. Formerly, when the caravan stretched out on the prairie, as I have described, so that the last wagons vanished from the eye, I saw in that only a lack of attention, and disorder, from which I grew very angry. Now, when I halted on some eminence, the sight of those wagons white and striped, shone on by the sun and plunging in the sea of grass, like ships on the ocean, the sight of men, on horseback and armed, scattered in picturesque disorder at the sides of the wagons, filled my soul with delight and happiness. And I know not whence such comparisons came to me, but that seemed some kind of Old Testament procession, which I, like a patriarch, was leading to the Promised Land. The bells on the harness of the mules and the drawling, "Get up!" of the drivers accompanied like music thoughts which came from my heart and my nature.

But I did not pass from that dialogue of eyes with Lillian to another, for the presence of the women travelling with her prevented me. Still, from the time when I saw that there was something between us for which I could not find a name yet, though I felt that the something was there, a certain strange timidity seized me. I redoubled, however, my care for the women, and frequently I looked into the wagon, inquiring about the health of Aunt Atkins and Aunt Grosvenor, so as to justify in that way and equalize the attentions with which I surrounded Lillian; but she understood my methods perfectly, and this understanding became as it were our own secret, concealed from the rest of the people.

Soon, glances and a passing exchange of words and tender endeavors were not enough for me. That young maiden with bright hair and sweet look drew me to her with an irresistible power. I began to think of her whole days; and at night, when wearied from visiting the sentries, and hoarse from crying "All is well!" I came at last to the wagon, and wrapping myself in a buffalo-skin, closed my eyes to rest, it seemed to me that the gnats and mosquitoes buzzing around were singing unceasingly in my ears, "Lillian! Lillian! Lillian!" Her form stood before me in my dreams; at waking, my first thought flew to her like a swallow; and still, wonderful thing! I had not noticed that the dear attraction which everything assumed for me, that painting in the soul of objects in golden colors, and those thoughts sailing after her wagon, were not a friendship nor an inclination for an orphan, but a mightier feeling by far, a feeling from which no man on earth can defend himself when the turn has come to him.

It may be that I should have noticed this sooner, had it not been that the sweetness of Lillian's nature won every one to her; I thought, therefore, that I was no more under the charm of that maiden than were others. All loved her as their own child, and I had proof of this before my eyes daily. Her companions were simple women, sufficiently inclined to wordy quarrels, and still, more than once had I seen Aunt Atkins, the greatest Herod on earth, combing Lillian's hair in the morning, kissing her with the affection of a mother; sometimes I saw Aunt Grosvenor warming in her own palms the maiden's hands, which had chilled in the night. The men surrounded her likewise with care and attentions. There was a certain Henry Simpson in the train, a young adventurer from Kansas, a fearless hunter and an honest fellow at heart, but so self-sufficient, so insolent and rough, that during the first month I had to beat the man twice, to convince him that there was some one in the train with a stronger hand than his, and of superior significance. You should have seen that same Henry Simpson speaking to Lillian. He who would not have thought anything of the President of the United States himself, lost in her presence all his confidence and boldness, and repeated every moment, "I beg your pardon, Miss Morris!" He had quite the bearing of a chained mastiff, but clearly the mastiff was ready to obey every motion of that small, half-childlike hand. At the halting-places he tried always to be with Lillian, so as to render her various little services. He lighted the fire, and selected for her a place free from smoke, covering it first with moss and then with his own horse-blankets; he chose

for her the best pieces of game, doing all this with a certain timid attention which I had not thought to find in him, and which roused in me, nevertheless, a kind of ill-will very similar to jealousy.

But I could only be angry, nothing more. Henry, if the turn to stand guard did not come to him, might do what he liked with his time, hence he could be near Lillian, while my turn of service never ended. On the road the wagons dragged forward one after another, often very far apart; but when we entered an open country for the midday rest I placed the wagons, according to prairie custom, in a line side by side, so that a man could hardly push between them. It is difficult to understand how much trouble and toil I had before such an easily defended line was formed. Mules are by nature wild and untractable; either they balked, or would not go out of the beaten track, biting each other meanwhile, neighing and kicking; wagons, twisted by sudden movement, were turned over frequently, and the raising up of such real houses of wood and canvas took no little time; the braying of mules, the cursing of drivers, the tinkling of bells, the barking of dogs which followed us, caused a hellish uproar. When I had brought all into order in some fashion, I had to oversee the unharnessing of the animals and urge on the men whose work it was to drive them to pasture and then to water. Meanwhile men who during the advance had gone out on the prairie to hunt, were returning from all sides with game; the fires were occupied by people, and I found barely time to eat and draw breath.

I had almost double labor when we started after each rest, for attaching the mules involved more noise and uproar than letting them out. Besides, the drivers tried always to get ahead of one another, so as to spare themselves trouble in turning out of line in bad places. From this came quarrels and disputes, together with curses and unpleasant delays on the road. I had to watch over all this, and in time of marching ride in advance, immediately after the guides, to examine the neighborhood and select in season defensible places, abounding in water, and, in general, commodious for night camps. Frequently I cursed my duties as captain, though on the other hand the thought filled me with pride, that in all that boundless desert I was the first before the desert itself, before people, before Lillian, and that the fate of all those beings, wandering behind the wagons over that prairie, was placed in my hands.

Chapter II

On a certain time, after we had passed the Mississippi, we halted for the night at Cedar River, the banks of which, grown over with cottonwood, gave us assurance of fuel for the night. While returning from the men on duty, who had gone into the thicket with axes, I saw, from a distance, that our people, taking advantage of the beautiful weather and the calm fair day, had wandered out on the prairie in every direction. It was very early; we halted for the night usually about five o'clock in the afternoon, so as to move in the morning at daybreak. Soon I met Miss Morris. I dismounted immediately, and leading my horse by the bridle, approached the young lady, happy that I could be alone with her even for a while. I inquired then why she, so young and unattended, had undertaken a journey which might wear out the strongest man.

"Never should I have consented to receive you into our caravan," said I, "had I not thought during the first few days of our journey that you were the daughter of Aunt Atkins; now it is too late to turn back. But will you be strong enough, my dear child? You must be ready to find the journey hereafter less easy than hitherto."

"I know all this," answered she, without raising her pensive blue eyes, "but I must go on, and I am happy indeed that I cannot go back. My father is in California, and from the letter which he sent me by way of Cape Horn, I learn that for some months he has been ill of a fever in Sacramento. Poor father! he was accustomed to comfort and my care, – and it was only through love of me that he went to California. I do not know whether I shall find him alive; but I feel that in going to him, I am only fulfilling a duty that is dear to me."

There was no answer to such words; moreover, all that I might object to this undertaking would be too late. I inquired then of Lillian for nearer details touching her father. These she gave with great pleasure, and I learned that in Boston Mr. Morris had been judge of the Supreme Court, or highest tribunal of the State; that he had lost his property, and had gone to the newly discovered mines of California in the hope of acquiring a new fortune, and bringing back to his daughter, whom he loved more than life, her former social position. Meanwhile, he caught a fever in the unwholesome Sacramento valley, and judging that he should die he sent Lillian his last blessing. She sold all the property that he had left with her, and resolved to hasten to him. At first she intended to go by sea; but an acquaintance with Aunt Atkins made by chance two days before the caravan started, changed her mind. Aunt Atkins, who was from Tennessee, having had her ears filled with tales which friends of mine from the banks of the Mississippi had told her and others of my daring expeditions to the famed Arkansas, of my experience in journeys over the prairies, and the care which I gave to the weak (this I consider as a simple duty), described me in such colors before Lillian that the girl, without hesitating longer, joined the caravan going under my leadership. To those exaggerated narratives of Aunt Atkins, who did not delay to add that I was of noble birth, it is necessary to ascribe the fact that Miss Morris was occupied with my person.

"You may be sure," said I, when she had finished her story, "that no one will do you any wrong here, and that care will not fail you; as to your father, California is the healthiest country on earth, and no one dies of fever there. In every case, while I am alive, you will not be left alone; and meanwhile may God bless your sweet face!"

"Thank you, captain," answered she, with emotion, and we went on; but my heart beat with more violence. Gradually our conversation became livelier, and no one could foresee that that sky above us would become cloudy.

"But all here are kind to you, Miss Morris?" asked I again, not supposing that just that question would be the cause of misunderstanding.

"Oh yes, all," said she, "and Aunt Atkins and Aunt Grosvenor, and Henry Simpson too is very good."

This mention of Simpson pained me suddenly, like the bite of a snake.

"Henry is a mule-driver," answered I curtly, "and has to care for the wagons."

But Lillian, occupied with the course of her own thoughts, had not noticed the change in my voice, and spoke on as if to herself, —

"He has an honest heart, and I shall be grateful to him all my life."

"Miss Morris," interrupted I, cut to the quick, "you may even give him your hand. I wonder, however, that you choose me as a confidant of your feelings."

When I said that she looked at me with astonishment but made no reply, and we went on together in disagreeable silence. I knew not what to say, though my heart was full of bitterness and anger toward her and myself. I felt simply conquered by jealousy of Simpson, but still I could not fight against it. The position seemed to me so unendurable that I said all at once briefly and dryly, —

"Good night, Miss Morris!"

"Good night," answered she calmly, turning her head to hide two tears that were dropping down her cheeks.

I mounted my horse and rode away again toward the point whence the sound of axes came, and where, among others, Henry Simpson was cutting a cottonwood. After a while I was seized by a certain measureless regret, for it seemed to me that those two tears were falling on my heart. I turned my horse, and next minute I was near Lillian a second time.

"Why are you crying, Miss Morris?" asked I.

"Oh, sir," said she, "I know that you are of a noble family, Aunt Atkins told me that, and you have been so kind to me."

She did everything not to cry; but she could not restrain herself, and could not finish her answer, for tears choked her voice. The poor thing! she had been touched to the bottom of her pensive soul by my answer regarding Simpson, for there was evident in it a certain aristocratic contempt; but I was not even dreaming of aristocracy, — I was simply jealous; and now, seeing her so unhappy, I wanted to seize my own collar and throttle myself. Grasping her hand, I said with animation: —

"Lillian, Lillian, you did not understand me. I take God to witness that no pride was speaking through me. Look at me: I have nothing in the world but these two hands, — what is my descent to me? Something else pained me, and I wanted to go away; but I could not support your tears. And I swear to you also, that what I have said to you pains me more than it does you. You are not an object of indifference to me, Lillian. Oh, not at all! for if you were, what you think of Henry would not concern me. He is an honest fellow, but that does not touch the question. You see how much your tears cost me; then forgive me as sincerely as I entreat your forgiveness."

Speaking in this way I raised her hand and pressed it to my lips; that high proof of respect, and the truthfulness which sounded in my request, succeeded in quieting the maiden somewhat. She did not cease at once to weep, but her tears were of another kind, for a smile was visible through them, as a sun-ray through mist. Something too was sticking in my throat, and I could not stifle my emotion. A certain tender feeling mastered my heart. We walked on in silence, and round about us the world was pleasant and sweet.

Meanwhile, the day was inclining toward evening; the weather was beautiful, and in the air, already dusky, there was so much light that the whole prairie, the distant groups of cottonwood-trees, the wagons in our train, and the flocks of wild geese flying northward through the sky, seemed golden and rosy. Not the least wind moved the grass; from a distance came to us the sound of rapids, which the Cedar River formed in that place, and the neighing of horses from the direction of the camp. That evening with such charms, that virgin land, and the presence of Lillian, brought me to such a state of mind that my soul was almost ready to fly out of me somewhere to the sky. I thought myself a shaken bell, as it were. At moments I wanted to take Lillian's hand again, raise it to my lips, and not put it down for a long time; but I feared lest this might offend her. Meanwhile she walked on near

me, calm, mild, and thoughtful. Her tears had dried already; at moments she raised her bright eyes to me; then we began to speak again, – and so reached the camp.

That day, in which I had experienced so many emotions, was to end joyfully, for the people, pleased with the beautiful weather, had resolved to have a “picnic,” or open air festival. After a supper more abundant than usual, one great fire was kindled, before which there was to be dancing. Henry Simpson had cleared away the grass purposely from a space of many square yards, and sprinkled it with sand brought from Cedar River. When the spectators had assembled on the place thus prepared, Simpson began to dance a jig, with the accompaniment of negro flutes, to the admiration of all. With hands hanging at his sides he kept his whole body motionless; but his feet were working so nimbly, striking the ground in turn with heel and toe, that their movement could hardly be followed by the eye.

Meanwhile the flutes played madly; a second dancer came out, a third, then a fourth, – and the fun was universal. The audience joined the negroes who were playing on the flutes, and thrummed on tin pans, intended for washing the gold-bearing earth, or kept time with pieces of ox-ribs held between the fingers of each hand, which gave out a sound like the clatter of castanets.

Suddenly the cry of “minstrels! minstrels!” was heard through the whole camp. The audience formed a circle around the dancing-place; into this stepped our negroes, Jim and Crow. Jim held a little drum covered with snake-skin, Crow the pieces of ox-rib mentioned already. For a time they stared at each other, rolling the whites of their eyes; then they began to sing a negro song, interrupted by stamping and violent springs of the body; at times the song was sad, at times wild. The prolonged “Dinah! ah! ah!” with which each verse ended, changed at length into a shout, and almost into a howling like that of beasts. As the dancers warmed up and grew excited, their movements became wilder, and at last they fell to butting each other with blows from which European skulls would have cracked like nutshells. Those black figures, shone upon by the bright gleam of the fire and springing in wild leaps, presented a spectacle truly fantastic. With their shouts and the sounds of the drum, pipes, and tin pans, and the click of the bones, were mingled shouts of the spectators: “Hurrah for Jim! Hurrah for Crow!” and then shots from revolvers.

When at last the black men were wearied and had fallen on the ground, they began to labor with their breasts and to pant. I commanded to give each a drink of brandy; this put them on their feet again. But at that moment the people began to call for a “speech.” In an instant the uproar and music ceased. I had to drop Lillian’s arm, climb to the seat of a wagon, and turn to those present. When I looked from my height on those forms illuminated by the fires, forms large, broad-shouldered, bearded, with knives at their girdles, and hats with torn crowns, it seemed to me that I was in some theatre, or had become a chieftain of robbers. They were honest brave hearts, however, though the rough life of more than one of these men was stormy perhaps and half wild; but here we formed, as it were, a little world torn away from the rest of society and confined to ourselves, destined to a common fate and threatened by common dangers. Here shoulder had to touch shoulder; each felt that he was brother to the next man; the roadless places and boundless deserts with which we were surrounded commanded those hardy miners to love one another. The sight of Lillian, the poor defenceless maiden, fearless among them and safe as if under her father’s roof, brought those thoughts to my head; hence I told everything, just as I felt it, and as befitted a soldier leader who was at the same time a brother of wanderers. Every little while they interrupted me with cries: “Hurrah for the Pole! Hurrah for the captain! Hurrah for Big Ralph!” and with clapping of hands; but what made me happiest of all was to see between the network of those sunburnt strong hands one pair of small palms, rosy with the gleam of the fire and flying like a pair of white doves. I felt then at once, What care I for the desert, the wild beasts, the Indians and the “outlaws”? and cried with mighty ardor, “I will conquer anything, I will kill anything that comes in my way, and lead the train even to the end of the earth, – and may God forget my right hand, if this is not true!” A still louder “Hurrah!” answered these words, and all began to sing with great enthusiasm the emigrants’ song: “I crossed the Mississippi, I will cross the Missouri.” Then Smith, the oldest among the emigrants, a miner from near Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania, spoke

in answer. He thanked me in the name of the whole company, and lauded my skill in leading the caravan. After Smith, from nearly every wagon a man spoke. Some made very amusing remarks, for instance Henry Simpson, who cried out every little while: "Gentlemen! I'll be hanged if I don't tell the truth!" When the speakers had grown hoarse at last, the flutes sounded, the bones rattled, and the men began to dance a jig again.

Night had fallen completely; the moon came out in the sky and shone so brightly that the flame of the fires almost paled before its gleams; the people and the wagons were illuminated doubly by a red and a white light. That was a beautiful night. The uproar of our camp offered a strange but pleasing contrast to the calmness and deep slumber of the prairie.

Taking Lillian's arm, I went with her around the whole camp; our gaze passed from the fires to the distance, and was lost in the waves of the tall and dark grasses of the prairie, silvery from the rays of the moon and as mysterious as spirits. We strolled alone in that way. Meanwhile, at one of the fires, two Scottish Highlanders began to play on pipes their plaintive air of "Bonnie Dundee." We both stopped at a distance and listened for some time in silence; all at once I looked at Lillian, she dropped her eyes, – and without knowing myself why I did so, I pressed to my heart long and powerfully that hand which she had rested on my arm. In Lillian too the poor heart began to beat with such force that I felt it as clearly as if on my palm; we trembled, for we saw that something was rising between us, that that something was conquering, and that we would not be to each other as we had been hitherto. As to me I was swimming already whithersoever that current was bearing me. I forgot that the night was so bright, that the fires were not distant, and that there were people around them; and I wanted to fall at her feet at once, or at least to look into her eyes. But she, though leaning on my arm, turned her head, as if glad to hide her face in the shade. I wished to speak but could not; for it seemed to me that I should call out with some voice not my own, or if I should say the words "I love" to Lillian I should drop to the earth. I was not bold, being young then, and was led not by my thoughts simply, but by my soul too; and I felt this also clearly, that if I should say "I love," a curtain would fall on my past; one door would close and another would open, through which I should pass into a certain new region. Hence, though I saw happiness beyond that threshold I halted, for this very reason it may be, – that the brightness beating from out that place dazzled me. Besides, when loving comes not from the lips, but the heart, there is perhaps nothing so difficult to speak about.

I had dared to press Lillian's hand to my breast; we were silent, for I had not the boldness to mention love, and I had no wish to speak of aught else, – it was impossible at such a time. It ended with this, that we both raised our heads and looked at the stars, like people who are praying. Then some one at the great fire called me; we returned; the festival had closed, but to end it worthily and well, the emigrants had determined to sing a psalm before going to rest. The men had uncovered their heads, and though among them were persons of various faiths, all knelt on the grass of the prairie and began to sing the psalm, "Wandering in the Wilderness." The sight was impressive. At moments of rest the silence became so perfect that the crackling of sparks in the fire could be heard, and from the river the sound of the waterfalls came to us.

Kneeling near Lillian, I looked once or twice at her face; her eyes were uplifted and wonderfully shining, her hair was a little disarranged; and, singing the hymn with devotion, she was so like an angel, that it seemed almost possible to pray to her.

After the psalm, the people went to their wagons. I, according to custom, repaired to the sentries, and then to my rest, like the others. But this time when the mosquitoes began to sing in my ears, as they did every evening, "Lillian! Lillian! Lillian!" I knew that in that wagon beyond there was sleeping the sight of my eye and the soul of my soul, and that in all the world there was nothing dearer to me than that maiden.

Chapter III

At dawn the following day we passed Cedar River successfully and came out on a level, broad prairie, stretching between that river and the Winnebago, which curved imperceptibly to the south, toward the belt of forests lying along the lower boundary of Iowa. From the morning Lillian had not dared to look in my eyes. I saw that she was thoughtful; it seemed as though she were ashamed of something, or troubled for some cause; but still what sin had we committed the evening before? She scarcely left the wagon. Aunt Atkins and Aunt Grosvenor, thinking that she was ill, surrounded her with care and tenderness. I alone knew what that meant, – that it was neither weakness, nor pangs of conscience; it was the struggle of an innocent being with the presentiment that a power new and unknown is bearing it, like a leaf, to some place far away. It was a clear insight that there was no help, and that sooner or later she would have to weaken and yield to the will of that power, forget everything, – and only love.

A pure soul draws back and is afraid on the threshold of love, but feeling that it will cross, it weakens. Lillian therefore was as if wearied by a dream; but when I understood all that, the breath in my breast was nearly stopped from joy. I know not whether it was an honorable feeling, but when in the morning I flew past her wagon and saw her, broken like a flower, I felt something akin to what a bird of prey feels, when it knows that the dove will not escape. And still I would not do an injustice to that dove for any treasure on earth, for with love I had in my heart at the same time an immense compassion. A wonderful thing however: notwithstanding my feeling for Lillian, the whole day passed for us as if in mutual offence, or at least in perplexity. I was racking my head to discover how I could be alone even for a moment with her, but could not discover. Fortunately Aunt Atkins came to my aid; she declared that the little one needed more exercise, that confinement in the stifling wagon was injuring her health. I fell upon the thought that she ought to ride on horseback, and ordered Simpson to saddle a horse for her; and though there were no side-saddles in the train, one of those Mexican saddles with a high pommel which women use everywhere on the frontier prairies, could serve her very well. I forbade Lillian to loiter behind far enough to drop out of view. To be lost in the open prairie was rather difficult, because people, whom I sent out for game, circled about a considerable distance in every direction. There was no danger from the Indians, for that part of the prairie, as far as the Winnebago, was visited by the Pawnees only during the great hunts, which had not begun yet. But the southern forest-tract abounded in wild beasts, not all of which were grass eating; wariness, therefore, was far from superfluous. To tell the truth I thought that Lillian would keep near me for safety; this would permit us to be alone rather frequently. Usually I pushed forward in time of march some distance, having before me only the two half-breed scouts, and behind the whole caravan. So it happened in fact, and I was at once inexpressibly and truly happy, the first day, when I saw my sweet Amazon moving forward at a light gallop from the direction of the train. The movement of the horse unwound her tresses somewhat, and care for her skirt, which was the least trifle short for the saddle, had painted her face with a charming anxiety. When she came up she was like a rose; for she knew that she was going into a trap laid by me so that we might be alone with each other, and knowing this she came, though blushing, and as if unwilling, feigning that she knew nothing. My heart beat as if I had been a young student; and, when our horses were abreast, I was angry with myself, because I knew not what to say. At the same time such sweet and powerful desires began to go between us, that I, urged by some unseen power, bent toward Lillian as if to straighten something in the mane of her horse, and meanwhile I pressed my lips to her hand, which was resting on the pommel of the saddle. A certain unknown and unspeakable happiness, greater and keener than all delights that I had known in life till that moment, passed through my bones. I pressed that little hand to my heart and began to tell Lillian, that if God had bestowed all the kingdoms of the earth on me,

and all the treasures in existence, I would not give for anything one tress of her hair, for she had taken me soul and body forever.

“Lillian, Lillian,” said I further, “I will never leave you. I will follow you through mountains and deserts, I will kiss your feet and I will pray to you; only love me a little, only tell me that in your heart I mean something.”

Thus speaking, I thought that my bosom would burst, when she, with the greatest confusion, began to repeat, —

“O Ralph! you know well! you know everything!”

I did not know just this, whether to laugh or to cry, whether to run away or to remain; and, as I hope for salvation to-day, I felt saved then, for nothing in the world was lacking to me. Thenceforth so far as my occupations permitted, we were always together. And those occupations decreased every day till we reached the Missouri. Perhaps no caravan had more success than ours during the first month of the journey. Men and animals were growing accustomed to order and skilled in travelling; hence I had less need to look after them, while the confidence which the people gave me upheld perfect order in the train. Besides, abundance of provisions and the fine spring weather roused joyfulness and increased good health. I convinced myself daily, that my bold plan of conducting the caravan not by the usual route through St. Louis and Kansas, but through Iowa and Nebraska, was best. There heat almost unendurable tortured people, and in the unhealthy region between the Mississippi and Missouri fevers and other diseases thinned the ranks of emigrants; here, by reason of the cooler climate, cases of weakness were fewer, and our labor was less.

It is true that the road by St. Louis was in the earlier part of it freer from Indians; but my train, composed of two or three hundred men well furnished with weapons and ready for fighting, had no cause to fear wild tribes, especially those inhabiting Iowa, who though meeting white men oftener, and, having more frequent experience of what their hands could do, had not the courage to rush at large parties. It was only needful to guard against stampedes, or night attacks on mules and horses, — the loss of draught-animals puts a caravan on the prairies in a terrible position. But against that there was diligence and the experience of sentries who, for the greater part, were as well acquainted with the stratagems of Indians as I was.

When once I had introduced travelling discipline and made men accustomed to it, I had incomparably less to do during the day, and could devote more time to the feelings which had seized my heart. In the evening I went to sleep with the thought: “To-morrow I shall see Lillian;” in the morning I said to myself: “To-day I shall see Lillian;” and every day I was happier and every day more in love. In the caravan people began by degrees to notice this; but no one took it ill of me, for Lillian and I possessed the good-will of those people. Once old Smith said in passing: “God bless you, captain, and you, Lillian.” That connecting of our names made us happy all day. Aunt Grosvenor and Aunt Atkins whispered something frequently in Lillian’s ear, which made her blush like the dawn, but she would never tell me what it was. Henry Simpson looked on us rather gloomily, — perhaps he was forging some plan in his soul, but I paid no heed to that.

Every morning at four I was at the head of the caravan; before me the scouts, some fifteen hundred yards distant, sang songs, which their Indian mothers had taught them; behind me at the same distance moved the caravan, like a white ribbon on the prairie, — and what a wonderful moment, when, about two hours later, I hear on a sudden behind me the tramp of a horse. I look, and behold the sight of my soul, my beloved is approaching. The morning breeze bears behind her her hair, which either had been loosened from the movement, or badly fastened on purpose, for the little rogue knew that she looked better that way, that I liked her that way, and that when the wind threw the tress on me I pressed it to my lips. I feign not to notice her tricks, and in this agreeable meeting the morning begins for us. I taught her the Polish phrase: “Dzien dobry” (good morning). When I heard her pronouncing those words, she seemed still dearer; the memory of my country, of my family, of years gone by, of that which had been, of that which had passed, flew before my eyes on that prairie

like mews of the ocean. More than once I would have broken out in weeping, but from shame I restrained with my eyelids the tears that were ready to flow. She, seeing that the heart was melting in me, repeated like a trained starling: "Dzien dobry! dzien dobry! dzien dobry!" And how was I not to love my starling beyond everything? I taught her then other phrases; and when her lips struggled with our difficult sounds, and I laughed at a faulty pronunciation, she pouted like a little child, feigning anger and resentment. But we had no quarrels, and once only a cloud flew between us. One morning I pretended to tighten a strap on her stirrup, but in truth the leopard Uhlan was roused in me, and I began to kiss her foot, or rather the poor shoe worn out in the wilderness. Then she drew her foot close to the horse, and repeating: "No, Ralph! no! no!" sprang to one side; and though I implored and strove to pacify her she would not come near me. She did not return to the caravan, however, fearing to pain me too much. I feigned a sorrow a hundred times greater than I felt in reality, and sinking into silence, rode on as if all things had ended on earth for me. I knew that compassion would stir in her, as indeed it did; for soon, alarmed at my silence, she began to ride up at one side and look at my eyes, like a child which wants to know if its mother is angry yet, – and I, wishing to preserve a gloomy visage, had to turn aside to avoid laughing aloud.

But this was one time only. Usually we were as gladsome as prairie squirrels, and sometimes, God forgive me, I, the leader of that caravan, became a child with her. More than once when we were riding side by side I would turn on a sudden, saying to her that I had something important and new to tell, and when she held her inquisitive ear I whispered into it: "I love." Then she also whispered into my ear in answer, with a smile and blush, "I also!" And thus we confided our secrets to each other on the prairie, where the wind alone could overhear us. In this manner day shot after day so quickly, that, as I thought, the morning seemed to touch the evening like links in a chain. At times some event of the journey would vary such pleasant monotony. A certain Sunday the half-breed Wichita caught with a lasso an antelope of a large kind, and with her a fawn which I gave to Lillian, who made for it a collar on which was put a bell, taken from a mule. This fawn we called Katty. In a week it was tame, and ate from our hands. During the march I would ride on one side of Lillian, and Katty would run on the other, raising its great black eyes and begging with a bleat for caresses.

Beyond the Winnebago we came out on a plain as level as a table, broad, rich, primeval. The scouts vanished from our eyes at times in the grass; our horses waded, as if in a river. I showed Lillian that world altogether new to her, and when she was delighted with its beauties, I felt proud that that kingdom of mine was so pleasing to her. It was spring, – April was barely reaching its end, the time of richest growth for grasses of all sorts. What was to bloom on the plains was blooming already.

In the evening such intoxicating odors came from the prairie, as from a thousand censers; in the day, when the wind blew and shook the flowery expanse, the eye was just pained with the glitter of red, blue, yellow, and colors of all kinds. From the dense bed shot up the slender stalks of yellow flowers, like our mullein; around these wound the silver threads of a plant called "tears," whose clusters, composed of transparent little balls, are really like tears. My eyes, used to reading in the prairie, discovered repeatedly plants that I knew: now it was the large-leaved kalumna, which cures wounds; now the plant called "white and red stockings," which closes its cups at the approach of man or beast; finally, "Indian hatchets," the odor of which brings sleep and almost takes away consciousness. I taught Lillian at that time to read in this Divine book, saying, —

"It will come to you to live in forests and on plains; it is well then to know them in season." In places on the level prairie rose, as if they were oases, groups of cottonwood or alder, so wreathed with wild grapes and lianas that they could not be recognized under the tendrils and leaves. On the lianas in turn climbed ivy and the prickly, thorny "wachtia," resembling wild roses. Flowers were just dropping at all points; inside, underneath that screen and beyond that wall, was a certain mysterious gloom; at the tree trunks were sleeping great pools of water of the spring-time, which the sun was unable to drink up; from the tree-tops and among the brocade of flowers came wonderful voices and

the calling of birds. When for the first time I showed such trees to Lillian and such hanging cascades of flowers, she stood as if fixed to the earth, repeating with clasped hands, —

“Oh, Ralph! is that real?”

She said that she was a little afraid to enter such a depth; but one afternoon, when the heat was great, and over the prairie was flying, as it were, the hot breath of the Texan wind, we rode in, and Katty came after us.

We stopped at a little pool, which reflected our two horses and our two forms; we remained in silence for a time. It was cool there, obscure, solemn as in a Gothic cathedral, and somewhat awe-inspiring. The light of day came in bedimmed, greenish from the leaves. Some bird, hidden under the cupola of lianas, cried, “No! no! no!” as if warning us not to go farther; Katty began to tremble and nestle up to the horses; Lillian and I looked at each other suddenly, and for the first time our lips met, and having met could not separate. She drank my soul, I drank her soul. Breath began to fail each of us, still lips were on lips. At last her eyes were covered with mist, and the hands which she had placed on my shoulders were trembling as in a fever: she was seized with a kind of oblivion of her own existence, so that she grew faint and placed her head on my bosom. We were drunk with each other, with bliss, and with ecstasy. I dared not move; but because I had a soul overfilled, because I loved a hundred times more than may be thought or expressed, I raised my eyes to discover if through the thick leaves I could see the sky.

Recovering our senses, we came out at last from beneath the green density to the open prairie, where we were surrounded by the bright sunshine and warm breeze; before us was spread the broad and gladsome landscape. Prairie chickens were fluttering in the grass, and on slight elevations, which were perforated like a sieve by prairie dogs, stood, as it were, an army of those little creatures, which vanished under the earth at our coming; directly in front was the caravan, and horsemen careering around it.

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