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Flora Lyndsay or, Passages in an Eventful Life

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FLORA LYND SAY;

OR,

PASSAGES IN AN EVENTFUL LIFE.

BY MRS. MOODIE.

AUTHOR OF "ROUGHING IT IN THE BUSH," "MARK HUR-
DLESTONE,"
"LIFE IN THE CLEARINGS," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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TO

MISS GOODING,

OF CROMER, IN THE COUNTY OF NORFOLK,

THESE VOLUMES ARE AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

BY HER ATTACHED FRIEND,

SUSANNAH MOODIE.

Belleville, Upper Canada.

**FLORA LYNDSEY;
OR,
PASSAGES IN AN EVENTFUL LIFE.**

**[1] CHAPTER I.
A MATRIMONIAL DIALOGUE.**

“Flora, have you forgotten the talk we had about emigration, the morning before our marriage?” was a question rather suddenly put to his young wife, by Lieutenant Lyndsey, as he paused in his walk to and fro the room. The fact is, that he had been pondering over that conversation for the last hour.

It had long been forgotten by his wife; who, seated upon the sofa with a young infant of three years old in her lap, was calmly watching its sleeping face with inexpressible delight. She now left off her maternal studies; and looked up at her husband, with an inquiring glance,—

“Why do you ask, dear John?”

“Are you turned Quaker, Flora, that you cannot give one a *direct* answer?”

[2] “I have not forgotten it. But we have been so happy ever since, that I have never given it a second thought. What put it into your head just now?”

“That child—and thinking how I could provide for her, in any other way.”

“Dear little pet! She cannot add much to our expenses.” And the mother bent over her sleeping child, and kissed its soft, velvet cheek, with a zest that mothers alone know.

“Not at present. But the little pet will in time grow into a tall girl; and other little pets may be treading upon her footsteps; and they must all be clothed, and fed, and educated.”

Flora, in her overflowing happiness, had dismissed all such cruel realities from her mind.

"Emigration is a terrible word, John. I wish that it could be expunged from our *English* dictionary."

"I am afraid, my dear girl, that you are destined to learn a practical illustration of its meaning. Nay, don't look so despondingly. If you intended to remain in England, you should not have married a *poor* man."

"Don't say that, John, or you will make me miserable. Our marriage made me rich in treasures, which gold could never buy. But seriously, I do not see this urgent necessity for taking such a hazardous step. I know that we are not rich—that our expectations on that score for the future [3] are very limited. We are both the younger children of large families, whose wealth and consequence is now a thing of the past. We have nothing to hope or anticipate from rich relations; but we have enough to be comfortable, and are surrounded with many blessings. Our little girl, whose presence seems to have conjured before you the gaunt image of poverty, has added greatly to our domestic happiness. Yes, little Miss Innocence! you are awake, are you? Come, crow to papa, and drive these ugly thoughts out of his head."

The good father kissed fondly the young thing seducingly held up to him. But he did not yield to the temptation, or swerve from his purpose, though Flora kissed *him*, with eyes brimful of tears.

"We are indeed happy, love. Too happy, I might say. But will it last?"

"Why not?"

"Our income is *very* small?" with a deep sigh.

"It is enough for our present wants. And we have no debts."

"Thanks to your prudent management. Yes, we have no debts. But it has been a hard battle, only gained by great self-denial, and much pinching. We have kind friends, too. But Flora, I am too proud to be indebted to friends for the common necessities of life; and without doing something to improve our scanty means, it might come to that. The narrow income which has barely supplied our wants this year, without the [4] incumbrance of a family, will not do so next. There remains no alternative but to *emigrate!*"

Flora felt that this was pressing her hard. All her affectionate ingenuity could not furnish an argument against such home truths. "Let us drop this hateful subject," said she, hastily; "I cannot bear to think about it."

"But, my dear girl, we must force ourselves to think about it, calmly and dispassionately; and having determined which is the path of duty, we must follow it out, without any reference to our own likes and dislikes. Our marriage would have been a most imprudent one, had it been contracted on any other terms; and we are both to blame that we have loitered away so many months of valuable time in happy ease, when we should have been earning independence for ourselves and our family."

"You may be right, John, — yes, I know that you are right. But it is no such easy matter to leave your home and country, and the dear friends whose society renders life a blessing and poverty endurable — to abandon a certain good for an uncertain better, to be sought for among untried difficulties. I would rather live in a cottage in England, upon brown bread and milk, than occupy a palace on the other side of the Atlantic."

"This sounds very prettily in poetry, Flora; but, my dear girl, life is made up of stern realities, and it is absolutely necessary for us to provide against the dark hour before it comes suddenly [5] upon us. Our future prospects press upon my heart and brain too forcibly to be neglected. I have thought long and painfully upon the subject, and I have come to the resolution to emigrate this spring."

"So soon?"

"The sooner the better. The longer we defer it, the more difficulties we shall have to encounter. The legacy left you by your aunt will pay our expenses out, and enable us, without touching my half-pay, to purchase a farm in Canada."

"Canada!"

Flora's eye brightened.

"Oh, I am so glad that it is not to the Cape of Good Hope!"

"In this decision, Flora, I have yielded to *your* wishes. My *own* inclinations would lead me back to a country where I have dear

friends, a large tract of land, and where some of the happiest years of my life were spent. You are not wise, Flora, to regard the Cape with such horror. No person would delight more in the beautiful and romantic scenery of that country than yourself. You have taken up a foolish prejudice against the land I love."

"It is not that, dear John. But you know, I have such a terror of the wild beasts—those dreadful snakes and lions! I never should dare to stir beyond the garden, for fear of being stung or devoured. And then, I have been bored to death [6] about the Cape, by our good friends the P—'s, till I hate the very name of the place!"

"You will perhaps one day find out your error, Flora; and your fears are perfectly absurd! Not wishing to render your emigration more painful, by taking you to a country to which you are so averse, I have made choice of Canada, hoping that it might be more to your taste. The only obstacle in the way, is the reluctance you feel at leaving your friends. Am I less dear to you, Flora, than friends and country?"

This was said so kindly, and with such an affectionate earnestness for her happiness more than his own—for it was no small sacrifice to Lyndsay to give up going back to the Cape—that it overcame all Flora's obstinate scruples.

"Oh, no, no!—you are more to me than all the world! I will try and reconcile myself to any change, for your sake!"

"Shall I go first, and leave you with your mother until I have arranged matters in Canada?"

"Such a separation would be worse than death! I would rather encounter a thousand dangers, than remain in England without you! If it must be, I will never say another word against it!"

Here followed a heavy sigh. The young husband kissed the tears from her cheek, and whispered—

"That she was his dear, good girl."

And Flora would have followed him to the deserts of Arabia. [7]

"I have had a long conversation with a very sensible, practical man," continued Lyndsay, "who has lately come to England upon colonial business. He has been a settler for some years in Canada,

and the accounts he has given me of the colony are so favourable, and hold out such encouragement of ultimate success and independence, that they have decided me in my choice of making a trial of the backwoods. I promised to meet him this morning at the Crown Inn (where he puts up), to look over maps and plans, and have some further talk upon the subject. I thought, dear, that it was better for me to consult you upon the matter before I took any decided steps. You have borne the ill news better than I expected: so keep up your spirits until I return, which will not be long."

Flora remained in deep thought for some time after the door had closed upon her husband. She could now recal every word of that eventful conversation, which they had held together the morning before their marriage, upon the subject of emigration. In the happy prospect of becoming his wife, it had not then appeared to her so terrible.

Faithfully had he reminded her of the trials she must expect to encounter, in uniting her destiny to a poor gentleman, and had pointed out emigration as the only remedy for counteracting the imprudence of such a step; and Flora, full of love [8] and faith, was not hard to be persuaded. She considered that to be his wife, endowed as he was by nature with so many moral and intellectual qualities, with a fine face and noble form, would make her the richest woman in the world: that there was in him a mine of mental wealth, which could never decrease, but which time and experience would augment, and come what might, she in the end was sure to be the gainer.

She argued thus:—"Did I marry a man whom I could not love, merely for his property, and the position he held in society, misfortune might deprive him of these, and a disagreeable companion for life would remain to remind me constantly of my choice. But a generous, talented man like Lyndsay, by industry and prudence may become rich, and then the most avaricious worlding would applaud the step I had taken."

We think after all, that Flora reasoned wisely, and, acting up to her convictions, did right. The world, we know, would scarcely agree with us; but in matters of the heart, the world is rarely consulted.

They were married, and, retiring to a pretty cottage upon the sea-coast, confined their expenditure to their limited means, and were contented and happy, and so much in love with each other and their humble lot, that up to this period, all thoughts upon the dreaded subject of emigration had been banished from one mind, at least. Flora knew her [9] husband too well to suspect him of changing a resolution he had once formed on the suggestion of duty. She felt, too, that he was right, — that painful as the struggle was, to part with all dear to her on earth, save him, that it must be made. “Yes, I can, and will dare all things, my beloved husband, for your sake,” she said. “My heart may at times rebel, but I will shut out all its weak complainings. I am ready to follow you through good and ill, — to toil for our future maintenance, or live at ease. England — my country! the worst trial will be to part from you.”

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[10] CHAPTER II. THE OLD CAPTAIN.

Flora's reveries were abruptly dispelled by a gentle knock at the door; and her "Come in," was answered by a tall, portly, handsome old lady, who sailed into the room in all the conscious dignity of black silk and white lawn.

The handsome old lady was Mrs. Kitson, the wife of the naval officer, whose ready-furnished lodgings they had occupied for the last year. Flora rose to meet her visitor, with the baby still upon her arm.

"Mrs. Kitson, I am happy to see you. Pray take the easy-chair by the fire. I hope your cough is better."

"No chance of that," said the healthy old lady, who had never known a fit of dangerous illness in her life, "while I continue so weak. Hu—hu—hu—. You see, my dear, that it is as bad as ever."

Flora thought that she never had seen a person at Mrs. Kitson's advanced stage of life with such a healthy, rosy visage. But every one has some pet weakness. Mrs. Kitson's was always fancying herself [11] ill and nervous. Now, Flora had no very benignant feelings towards the old lady's long catalogue of imaginary ailments; so she changed the dreaded subject, by inquiring after the health of the old Captain, her husband.

"Ah, my dear, he's just as well as ever,—nothing in the world ever ails him; and little he cares for the sufferings of another. This is a great day with him; he's all bustle and fuss. Just step to the window, and look at his doings. It's enough to drive a sensible woman mad. Talk of women wearing the *smalls*, indeed! it's a base libel on the sex. Captain Kitson is not content with putting on my apron, but he appropriates my petticoats also. I cannot give an order to my maid, but he contradicts it, or buy a pound of tea, but he weighs it after the grocer. Now, my dear, what would you do if the *Leaftenant* was like my husband?"

"Really, I don't know," and Flora laughed heartily. "It must be rather a trial of patience to a good housekeeper like you. But what is he about?" she cried, stepping to the window that overlooked a pretty lawn in front of the house, which commanded a fine view of

the sea. "He and old Kelly seem up to their eyes in business. What an assemblage of pots and kettles, and household stuff there is upon the lawn! Are you going to have an auction?"

"You may well think so; if that were the case, there might be some excuse for his folly. No; [12] all this dirt and confusion, which once a week drives me nearly beside myself, is what K— — calls clearing up the ship; when he and his man Friday, as he calls Kelly, turn everything topsy-turvy, and, to make the muddle more complete, they always choose my washing-day for their frolic. Pantries and cellars are rummaged over, and everything is dragged out of its place, for the mere pleasure of making a litter, and dragging it in again.

"Look at the lawn! Covered with broken dishes, earless jugs, cracked plates, and bottomless saucepans," continued Mrs. Kitson. "What a dish of nuts for my neighbours to crack! They always enjoy a hearty laugh at my expense, on Kitson's clearing-up days. But what does he care for my distress? In vain I hide up all this old trumpery in the darkest nooks in the cellar and pantry—nothing escapes his prying eyes; and then he has such a memory, that if he misses an old gallipot he raises a storm loud enough to shake down the house.

"The last time he went to London," pursued the old lady, "I collected a vast quantity of useless trash, and had it thrown into the pond behind the house. Well, when he cleared the decks next time, if he did not miss the old broken crockery, all of which, he said, he meant to mend with white lead on rainy days; while the broken bottles, forsooth, he had saved to put on the top of the brick wall, to hinder the little boys from climbing over to steal [13] the apples! Oh, dear, dear, dear! there was no end to his bawling, and swearing, and calling me hard names, while he had the impudence to tell Kelly, in my hearing, that I was the most extravagant woman in the world. Now, *I*, that have borne him seventeen children, should know something about economy and good management; but he gives me no credit at all for that. He began scolding again to-day, but my poor head could not stand it any longer; so I came over to spend a few minutes with you."

The handsome old lady paused to draw breath, and looked so much excited with this recapitulation of her domestic wrongs, that Mrs. Lyndsay thought it not improbable she had performed her own part in the scolding.

As to Flora, she was highly amused by the old Captain's vagaries. "By-the-bye," she said, "had he any luck in shooting this morning? He was out by sunrise with his gun."

The old lady fell back in her chair, and laughed immoderately.

"Shooting! Yes, yes, that was another frolic of his. But Kitson's an old fool, and I have told him so a thousand times. So you saw him this morning with the gun?"

"Why, I was afraid he might shoot Lyndsay, who was shaving at the window. The captain pointed his gun sometimes at the window, and sometimes at the eaves of the house, but as the [14] gun always missed fire, I began to regain my courage, and so did the sparrows, for they only chattered at him in defiance."

"And well they might. Why, my dear, would you believe it, he had no powder in his gun! Now, Mrs. Lyndsay, you will perhaps think that I am telling you a story, the thing is so absurd; yet I assure you that it's strictly true. But you know the man. When my poor Nelly died, she left all her little property to her father, as she knew none of her late husband's relations—never was introduced to one of them in her life. In her dressing-case he found a box of charcoal for cleaning teeth, and in spite of all that I could say or do, he insisted that it was *gunpowder*. 'Gunpowder!' says I, 'what would our Nelly do with gunpowder? It's charcoal, I tell you.'"

"Then he smelt it, and smelt it—"Tis gunpowder, Sally! Don't you think, that I know the smell of gunpowder? I, that was with Nelson at Copenhagen and Trafalgar?"

"'Tis the snuff in your nose, that makes everything smell alike,' says I. 'Do you think, that our Nelly would clean her beautiful white teeth with gunpowder?'"

"'Why not?' says he; 'there's charcoal in gunpowder. And now, Madam, if you dare to contradict me again, I will shoot you with it, to prove the truth of what I say!'"

“Well, after that, I held my tongue, though I [15] did not choose to give up. I thought to spite him, so for once I let him have his own way. He spent an hour last night cleaning his old rusty gun; and rose this morning by daybreak with the intention of murdering all the sparrows. No wonder that the sparrows laughed at him. I have done nothing but laugh ever since—so out of sheer revenge, he proclaimed a cleaning day; and he and Kelly are now hard at it.”

Flora was delighted with this anecdote of their whimsical landlord; but before she could answer his better-half, the door was suddenly opened and the sharp, keen face of the little officer was thrust into the room.

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[16] CHAPTER III. THE OLD CAPTAIN IN PERSON.

“Mrs. Lyndsay, my dear; that nurse of yours is going to hang out your clothes in front of the sea. Now, it’s hardly *decent* of her, to expose female garments to every boat that may be passing.”

The Captain’s delicacy threw poor Flora nearly into convulsions of laughter – while he continued, rather pettishly –

“She knows no more how to handle a rope than a pig. If you will just tell her to wait a bit, until I have overhauled my vessel, I will put up the ropes for you myself.”

“And hang out the clothes for you, Mrs. Lyndsay, if you will only give him the treat – and then, he will not shock the sensitive nerves of the sailors, by hanging them near the sea,” sneered the handsome old lady.

“I hate to see things done in a lubberly manner,” muttered the old tar.

“Oh, pray oblige him, Mrs. Lyndsay. He is such an old woman. I wonder he does not ask your permission to let him wash the clothes.”

[17] “Fresh water is not my element, Mrs. Kitson, though I have long known that *hot* water is yours. I never suffer a woman to touch my ropes, and Mrs. Lyndsay borrowed those ropes this morning of me. Don’t interrupt me, Mrs. K.; attend to your business, and leave me to mine. Put a stopper upon that clapper of yours; which goes at the rate of ten knots an hour – or look out for squalls.”

In the hope of averting the storm, which Flora saw was gathering on the old man’s brow, and which in all probability had been brewing all the morning, she assured the Captain, that he might take the command of her nurse, ropes, clothes, and all.

“Mrs. Lyndsay, – you are a sensible woman, – which is more than I can say of some folks,” glancing at his wife; “and I hope that you mean to submit patiently to the yoke of matrimony; and not pull one way, while your husband pulls the other. To sail well together

on the sea of life, you must hold fast to the right end of the rope and haul in the same direction."

His hand was upon the lock of the door, and the old lady had made herself sure of his exit, and was comfortably settling herself for a fresh spell of gossip at his expense, when he suddenly returned to the sofa on which Flora was seated; and putting his mouth quite close to her ear, while his little inquisitive grey eyes sparkled with intense curiosity, [18] said, in a mysterious whisper, "How is this, my dear—I hear that you are going to leave us?"

Flora started with surprise. Not a word had transpired of the conversation she had lately held with her husband. Did the old Captain possess the gift of second-sight? "Captain Kitson," she said, in rather an excited tone; while the colour flushed up into her face, "Who told you so?"

"Then it is true?" and the old fox rubbed his hands and nodded his head, at the success of his stratagem. "Who told me?—why I can't say, who told me. You know, where there are servants living in the house, and walls are thin—news travels fast."

"And when people have sharp ears to listen to what is passing in their neighbours' houses," muttered the old lady, in a provoking aside, "news travels faster still."

Flora was annoyed beyond measure at the impertinent curiosity of the inquisitive old man. She felt certain that her conversation with her husband had been overheard. She knew that Captain Kitson and his wife were notable gossips, and it was mortifying to know that their secret plans in a few hours would be made public. She replied coldly, "Captain Kitson, you have been misinformed; we may have talked over such a thing in private as a matter of speculation, but nothing at present has been determined."

"Now, my dear, that won't do; leave an old [19] sailor to find out a rat. I tell you that 'tis the common report of the day. Besides, is not the *Leaftenant* gone this morning with that scapegrace, Tom W—, to hear some lying land-shark preach about Canada."

"Lecture! Kitson," said the old lady, who was not a whit behind her spouse in wishing to extract the news, though she suffered him to be the active agent in the matter.

"Lecture or preach, it's all one; only the parson takes his text from the Bible to hold forth upon, and these agents, employed by the Canada Company, say what they can out of their own heads. The object in both is to make money. I thought the *Leaftenant* had been too long in a colony to be caught by chaff."

"My husband can judge for himself, Captain Kitson. He does not need the advice, or the interference of a third person," said Flora, colouring again. And this time she felt really angry; but there was no shaking the old man off.

"To be sure—to be sure," said her tormentor, without taking the smallest notice of her displeasure; "people are all wise in their own eyes. But what is Canada to you, my dear? A fine settler's wife you will make; nervous and delicate, half the time confined to your bed with some complaint or other. And then, when you are well, the whole blessed day is wasted in reading and writing, and coddling up the baby. I tell you [20] that sort of business will not answer in a rough country like Canada. I was there often enough during the American war, and I know that the country won't suit you,—no, nor you won't suit the country."

Finding that Mrs. Lyndsay made no answer to this burst of eloquence, he continued, in a coaxing tone—

"Now, just for once in your life, my dear, be guided by older and wiser heads than your own, and give up this foolish project altogether. Let well alone. You are happy and comfortable where you are. This is a nice cottage, quite large enough for your small family. Fine view of the sea from these front windows, and all ready furnished to your hand,—nothing to find of your own but plate and linen; a pump, wood-house and coal-bin, and other conveniences,—all under one roof. An oven—"

"Stop," cried the old lady, "you need say nothing about that, Kitson. The oven is good for nothing. It has no draught; and you cannot put a fire into it without filling the house with smoke."

"Pshaw!" muttered the old man. "A little contrivance would soon put that to rights."

"I tried my best," retorted the wife, "and I could never bake a loaf of bread in it, fit to eat."

"We all know what bad bread you make, Mrs. Kitson," said the captain. "I know that it can [21] be baked in; so hold your tongue, Madam! and don't contradict me again. At any rate, there's not a smoky chimney in the house, which after all is a less evil than a cross wife. The house, I say, is complete from the cellar to the garret. And then, the rent—why, what is it? A mere trifle—too cheap by one half,—only twenty-five pounds per annum. I don't know what possessed me, to let it so low; and then, my dear, the privilege you enjoy in my beautiful flower-garden and lawn. There is not many lodging-houses in the town could offer such advantages, and all for the *paltry* consideration of twenty-five pounds a-year."

"The cottage is pretty, and the rent moderate, Captain," said Flora. "We have no fault to find, and you have not found us difficult to please."

"Oh, I am quite contented with my tenants; I only want them to know when they are well off. Look twice before you leap once—that's my maxim; and give up this mad Canadian project, which I am certain will end in disappointment."

And with this piece of disinterested advice, away toddled our gallant naval commander, to finish with Kelly the arrangement of his pots and kettles, and superintend the right adjustment of the clothes-lines, and the hanging out of Mrs. Lyndsay's clothes.

Do not imagine, gentle reader, that this picture is over-charged. Captain Kitson is no creature of romance, (or was not, we should rather say; for he [22] has long since been gathered to his fathers); but a brave, uneducated man; who during the war had risen from before the mast to the rank of Post Captain. He had fought at Copenhagen and Trafalgar, and distinguished himself in many a severe contest on the main during those stirring times, and bore the reputation of a dashing naval officer. At the advanced age of eighty, he retained all his original ignorance and vulgarity; and was never admitted into the society which his rank in the service entitled him to claim.

The restless activity which in the vigour of manhood had rendered him a useful and enterprising seaman, was now displayed in the most ridiculous interference in his own domestic affairs, and those of his neighbours. With a great deal of low cunning, he min-