

***CHARLOTTE
M. YONGE***



***LADY HESTER;
OR, URSULA'S
NARRATIVE***

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Lady Hester; Or, Ursula's Narrative

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CHAPTER I.

SAULT ST. PIERRE.

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I write this by desire of my brothers and sisters, that if any reports of our strange family history should come down to after generations the thing may be properly understood.

The old times at Trevorsham seem to me so remote, that I can hardly believe that we are the same who were so happy then. Nay, Jaquetta laughs, and declares that it is not possible to be happier than we have been since, and Fulk would have me remember that all was not always smooth even in those days.

Perhaps not—for him, at least, dear fellow, in those latter times; but when I think of the old home, the worst troubles that rise before me are those of the back-board and the stocks, French in the school-room, and Miss Simmonds' "Lady Ursula, think of your position!"

And as to Jaquetta, she was born under a more benignant star. Nobody could have put a back-board on her any more than on a kitten.

Our mother had died (oh! how happily for herself!) when Jaquetta was a baby, and Miss Simmonds most carefully ruled not only over us, but over Adela Brainerd, my father's ward, who was brought up with us because she had no other relation in the world.

Besides, my father wished her to marry one of my brothers. It would have done very well for either Torwood or Bertram, but unluckily, as it seemed, neither of them could

take to the notion. She was a dear little thing, to be sure, and we were all very fond of her; but, as Bertram said, it would have been like marrying Jaquetta, and Torwood had other views, to which my father would not then listen.

Then Bertram's regiment was ordered to Canada, and that was the real cause of it all, though we did not know it till long after.

Bertram was starting out on a sporting expedition with a Canadian gentleman, when about ten miles from Montreal they halted at a farm with a good well-built house, named Sault St. Pierre, all looking prosperous and comfortable, and a young farmer, American in his ways—free-spoken, familiar, and blunt—but very kindly and friendly, was at work there with some French-Canadian labourers.

Bertram's friend knew him and often halted there on hunting expeditions, so they went into the house—very nicely furnished, a pretty parlour with muslin curtains, a piano, and everything pleasant; and Joel Lea called his wife, a handsome, fair young woman. Bertram says from the first she put him in mind of some one, and he was trying to make out who it could be. Then came the wife's mother, a neat little delicate, bent woman, with dark eyes, that looked, Bertram said, as if they had had some great fright and never recovered it. They called her Mrs. Dayman.

She was silent at first, and only helped her daughter and the maid to get the dinner, and an excellent dinner it was; but she kept on looking at Bertram, and she quite started when she heard him called Mr. Trevor. When they were just rising up, and going to take leave, she came up to him in a

frightened agitated manner, as if she could not help it, and said—

"Sir, you are so like a gentleman I once knew. Was any relation of yours ever in Canada?"

"My father was in Canada," answered Bertram.

"Oh no," she said then, very much affected, "the Captain Trevor I knew was killed in the Lake Campaign in 1814. It must be a mistake, yet you put me in mind of him so strangely."

Then Bertram protested that she must mean my father, for that he had been a captain in the —th, and had been stationed at York (as Toronto was then called), but was badly wounded in repulsing the American attack on the Lakes in 1814.

"Not dead?" she asked, with her cheeks getting pale, and a sort of excitement about her, that made Bertram wonder, at the moment, if there could have been any old attachment between them, and he explained how my father was shipped off from England between life and death; and how, when he recovered, he found his uncle dying, and the title and property coming to him.

"And he married!" she said, with a bewildered look; and Bertram told her that he had married Lady Mary Lupton—as his uncle and father had wished—and how we four were their children. I can fancy how kindly and tenderly Bertram would speak when he saw that she was anxious and pained; and she took hold of his hand and held him, and when he said something of mentioning that he had seen her, she cried out with a sort of terror, "Oh no, no, Mr. Trevor, I beg you will not. Let him think me dead, as I thought him." And

then she drew down Bertram's tall head to her, and fairly kissed his forehead, adding, "I could not help it, sir; an old woman's kiss will do you no harm!"

Then he went away. He never did tell us of the meeting till long after. He was not a great letter writer, and, besides, he thought my father might not wish to have the flirtations of his youth brought up against him. So we little knew!

But it seems that the daughter and son-in-law were just as much amazed as Bertram, and when he was gone, and the poor old lady sank into her chair and burst out crying, and as they came and asked who or what this was, she sobbed out, "Your brother Hester! Oh! so like him—my husband!" or something to that effect, as unawares. She wanted to take it back again, but of course Hester would not let her, and made her tell the whole.

It seems that her name was Faith Le Blanc; she was half English, half French-Canadian, and lived in a village in a very unsettled part, where Captain Trevor used to come to hunt, and where he made love to her, and ended by marrying her—with the knowledge of her family and his brother officers, but not of his family—just before he was ordered to the Lake frontier. The war had stirred up the Indians to acts of violence they had not committed for many years, and a tribe of them came down on the village, plundering, burning, killing, and torturing those whom they had known in friendly intercourse.

Faith Le Blanc had once given some milk to a papoose upon its mother's back, and perhaps for this reason she was spared, but everyone belonging to her was, she believed, destroyed, and she was carried away by the tribe, who

wanted to make her one of themselves; and she knew that if she offended them, such horrors as she had seen practised on others would come on her.

However, they had gone to another resort of theirs, where there was a young hunter who often visited them, and was on friendly terms. When he found that there was a white woman living as a captive among them, he spared no effort to rescue her. Both he and she were often in exceeding danger; but he contrived her escape at last, and brought her through the woods to a place of safety, and there her child was born.

It was over the American frontier, and it was long before she could write to her husband. She never knew what became of her letter, but the hunter friend, Piers Dayman, showed her an American paper which mentioned Captain Trevor among the officers killed in their attack. Dayman was devoted to her, and insisted on marrying her, and bringing up her daughter as his own. I fancy she was a woman of gentle passive temper, and had been crushed and terrified by all she had gone through, so as to have little instinct left but that of clinging to the protector who had taken her up when she had lost everything else; and she married him. Nor did Hester guess till that very day that Piers Dayman was not her father!

There were other children, sons who have given themselves to hunting and trapping in the Hudson's Bay Company's territory; but Hester remained the only daughter, and they educated her well, sending her to a convent at Montreal, where she learnt a good many

accomplishments. They were not Roman Catholics; but it was the only way of getting an education.

Dayman must have been a warm-hearted, tenderly affectionate person. Hester loved him very much. But he had lived a wild sportsman's life, and never was happy at rest. They changed home often; and at last he was snowed up and frozen to death, with one of his boys, on a bear hunting expedition.

Not very long after, Hester married this sturdy American, Joel Lea, who had bought some land on the Canadian side of the border, and her mother came home to live with them. They had been married four or five years, but none of their children had lived.

So it was when the discovery came upon poor old Mrs. Dayman (I do not know what else to call her), that Fulk Torwood Trevor, the husband of her youth, was not dead, but was Earl of Trevorsham; married, and the father of four children in England.

Poor old thing! She would have buried her secret to the last, as much in pity and love to him as in shame and grief for herself; and consideration, too, for the sons, for whom the discovery was only less bad than for us, as they had less to lose. Hester herself hardly fully understood what it all involved, and it only gradually grew on her.

That winter her mother fell ill, and Mr. Lea felt it right that the small property she had had for her life should be properly secured to her sons, according to the division their father had intended. So a lawyer was brought from Montreal and her will was made. Thus another person knew about it, and he was much struck, and explained to Hester that she

was really a lady of rank, and probably the only child of her father who had any legal claim to his estates. Lea, with a good deal of the old American Republican temper, would not be stirred up. He despised lords and ladies, and would none of it; but the lawyer held that it would be doing wrong not to preserve the record. Hester had grown excited, and seconded him; and one day, when Lea was out, the lawyer brought a magistrate to take Mrs. Dayman's affidavit as to all her past history—marriage witnesses and all. She was a good deal overcome and agitated, and quite implored Hester never to use the knowledge against her father; but she must have been always a passive, docile being, and they made her tell all that was wanted, and sign her deposition, as she had signed her will, as Faith Trevor, commonly known as Faith Dayman.

She did not live many days after. It was on the 3rd of February, 1836, that she died; and in the course of the summer Hester had a son, who thrived as none of her babies had done.

Then she lay and brooded over him and the rights she fancied he was deprived of, till she worked herself up to a strong and fixed purpose, and insisted upon making all known to her father. Now that her mother was gone she persuaded herself that he had been a cruel, faithless tyrant, who had wilfully deserted his young wife.

Joel Lea would not listen to her. Why should she wish to make his son a good-for-nothing English lord? That was his view. Nothing but misery, distress, and temptation could come of not letting things alone. He held to that, and there were no means forthcoming either of coming to England to

present herself. The family were well to do, but had no ready money to lay out on a passage across the Atlantic. Nor would Hester wait. She had persuaded herself that a letter would be suppressed, even if she had known how to address it; but to claim her son's rights, and make an earl of him, had become her fixed idea, and she began laying aside every farthing in her power.

In this she was encouraged, not by the lawyer who had made the will—and who, considering that poor Faith's witnesses had been destroyed, and her certificate and her wedding ring taken from her by the Indians, thought that the marriage could not be substantiated—but by a clever young clerk, who had managed to find out the state of things; a man named Perrault, who used to come to the farm, always when Lea was out, and talk her into a further state of excitement about her child's expectations, and the injuries she was suffering. It was her one idea. She says she really believes she should have gone mad if the saving had not occupied her; and a very dreary life poor Joel must have had whilst she was scraping together the passage-money. He still steadily and sternly disapproved the whole, and when at two years' end she had put together enough to bring her and her boy home, and maintain them there for a few weeks, he still refused to go with her. The last thing he said was, "Remember, Hester, what was the price of all the kingdoms of the world! Thou wilt have it, then! Would that I could say, my blessing go with thee." And he took his child, and held him long in his arms, and never spoke one word over him but, "My poor boy!"