Voyages

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**The Vanquished Lion**

Dear mamma, why do you look so very sad?” said Lewis Fenwick to his mother, as she slowly folded together the letter she had just finished reading, and burst into tears. “That letter is from papa — I know his seal. Is he ill?”

“No, my child; he is well, and will be here to-morrow.”

“Then why do you cry, mamma?”

“Lewis,” said Mrs. Fenwick, with a glance of such tender concern that it brought tears into the eyes of the affectionate boy, “you are too young to enter fully into the cause of my grief. You have only enjoyed the sunshine of life, and at present know nothing of its storms. Yes, my poor children,” she continued, as the nurse-maid entered and put little Arthur, her youngest born, an infant eighteen months old, into her arms, “you little know the trials which await you, or the sorrow which at this moment wrings your mother’s heart. Listen to me, Lewis — perhaps you may be able to comprehend me. A few weeks ago, your father was a rich man. This fine house, and these beautiful gardens, in which you have played from your infancy, were his own property; and everybody looked up to him with respect, and treated him with attention. A great change has taken place. Your father has lost all his fortune. He is now, Lewis, a poor man. This house is no longer his. It has been sold, together with the furniture, to pay his creditors; and these beautiful gardens you will play in no more. The friends who came hither so often, when we could afford to entertain them, have deserted us in our distress; and your father,
unable to maintain a genteel appearance in England, has accepted your uncle’s invitation to go out to him as a settler to the Cape of Good Hope. We are to accompany him. This letter informs me, that he has already engaged our passage in the Antelope, and to-morrow we are to bid adieu to Hampstead for ever. In another week, Lewis, we shall be upon that vast ocean, of which you have so often read, and which you have so earnestly wished to behold; and we shall see our dear friends and native land no more. It is this thought which pains me, Lewis — which makes me weep. God will give me strength, for your sakes, my dear children, to support this great trial, but at present I feel it very hard to bear.”

“And shall I indeed sail in a great ship across the wide sea? and go to that beautiful country, about which papa was reading the other night in Mr. Thompson’s Travels? and see the great desert which Mr. Pringle describes in his beautiful poem? and the ostriches and the lions, and all the wild beasts which he saw?” said Lewis, his eyes sparkling with delight. “Is not that the land, mamma, where the oranges, and lemons, and figs, and grapes, grow in the gardens, the same as our pears and apples do here? Do not weep, mamma! — We shall be so happy.”

“I have no doubt, Lewis, that you will learn to love the strange land; and perhaps, my boy, I may learn to love it, for your sake. But, Lewis, you cannot tell what it is for persons of my age to part from the country in which they were born; in which the best years of their life have passed calmly away in the bosom of a happy home, and surrounded by dear friends. The Cape will soon become as dear to you as England is now, and the recollections of these pleasant scenes will appear to you like the indistinct outlines of a dream. But, Lewis, I am too old to forget. The love of country is one of the most powerful feelings in the human breast, and the mind ever dwells upon the land of our birth with greater affection, when impressed with the certainty of beholding it no more. But God, my dear child, has appointed the future; and it is weak and sinful in shortsighted mortals like us to murmur at his will. To submit
with cheerfulness to the dispensations of Providence is to overcome the world, and to disarm sorrow of its sting."

Here the conversation ended, and Lewis went out to work in his little garden as usual; forgetting that it was for the last time, for his thoughts were entirely taken up with what his mother had told him; and, boy-like, he looked forward with pleasure to the long voyage he was about to take. In the morning, the return of his father, and the bustle and confusion of packing, left Master Lewis no time for castle-building. He was proud of being made useful, and thought himself happy and highly favoured in being allowed to hold string and hand parcels. But, when all was over, and the house was dismantled of the last piece of furniture, and the heavy travelling trunks alone occupied the floor of the once-splendid dining room, Lewis began to think that the scene wore rather a serious aspect. His father stood pensively leaning against the bow-window which fronted the road, anxiously watching for the arrival of the coach, which was to take them away. His mother was seated on a large box, in a dejected attitude, holding her infant on her knee. His venerable grandmother, and his two aunts, were weeping beside her; and Lewis, feeling for the first time the sadness of a final separation from these kind friends, crept to his mother's feet, and, sitting down upon the uncarpeted floor, burst into tears.

The sound of approaching wheels, and the blast of the coachman's horn, roused all parties from their stupor of grief. Then came hurried and passionate adieus — arms were enfolded — and eyes, which had long ceased to hold acquaintance with tears, ran over — and hearts were united in the close embrace which precedes an everlasting separation. "God bless you! God grant you a safe and happy voyage, and protect and prosper you in a foreign land!" burst from pale lips; while some of their friends were too much agitated to express in words their silently eloquent farewell. "Write to us soon, Edward! and tell us all that happens to you and the dear children on the voyage," said Mrs. Fenwick, tightly pressing the hand of her son. "Think how precious your letters will be when these old eyes must see
you no more.” — “This is too much,” said Mr. Fenwick, pressing his mother more closely to his heart — “These partings are worse than death.”

The old servants now crowded round their once dear master and mistress, to take their final farewell. In moments like these, the distinctions of rank are forgotten, and the best feelings of the heart alone prevail; and hands, hardened with labour, are pressed affectionately as if they had always been accustomed to exchange reciprocal demonstrations of kindness. It was with feelings like these that Mr. Fenwick’s family parted from their faithful domestics.

“The coach waits, sir,” said the old gardener, as he entered the room, respectfully touching his hat, whilst his tearful eyes were anxiously turned upon his master. Mr. Fenwick understood the old man’s look. “Robert,” he said, kindly taking him by the hand, “you served my father faithfully for twenty years — do not forget his son.”

“Oh, sir! — ” The poor fellow could add no more. He turned round to his mistress, to conceal his emotion. “My lady, shall I carry Master Arthur to the coach?” Mrs. Fenwick placed the sleeping infant in the arms of the old man, who hurried off with his precious burden, imprinting, by the way, a kiss on his dimpled hands, and breathing over him a fervent prayer that he might yet return, a rich and worthy gentleman, to his native land.

The last look was given — the last wave of the hand had left the heart silent and the eyes dim — when Mr. Fenwick and his family found themselves rapidly advancing towards the place of their embarkation. When the ocean, with its wide expanse of moving waters, burst upon their sight, Lewis, unable to control his feelings, amused the sadness of the party with exclamations of wonder and delight. The next morning a boat conveyed them on board the Antelope, the noble and swift-sailing vessel, which sat like a sea-bird upon the waters, spreading her broad, white pinions to the fresh breeze. Lewis, captivated with the novelty of his situation, wondered why his mother wept, as she continued to watch, with streaming eyes, the cliffs of her
native isle, retreating for ever from her view. "Ah, dear home and country!" she exclaimed; "friends of my youth, farewell, farewell!" The dim veil of approaching night descended slowly upon the waters, and soon hid these beloved objects from her sight.

At that delightful age, when the heart is too tender to retain any lasting impressions of sorrow — when the joy of the present moment drowns the remembrance of yesterday's grief — Lewis Fenwick soon forgot, in the novelty of surrounding objects, the dark features of that painful separation. Their voyage was prosperous; and their fellow-passengers, like themselves, were mostly respectable families, going out as settlers to the Cape. In a few days the party regained their usual cheerfulness.

Mr. Fenwick's family was but small; Lewis, a fine lad of ten years, and Arthur, the little one, to whom my readers have likewise been introduced. Death had thinned the infant band, and left a wide space between the ages of the brothers. Arthur was still designated the baby by his old nurse and mamma; while Lewis began to look about him, to think and act for himself, and to imagine that he was already more than half a man. Dearly did he love little Arthur, who, as a weakly infant, had been made a general nursling and pet; and Mrs. Fenwick regarded him as a treasure, in the possession of which Heaven had bestowed upon her a peculiar blessing.

When the Cape of Storms rose towering, like a crown, above the turbulent billows, which chafe and roar like subdued lions at its majestic feet, Lewis hailed its rocky face with enthusiastic delight. The nearer they approached, the more eloquent he became; and Mr. Fenwick, scarcely less interested than his son, listened with paternal emotion to the outpourings of a heart first keenly awakened to a sense of the sublime and beautiful. The first rays of the sun had scarcely turned the waves into rolling masses of light, on the ensuing morning, before Lewis and his father were upon deck. Struck with the magnificence of the scene, he turned his kindling eyes upon his father, and said, "Papa! this shall be my country. Look at the sea — look at the
mountains! Are they not grand? — shooting their tall heads upwards, as though they would pierce the clouds, and bid good-morrow to the sun! What would my school-fellows say, could they stand here, and look upon this glorious scene with me? The hills we thought so high at Greenwich and Hampstead are mere mole-hills, and less, when compared with these lofty mountains."

Mr. Fenwick and his family made but a short stay at Cape Town, where they were met by his uncle, Mr. Clayton, with whom they were to proceed on their journey towards the interior. Mr. Clayton had been for many years settled at the Cape. Heaven had blessed his basket and his store, and he was the envied possessor of one of the finest estates in the colony. But the reward of his industry could not compensate for the loss of those for whom Mr. Clayton had so successfully laboured. In the short space of eighteen months, death had bereft him of an affectionate wife and his son and daughter, and he looked forward to the arrival of his favourite nephew, and his young family, with the greatest interest, hoping to find in their society a mitigation of the grief which had so long preyed upon his spirits. The party left Cape Town, and proceeded towards the eastern frontier in a horse-waggon, accompanied by a party of Hottentots and two faithful domestic slaves. For a few days Lewis felt the prejudices of colour operating very forcibly upon his mind against the natives of the country, which, from this period, he was to consider as his own. Neither his father’s arguments, nor the entreaties of his mother, could induce him to go near, or hold any communication with their dark-skinned escort. One of the slaves in particular seemed greatly to excite his aversion. "Mamma," he said one day, while the horses were putting to, "I hate that ugly Charka. I cannot bear to look at him; I feel so afraid of him. I hope he does not always live with my uncle."

"He seems a faithful creature, Lewis," said Mrs. Fenwick; "and it grieves me to see such a cruel trait in your character. Why should you regard with aversion a fellow-creature, whom God has endowed with rational faculties and feelings as keen as your own, merely because his skin is
of a different hue. To look upon Charka with such abhorrence, is to reproach your Maker. Your fair face and light hair may excite feelings of a similar nature in the breast of the African. To be black is no disgrace — to be fair is no merit of yours. God has formed you both, and adapted your complexions to the countries in which you were born. The consideration that Charka is a slave should produce in your bosom feelings of compassion and tenderness, instead of hatred and disgust."

"Mamma," said Lewis, thoughtfully, "I am wrong. But what is a slave?"

"A fellow-creature, Lewis, a brother, or sister, in the bonds of Nature, who has been most unjustly and cruelly made the property of his fellow-men. To be torn from their country — to be exposed in the public market-place — to be sold like beasts of burden — to be separated from fathers, and mothers, and brothers, and sisters, and husbands, and wives, and children — to be worked beyond their strength — to have no settled home — to receive no wages for their labour — to be inhumanly punished with a cart- whip for the least offence, and often for no offence at all — to have no one to comfort them when sad, to nurse them when sick, or to feel the least pity for such aggravated sufferings — to pass a childhood, a youth, and a manhood of toil, and an old age of disease and neglect — this, Lewis, is slavery — this, my boy, is to be a slave."

"Then why does such a kind man as my uncle keep slaves?" said Lewis.

"Because, my dear, like many of his countrymen, he has never rightly considered the subject. He is not aware that, in following the customs of the land, he is committing a great national crime. I trust, Lewis, the time is at hand, when your uncle will break the yoke from off the neck of his slaves, and that the British government will restore to the wronged and degraded African his rights as a man."

"Poor Charka! I am sorry for him now," said Lewis. "Mamma, I should not like to be a slave."

With a mind, even at that early age, keenly alive to the beauties of nature, the most barren desert through
which they travelled awakened in the breast of young Lewis feelings of interest and pleasure; and, whenever the parties halted to dine, and refresh their weary cattle, Lewis bounded away to explore, as far as he dared, the country round. In these little excursions he was generally attended by two of the Hottentots, armed with guns, for fear of being suddenly attacked by wild beasts. But on one of these occasions he outran his companions, whilst collecting, with childish delight, different specimens of the beautiful heaths that grow wild in these desert places, making the barrenness of nature lovely with their delicate blossoms. As fast as he gathered one piece, another shrub at a distance caught his fancy, and tempted his steps to rove farther into the wilderness, till, unconscious of his danger, he strayed far beyond his party, which, together with the waggon, were no longer in sight. Not in the least terrified by this circumstance, he sat down in the shade of some stunted bushes, and began arranging his nosegay, thinking to please his mother with the beauty of the flowers he had walked so far to procure. Overpowered by the heat of the climate, the bunch of treasures dropped from his hand, and the English boy fell fast asleep. He had not been long in this state, when he dreamed that he had fallen into the sea, and was struggling with the cold waters, which, rolling continually over him, at length deprived him of breath, and rendered him incapable of longer struggling against them. Yielding himself up to his fate, he awoke with a stifled cry, suffering all the horrors of strangulation.

His eyes unclosed, and the glowing heavens flashed once more upon them; but Lewis found himself not only unable to rise, but held down to the earth by a grasp, which appeared to him like the hand of a giant. A shiver of agony ran through his frame, as a large snake, which had wreathed itself about his neck during his slumbers, reared up its arrowy head, and fixed its baleful eyes upon his face. That look blinded the unhappy boy. The earth heaved beneath him — the skies darkened above him — one faint sigh escaped his lips — one spasm of terror convulsed his frame — and he sunk into a state of absolute unconsciousness.
When his senses returned, he found himself supported on the dark breast of Charka, the negro, who was looking at him with a tender and compassionate glance, and his deadly enemy lay extended near them upon the sand. "Oh, Massa Lewis, me tank God you no die," said the black. "Poor missa weep — good massa weep — all weep for young massa if he die."

"Dear Charka," said Lewis, overcome with remorseful feelings for having disliked the generous preserver of his life, and keenly alive to the great service he had rendered him, "what shall I do for you? how shall I thank you for saving my life?"

The eyes of the black glistened with joy as he pressed the fair youth to his dark bosom. "Dear young massa, think no ill of black man — look no dark upon him. Black man have a large heart — black man love all that treat him well."

"Charka," said Lewis, "I did not love you once — but I love you now. I will never speak unkindly to you again. Come, let us go to my mother."

"She afraid you lost, massa — she send me out to find you. Me look a long time in vain — me at last see flowers — then great big snake — and then young massa. Me steal behind the bush — lie down quite flat on the sand, and seize him by the throat, and cut off his head with large knife. Massa quite dead then — no move — no look up. Massa live again, and quite kind to Charka."

When Lewis came up to the waggon, he found all the party in the greatest alarm, occasioned by his absence. Mrs. Fenwick was prepared to chide her son; but, when informed of his miraculous preservation, her angry feelings were turned into joy; and she thanked the negro with tears of gratitude for his prompt assistance.

"Oh, that I could reward Charka for this great kindness!" said Lewis, looking anxiously up in Mr. Clayton's face. "Well, my boy," said his uncle, taking his hand, "if you had it in your power, what would you do in return?"

"I would make him free!" said Lewis.

Mr. Clayton started, and surveyed his nephew's animated countenance with surprise.
"And why would you do this, Lewis?"

"Because, sir, I feel that it is impossible for any man to be happy whilst he remains a slave!"

Mr. Clayton was struck to the heart. He remained silent for a few minutes, then, turning to Lewis, he said, "You shall have your wish; from this hour your deliverer is free! And not Charka alone — I will emancipate every slave on my location, for that word of yours."

From that hour the most tender and grateful attachment subsisted between the negro and Lewis; and, upon their arrival at his uncle's location, Lewis employed his leisure hours in teaching Charka to read, while the negro, in return, taught him to hunt and to shoot, and the two friends were seldom long apart.

Mr. Clayton had taken great pains in cultivating a beautiful garden round his house, which produced all sorts of fruits indigenous to the climate; and in a sequestered nook of this little paradise he had erected a small urn to the memory of his wife and children. At the base of this little pillar grew the sweetest flowers, nourished by the waters of a clear spring, which had its source only a few yards from the spot. By the margin of this spring Lewis would sit for hours in the cool of the day, with little Arthur upon his knees, conning his tasks; and when he was absent with his father and uncle, Arthur knew the path to the spring, and would play during the greater part of the day among the shrubs and flowers. Though concealed by the trees, the spot was so near at hand, and so close to the house, that Mrs. Fenwick felt no uneasiness at her darling amusing himself in the open air.

One morning, Mr. Fenwick, in great haste, came in, and told his wife that a lion had been seen prowling, late the evening before, near the garden, and that several of his sheep had been carried off; and Mr. Clayton had summoned all the neighbouring boors to track him to his retreat.

"Oh, papa, let me go to the lion-hunt!" said Lewis, springing from his seat, and seizing his little gun. He met his mother's anxious glance. "Dear mamma, I never saw a wild lion — I should like so much to go."
“Let the boy go, Mary,” said Mr. Fenwick; “Charka and I will take care that he shall not be hurt.”

Mrs. Fenwick gave a reluctant consent, and watched the party leave the garden with a heavy heart. They had been gone about two hours, when she suddenly missed little Arthur. “What has become of baby, Dinah?” she said to her dark female domestic.

“He is playing in the garden, ma’am; I saw him chasing a butterfly not many minutes ago.”

“I do not feel easy at his being out to-day,” said Mrs. Fenwick. “I will go and fetch him in.”

Wishing to gather some figs, she provided herself with a basket for that purpose, and had nearly filled it, when she thought she heard a low growling near the spring. The safety of her child immediately flashed across her mind, and, putting down her basket on the pillar that Mr. Clayton had erected to the memory of his wife and children, she hastened to the spot. But what were her feelings, the terror, the agony, which convulsed her frame, when she beheld the fair child extended senseless on the ground, beneath the very paw of the tremendous monarch of the desert. There was no time for reflection — no time for indulging in selfish fears. Maternal love conquered female timidity. She had not leisure to scan the formidable power of her savage opponent; she only saw the perilous situation of her child; she was only alive to his danger. One brief prayer to the Father of Mercies to protect her from evil, and deliver her boy from the paw of the lion, rose in her heart as she sprang forward, and, flinging herself on her knees before the majestic animal, she snatched the child from the earth, and, pressing it to her beating bosom, continued to look the lion steadily in the face, with eyes brimful of tears, and with an expression of earnest and heart-rending supplication, as though he were endowed with human feelings, and could understand her silently eloquent appeal.

But, if the animal could not comprehend the mother’s anguish, there was One who had compassion upon her grief, and restrained his fury. The mother’s prayer had been
heard; and the lion, who, on her first approach, had fiercely seized in his teeth part of the drapery depending from her shoulders, and already raised one of his tremendous paws to inflict a mortal wound, disarmed by her dauntless courage, appeared, in his turn, to yield to the influence of fear.

At this moment a shot was fired from a steep bank above, and Lewis cried out, in a tone of horror, “The lion, Charka! the lion! — Arthur is dead, and he will kill mamma!”

“God has vanquished him,” said Mrs. Fenwick, rising from her knees, as the lordly beast slowly turned round, and walked majestically from the spot. “Let not a shot be fired — I would not act so ungenerously to a noble foe.”

In a few minutes she was folded in the arms of her husband, and surrounded by the hunting party, who listened with mingled feelings of wonder and gratitude to the marvellous tale. A handful of water from the spring soon brought the rosy tints of life back to the rescued infant’s cheek. Mrs. Fenwick returned to the house, and, carrying her little boy into her own chamber, she sunk once more upon her knees, and returned her heartfelt acknowledgments to the Almighty Power, who had assisted her in the hour of danger, vanquished the lion, and delivered her child from death.

Ackermann’s Juvenile Forget Me Not: A Christmas, New Year’s, and Birthday Present for 1832 (1831): 97–115.