BEADLE'S

AMERICAN LIBRARY

SIX PENCE

THE CHOICEST WORKS OF THE MOST POPULAR AUTHORS

ALICE WILDE

GEO. ROUTLEDGE & SONS, THE BROADWAY, LUDGATE.

Title: Alice Wilde: The Raftman's Daughter
       A Forest Romance

Author: Metta V. Victor

Release Date: August 14, 2014 [EBook #46586]

Language: English

Produced by David Edwards, Demian Katz and the Online
Distributed Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net (This
file was produced from images generously made available
by The Internet Archive)

"I must return to the house! There's something in the garret I must have."—page 34.

ALICE WILDE:

THE

RAFTSMAN'S DAUGHTER.

A

FOREST ROMANCE.

BY MRS. METTA V. VICTOR.

NEW YORK:
IRWIN P. BEADLE AND COMPANY,
141 WILLIAM ST., CORNER OF FULTON.

ALICE WILDE.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I.

THE CABIN HOME.

"That ar' log bobs 'round like the old sea-sarpint," muttered Ben Perkins to himself, leaning forward with his pole-hook and trying to fish it, without getting himself too deep in the water. "Blast the thing! I can't tackle it no how;" and he waded in deeper, climbed on to a floating log, and endeavored again to catch the one which so provokingly evaded him.

Ben was a "hand" employed in David Wilde's saw-mill, a few rods farther up the creek, a young fellow not without claims to admiration as a fine specimen of his kind and calling. His old felt-hat shadowed hair as black as an Indian's, and made the swarthy hue of his face still darker; his cheeks and lips were red, and his eyes blacker than his hair. The striped wammus bound at the waist by a leather belt, and the linen trowsers rolled up to the knees, were picturesque in their way and not unbecoming the lithe, powerful figure.

Ben had bobbed for saw-logs a great many times in his life, and was a person too quick and dextrous to meet with frequent accidents; but upon this day, whether the sudden sight of a tiny skiff turning the bend of the river just below and heading up the creek threw him off his guard, or what it was, certain it is, that stretching forward after that treacherous log, he lost his balance and fell into the water. He did not care for the ducking; but he cared for the eyes which saw him receive it; his ears tingled and his cheeks burned as he heard the silvery laugh which greeted his misfortune. Climbing up on to a log again, he stood dripping like a merman and blushing like a peony, as the occupant of the boat rowed nearer.

"Keep out the way them logs, Miss Alice, or ye'll get upsot!" he cried, glad of an excuse for attracting attention from his own mishap.

"I can take care of myself, thank you," was the gay answer. "Do you see father's boat coming, anywhere in sight, Ben? He was to be home this afternoon; and I took a fancy to go down and meet him."

"I don't see nuthin' of it. That war a mighty big raft he took down to Centre City; the biggest raft that ever floated on that river, I reckon. He mought not be home for two or three days yet, Miss Alice. Gorry! but won't he hev a heap of money

when he sells that ar' raft!"

"And he'll be sure to bring me something pretty—he always does."

"He knows what's what," responded Ben, stealing a sidelong, admiring glance at the sweet, young face in the skiff.

If a compliment was intended, it was not understood by the hearer.

"Yes, father always knows *just* what suits me best. Dear father! I hope he *will* come home to-night. I've been out picking blackberries for supper—just look at my hands," and she held up two pretty, dimpled hands, as if to show how charming they were, instead of to betray the purple-tipped fingers.

But Alice Wilde did not know they were pretty, in sober truth, for she had never been praised, flattered, nor placed in a situation where she could institute comparisons.

"Well, Ben, good-by. I shall float down the river a few miles, and if I don't see him, I can row back alone."

"You're mighty pert with the oars, for a gal. I never seed no woman 't could row a boat like you, Miss Alice."

"Thank you," she said, with a bright smile, as she turned her little birchen skiff about and struck out into the river again.

Ben watched that graceful form until it was out of sight, heaving a sigh, as he turned again to his work, which told how absorbed he had been.

Drifting down the river, under the shadow of precipitous bluffs, while the sunshine flecked with gold the rolling prairie-land upon the opposite side, the young girl sang wild negro-melodies which she had learned of the two old colored people who formed her father's retinue of house-servants. Rich and clear, her voice floated through those beautiful solitudes, heard only by the envious birds in the trees which overtopped the bluffs.

Presently she had listeners, of whom she was unaware. An abrupt bend in the river hid from her the little boat with its single sail, fluttering like a butterfly against the current. It held two persons—David Wilde, the owner and captain of the raft of which Ben had spoken, a rough, striking-looking man of middle age, attired in a pink calico shirt and brown linen jacket and trowsers, who sat at the tiller smoking his pipe; and a young man of four and twenty, extremely good-looking and fashionably-dressed.

"What's that?" exclaimed the latter, as the sweet voice thrilled over the water.

"That's herself, sure," replied the raftsman, listening; "she's comin' to meet me, I reckon. It's just like her."

"And who's 'herself?'" queried the other, laughing.

"My cub, sir. Won't yer take yer flute out of yer pocket and give her a tune, before she sees us? It'll set her to wonderin' what 'n earth it is."

The young man put the pieces of his flute together, and joined in the strain, rising loud and exultant upon the breeze; the voice ceased; he stopped playing; the voice began, and again he accompanied it; it sang more exuberently than ever, and the flute blent in with it accordantly.

It was not until they were nearly upon her fairy bark that they came in sight of the singer, her bright hair flying, her cheeks redder than roses with the double exercise of rowing and singing. Philip Moore thought he had never beheld so lovely an apparition.

"Oh, father, I'm so glad you're home again. Did you hear that beautiful echo?" she asked, her eyes all aglow with surprise and pleasure. "I never heard any thing like it before. It must be the rocks."

"'Twant the rocks—'twas this here gentleman," said David Wilde, smiling. "Mr. Moore, this is my daughter Alice."

Unknown to himself, his tone and look were full of pride as he presented her to his companion, who never paid a more sincere tribute of admiration to any woman, however accomplished, than he did to the artless child who returned his deep bow with so divine a blush.

"I thought I'd come to meet you, and run a race home with you," she said to her father, with a fond look.

"That's just like my little cub—allers on hand. Wall, go ahead! the breeze is fair, and I guess we'll beat ye. Hope ye'll make good time, fur I'm beginning to get rather growly in the region of the stomach."

"Pallas expects you," returned Alice, laughing.

"If your skiff were large enough for two, I'd take those oars off your hands," said the young gentleman.

"Nobody ever touches this, but myself," and away sped the fairy affair with its mistress, darting ahead like an arrow, but presently dropping behind as they

tacked, and then shooting past them again, the young girl stealing shy glances, as she passed, at the stranger who was watching her with mingled curiosity and admiration. So sweetly bashful, yet so arch and piquant—so rustic, yet so naturally graceful—so young, he could not tell whether she esteemed herself a child or a woman—certainly she was very different from the dozen of tow-headed children he had taken it for granted must run wild about the 'cabin' to which he was now about to make a visit.

"How many children have you, Mr. Wilde?"

"She's all. That's my mill you see just up the mouth of the creek thar. We're nigh on to my cabin now; when we've rounded that pint we shall heave in sight. Seems to me I smell supper. A cold snack is very good for a day or two, but give me suthin' of Pallas' getting up after it. Thar's the cabin!"

Philip had been following with his eyes the pretty sailor, who had already moored her craft to the foot of a huge elm, overhanging the gravelly shore from a sloping bank above, and now stood in the shadow of the tree awaiting them.

If it had not been for the blue smoke curling up in thin wreaths from a stick chimney which rose up in the rear, he would hardly have discovered the dwelling at first sight—a little one-story log-house, so completely covered with clambering vines that it looked like a green mound. Tartarian honeysuckles waved at the very summit of the chimney, and wild-roses curtained every window.

Taking upon herself the part of hostess, Alice led the way to the house. Philip was again agreeably surprised, as he entered it. He had read of squatter life, and considered himself "posted" as to what to expect—corn-bread and bacon, an absence of forks and table-cloths, musquitoes, the river for a wash-basin, sand for soap, the sun for a towel, and the privilege of sharing the common bed. But upon entering the cabin, he found himself in a large room, with two smaller apartments partitioned from the side; the cooking seemed to be done in a shanty in the rear. The table was set in the center of the room, with a neat cloth, and a great glass plate, heaped with blackberries, stood upon it, and was surrounded by a wreath of wild-flowers woven by the same dimpled hands which had managed the oars so deftly.

"'Clar to gracious, masser, you tuk us unbeknown."

The new speaker was an old negro woman, portly and beaming, who appeared at the back door, crowned with a yellow turban, and bearing in her left hand that scepter of her realm, the rolling-pin.

"But not unprepared, hey, Pallas?"

"Wall, I dunno, masser. I didn't spec' the pickaninny 'ud eat more 'n *one* roas' chicken. But thar's two in de oven; for, to tell de trute, masser, I had a sense dat you war a comin'; and I know'd if you wasn't, me and my ole man wouldn't be afraid of two fowls."

"But I've brought home company, Pallas."

"Hev you now, masser? I'se mighty glad to hear it. I'd as soon wait on masser's frien's as to sing de Land of Canaan. Yer welcome," she added, dropping a courtesy to the guest with as much importance as if she were mistress of the house—as, in fact, she had been, in most matters, for many long years. He made her a deep and gracious bow, accompanied by a smile which took her old heart by storm.

Retreating to the kitchen outside, where Saturn, her husband, had been pressed into service, and sat with an apron over his knees pareing potatoes, buoyed up by the promise of roast chicken from his wife, she told him as she rolled and cut out her biscuits:

"The finest gentleum she had sot eyes on sence she left ole Virginny. His smile was enough to melt buttah—jus' de smile what a sweet-mannered young gentleum ought to have. She was mighty glad," she added, in a mysterious whisper, "dat ar' pickaninny was no older."

"Wha' for?" queried Saturn, pausing, with a potato on the end of his knife, and a look of hopeless darkness on his face, barring the expanding whites of his eyes.

"You nebbah could see tru a grin'-stone till I'd made a hole in it for yer. It's a wonder I tuk up wid such an ole fool as you is, Saturn. If yer eyes were wurf half as much as dem pertaters' eyes, yer could see for yerself. Hasn't masser swore agin dem city gentleum?"

"He's swore—dat's so."

"And he never would forgive one as would come and steal away his precious child—nebbah!" continued Pallas, lifting her rolling-pin threatingly at the bare thought. "If he war rich as gold, and lubbed her to distruction, 'twouldn't make a speck o' difference. He's jealous of the very ground she walks on; and he hates dem smoof-spoken city folks."

"Do you suspec' he's a kidnapper—dat ar' vis'ter?" asked Saturn, his eyes growing still bigger, and looking toward the door as if he thought of the

possibility of the handsome young stranger carrying *him* off.

"You is born a fool, and you can't help it. Put 'em 'taters in de pot, and mind yer own bisness. I want some more wood for dis fiah—immejetly!"

When Pallas said "immejetly!" with that majestic air, there was nothing left for her worser half save to obey, and he retreated to the wood-pile with alacrity. On going out he run against Ben Perkins, who had been standing by the open door, unperceived, for the last five minutes.

"Why, Ben, dat you?" asked Pallas, good-naturedly, not dreaming that he had overheard her confidential conversation.

"Yes; I came up to the house to seen if Captain Wilde had any orders for the mill to-night. I see him when he passed the creek. Who's with him, Pallas?"

The old colored woman gave a sudden sharp glance at the youth's troubled face.

"It's a frien' for all I know. What bisness is it of yours to be askin'?"

"I s'pose I hain't no business. Do you think it's likely it's anybody as expects to marry Miss Alice?" his voice trembled, and he looked at his boots as he asked the question.

"Marry Miss Alice! What a simpl'un you is, Ben. Wha's that pickaninny but a chile yet, I'se like to know? a little chit as don't know nothin' 'bout marryin' nobody. 'Sides that, long as her fadder libs, she'll never marry, not if it war a king. He'd be mad as fury ef any one was to dar' to speak of such a thing. Humf! my pickaninny, indeed!" with an air of scorn and indignation deeply felt by the youth, whose face was flushing beneath the implied rebuke. "Ef you'll stop a few minutes, I'll give yer some of dese soda biscuits," she said, after a brief silence, secretly pitying a trouble at which she had shrewdly guessed, though she resented the audacity of the hope from which it sprang. "Dat ar' man-cook what gets up the vittles for the mill-hands can't make sech biscuits as mine. Stop now, and hab some, won't yer?"

"Thank ye, Pallas, I ain't hungry," was the melancholy reply—melancholy when proceeding from a hearty, hard-working young man, who *ought* to have been hungry at that hour of the day. He turned away, and without even going to the cabin-door to inquire of Mr. Wilde as he had proposed, struck into the pine-woods back of the garden-patch.

CHAPTER II.

PALLAS AND SATURN.

Supper was over, and David Wilde was cutting with his jack-knife the strings of several packages which had accompanied him on his trip back from Center City, where he had disposed of his raft. His guest sat upon a wooden settle, as much interested as the others in the proceedings, though his eyes were fixed mostly upon the happy girl, who, with all of her sex's love of finery, was upon her knees on the floor, assisting, with smiling eyes and eager fingers, at the pleasant task of bringing forth the contents of these packages. A dark-blue dress of the finest merino, a rich shawl, and some pretty laces for collars and ruffles rewarded her search. There was another package which was all her own, with which she was equally delighted; it was made up of a dozen of books, whose titles she eagerly read before she continued her explorations.

"Here's a dress Mr. Moore picked out for you," said the raftsman, maliciously, unfolding a gorgeous red and yellow calico.

"But I hadn't seen you, you know," returned Philip coloring.

At this moment Pallas, who had an eye upon the bundles, came in on a pretence of clearing off the table.

"Come and look at my beautiful presents, Pallas," cried her young mistress.

"You've got little les'n an angel fer a fadder, my dear chile," ejaculated that personage, catching sight of the calico from the corner of her eye while admiring the merino.

Alice looked up into the rough sun-burnt face of her father with a smile; the idea of his being an angel was not so ludicrous to her as it was to their guest.

"Here's somethin' to help you along with yer sewing," continued David, taking a little box containing a gold thimble from his jacket-pocket. "See if it fits," and he placed it on the little fair hand.

"It sets to your finger like a cup to an acorn," exclaimed Pallas. "Thar's none like masser to tell per-*cisely* what a person wants and is a wishin' fer," and again her covert glance sought the calico.

"Sartainly, old girl; no doubt," chuckled the raftsman. "If that's the case, jist take them handkerchiefs and that dress-pattern and give 'em to Saturn. You can keep the vest and the tobacker and the boots yerself, and especially the trowsers—you've allers worn 'em!"

"Laws, masser, ef I *hadn't*, things would a gone to rack and ruin long ago. Dat nigger of mine no use, but to sleep hisself to deaf. He's a great cross to me, Saturn is," and with a profusion of smiles and thanks she carried off her booty to the kitchen, graciously dispensing his share to her "ole man," and condescending to be unusually affable.

"Ef we only had a camp-meetin' to go to now," she said, spreading out the new jacket and trowsers beside the calico. "It's four yeer, come nex' monf, since we went to dat meetin' down de riber. I declar' it's jes' like de heathen fer decent culled pussons not to have any place to holler Glory, and show der new clo'es."

"I'd like to go to meetin' wid dese boots," remarked her spouse, looking down at the immense pair into which he had squeezed his feet.

"Ef you did, all I can say is, dar' wouldn' be no room fer anybody else dar'," returned Pallas, giving way, by mere force of habit, to her custom of snubbing her companion.

"Wha' fer?" inquired Saturn.

"No matter, ef yer don't know. My! my!"—hopelessly—"what a fool you is!"

"Dat's so, wife;" was the humble reply, "but," picking up courage at the sight of his new rig, "mebbe when I get my new jacket on, I'll know more."

"You'd bettar put it on quick, den, and nebbar take it off."

When her dishes were washed, Pallas took the calico in her lap and sat down.

"I've a sense," she said, in a low voice, "dat things is goin' to happen."

"Wha' fer?"

"I haven't had such a sense fer years," she continued, too preoccupied to administer her customary rebuke. "And when I've a sense, it allers comes to suthin'—it never fails. I haven't had such feelin's since missus died. 'Pears to me dat young gentleum looks like missus' family. And it's de same name—curus, isn't it?"

"Berry," replied Saturn, at random, lost in the study of his feet; "dem boots is beauties."

"I dunno what masser brought him here fer, he's allers been so keerful. He tole me 'twas a pardner in de steam saw-mill dat takes his lumber off his han's; a young storekeeper in Center City now, though he use to be a lawyer in New York —bress it! it's a long time since I sot eyes on dat city now. Our fus' masser, Mortimer Moore, usin to invite no shop-keepers to *his* house. My! my! but he was a mighty proud man, and dat's what made all de trouble. Dem was grand times, wid all de serbents and de silber—never tought I cud come to dis—but I promised missus, when she died, I'd stan' by her chile, and I shall stand by her, long as der's any bref left in dis ole body—bress her! She's growing up jes' as han'some as ever her mudder was, and she's got her ways; and as for manners—hi! hi! folks might larf at the idea of ole Pallas learnin' manners to her missus, but dar ain't nobody knows better how table ought to be set and sarbed, and things to be done, than my dear chile now, dis minit. Ef masser *will* keep her, like de children of Israel, forty years in de wilderness, she shall be a lady for all dat, bress her, and a Christian lady, too! She knows all de bes' part of de psalms by heart, now; and she can sing hymns like a cherubim. Sometimes I mos' think she's got one of dem golden harps in her hand. If dat ole fool ain't asleep. Saturn!" kicking his shins, "wake up yer, and go to bed—immejetly!"

Saturn had a discouraging time getting his new boots off in the sleepy state which had come upon him; but this being at last accomplished, and he safely lodged in the bed, which took up the greater portion of Pallas' "settin'-room," off her kitchen, she stole out to the corner of the house to "spy out the land," in Bible language, which, to her, sheltered the deed from opprobrium. Pallas was no mischief-making listener; she considered herself entitled to know all that transpired in the family, whose secrets she kept, and whose welfare she had in her heart.

"My! my! they make a pretty pictur' sittin' dar' in de light ob de moon," she thought, peeping at the group, now gathered outside of the door, enjoying the glory of a most brilliant August moon. The young stranger was telling some story of foreign adventure, his fine face and animated gestures showing well in the pure light, while the old raftsman smoked his pipe to keep away musquitoes, as he said—though they were not particularly troublesome in that neighborhood —and Alice sat on the step at his feet, her arms folded over his knee, her eager, girlish face lifted to the story-teller.

"He sartainly belongs to *our* family of Moores, ef he ain't no nearer than a forty-second cousin," whispered Pallas to herself. "Masser don't know 'em, root and branch, as well as I do, else he'd see it right away. How that pickaninny is a

watchin' of him talk! Laws! nobody knows what their doing in dis yere worl', or we'd all act different."

As she stood there, taking observations, she thought she saw a person in the shade of the great elm on the bank; and not being afraid of any thing but "gosstesses" and "sperits," she went back to the kitchen for a bucket, as an excuse for going down to the river and finding out who it was.

"Ef it's that yer young Perkins, won't I let him know what a fool he's making of hisself—he, indeed! Gorry! I'll give a scolding 'at'll las' him his lifetime." But she had no opportunity of venting her indignation, as the form, whosever it was, slipped down the bank, and ran away along the wet sand, taking shelter behind a ledge of rock, before she could recognize it.

"My! my! dis ole bucket full of silber," she ejaculated, as she lifted it out of the river, glittering in the moonlight. "Dis yere ribber looks lubly as de stream of life dat's flowin' round de streets ob Paradise, to-night;" and the good old creature stood watching the burnished ripples. The rush of waters and the murmur of the pine-forest were sweet even to her ears.

"It's a bad night for young folks to be sittin' out-o'-doors," she reflected, shaking her yellow turban suggestively, as she looked at the two by the cabin-door.

But let us go back a little way with our story.

CHAPTER III.

REJECTED ADDRESSES.

Through the spacious lengths of a suite of richly-furnished rooms, a woman was wandering, with that air of nervous restlessness which betokens a mind ill at ease. The light, stealing in soft tints through the curtains, fell upon many pictures and objects of taste and art, and all that lavish richness of plenishing to which wealthy Gothamites are prone—but upon nothing so beautiful as the mistress of them all, who now moved from place to place, lifting a costly toy here, pausing before a picture there, but really interested in neither.

"Virginia!"

Her cousin Philip had come in through the library so silently that she was unaware of his presence until he spoke, although it was waiting for him which had made her so uneasy.

"Well, Philip?"

She had started when he spoke her name, but recovered her haughty self-possession immediately.

"Sit down, please, on this sofa. I can not talk to you when you are standing. You look too cold and too imperious. I have come to-day for your answer, Virginia."

They sat upon the sofa together, he turning so as to read her face, which was bent down as she played with the diamond ring upon her finger. She looked cool and quiet enough to dampen the ardor of her lover; but he was so absorbed in his own feelings that he could not and would not understand it.

"Speak, Virginia! I can not bear this suspense."

Still she hesitated; she *liked* him too well to take any pleasure in giving him pain, frivolous coquette though she was.

"I have questioned my heart closely, Philip, as you bade me," she began after a few moments, "and I have satisfied myself that I can never be happy as the wife of a poor man."

"Then you do not love me! Love does not put itself in the scales and demand to be balanced with gold."

"But gold is very necessary to its welfare and long life. No, Philip, I do not know that I love you—perhaps I do not—since I am not willing to make this sacrifice. I certainly think better of you than of any other living man, except my father; I would rather marry you than any other man, if you had the wealth necessary to support me in the station for which only I am fitted. A young man, with nothing to rely upon but the profession of the law, in a great city like this, must expect to wait some time before he can pour many honors and much wealth into the lap of the woman he loves."

"You are sarcastic, Virginia!"

"No, only practical. My father is not so rich as in days gone by. His fortune has dwindled until it is barely sufficient to keep up the house in the old style. If I would still preserve the family pride, still rule queen of the circle I have brought around me, I must marry rich."

"And for this you can resign a love like mine."

"It is my nature, Philip—born in me, cherished in me. My father, I know, would not listen to the match, as highly as he esteems you. I had a sister, a woman when I was a child—you remember her, do you not? she married against his will, married poor, and tried this 'love in a cottage' sentiment—he never forgave her, and she never prospered; she is dead, poor thing, and I do not care to emulate her."

"Humph! I am to understand that your father then rears his children as slaves to be sold to the highest bidder—that you hold yourself ready for the market?"

"Don't provoke me, Philip." The black eyes were fixed upon him haughtily.

"Forgive me, Virginia. I am half-mad just now, you know. You can not say that you have not encouraged me."

"Perhaps I have—shown you the affection of a cousin. I have felt as if you were one of the family. I might even have felt a still closer interest, had I allowed myself. But I am, what you never will be—prudent. I may yet see some one whom I can really respect and love, who has also the fortune you lack; if not, I shall accept some one for glory's sake, and let the love go! Don't look so scornful, Phil. I have beauty, fashion, pride of place, family, every thing but the means wherewith to set these off magnificently; and this has made me ambitious. Dear Philip, much as I like you, I could never be contented to wait your slow promotion."

"Prudence is very commendable, Virginia. Its maxims fall with double force

from lips as beautiful as yours. I will try to learn it. I, a man, upon whom such cold duties are supposed most naturally to devolve, will be taught by you, a soft, tender woman, who looks as if made for the better purpose of loving and teaching love. Farewell! when you see me again, perhaps I shall rival you in prudence."

"You are not going away, cousin Philip?" He was already opening the door into the hall, as she followed him, and caught his hand.

"Oh, yes, I am. Since only rich men can possess the happiness such gentle creatures have it in their power to bestow, I must make haste after wealth," and he looked down bitterly at the proud girl over whose face was coming a faint expression of remorse and relenting.

"Shall I not hear from you?" she asked, quite humbly.

"No; not until I am in a fair way to achieve that which will recommend me to your *disinterested affection*!"

He withdrew his hand from her clasp, and went out with a quick, resounding step which told of the firmness of his resolution. The girl who had rejected him sank down in the nearest seat. She had never seen him look more—as a woman is proud to have a man look—handsome, self-reliant, determined, than in the hour of his disappointment. Two or three tears trickled through her jeweled fingers; she shook them off impatiently.

"He is a man who would never have shamed my choice," she whispered. "But I have decided for the best. I know my own disposition; I should fret at the chains which limited my power. And I am used to every indulgence. I am selfish. Poor Phil! if somebody would present you with a check for half-a-million, I'd marry you to-morrow."

In the mean time Philip Moore, all the dregs stirred up from the bottom of the fountain in his usually transparent soul, hurried to the office which he had just set up in Wall-street. There, as if in answer to the wish which had been aroused, he found a letter from a friend who had emigrated westward three years previously, forsaking the law for speculations in pine-lands and lumber, merchandise, etc. He was doing well, was getting rich in seven-league strides, had married a pretty western girl, was happy, had gone to housekeeping, wanted a partner in business as well as domestic affairs—recommended Philip to accept the chance—a few thousand dollars would be all the capital required.

Philip had seven thousand dollars in stocks; he sold out, shook off the dust from

his feet as he left the great metropolis, and answered his friend's letter in person, in less than a fortnight.

Virginia Moore missed the convenient escort, the constant attentions, *and* the profound worship of her high-hearted cousin; but a rich Spaniard, ugly and old, was come into the market, and she was among the bidders. Let us leave Virginia Moore, and return to that western wilderness, where a certain little girl looks lovelier, in her blue-gingham dress and wild-flower wreath, than the other in all the family diamonds.

CHAPTER IV.

BEN PERKINS.

The day after her father's return, Alice Wilde sat down to try her new thimble in running up the skirt of her merino dress. The frock which she wore, and all her others, probably, were fashioned in the style of twenty years ago—short under the arms; a belt at the waist; low in the neck; full, puffed, short sleeves; narrow skirt, and no crinoline. Her profuse hair, when it was not allowed to fall in a golden torrent around her neck, was looped up in the quaint style which marked the fashion of her dress. She looked like the portrait, come to life, of some republican belle and beauty of long ago. Quite unconscious that this ancient style had been superseded by the balloons of to-day, she measured off the three short breadths which, when hemmed, would leave her pretty ankles exposed, even as they now, with the slippered feet, peeped from beneath her gingham.

If Philip Moore had understood the mantua-maker's art, and had possessed "patterns" of the latest mode, he would not have instructed his hostess in any changes, she looked so picturesque and quaint as she was. But he did not let her sew very steadily that day. He wanted to explore the surroundings of the cabin, and she was his ready, intelligent guide.

They went back into the forest, through which thundered, ever and anon, the crash of a falling tree; for many men were busy cutting timber for another raft, on which, at its completion, Philip was to return to Center City. His business would not have detained him more than three or four days, but he was in no haste; he wanted to hunt and fish a little, and he liked the novelty of the idea of floating down the river on a raft of logs in company with a score of rough fellows. Although David Wilde sawed up some of his timber himself, his old-fashioned mill was not equal to the supply, and he sent the surplus down to the steam saw-mills, one of which was owned by Philip and his partner.

It called forth all his affability to conquer the shyness of his pretty guide, who at last dared to look full into his face with those brilliant blue eyes, and to tell him where the brooks made the sweetest music, where the fawns came oftenest to drink, where the violets lingered the latest, and where there was a grape-vine swing.

Both of them looked very happy when they came in, just in time to meet Mr.

Wilde at the supper-table, who had been at the mill all day. *He* did not seem in such good spirits. Some new thought troubled him. His keen, gray eyes scanned the countenance of his child, as if searching for something hitherto undiscovered; and then turned suspiciously to the stranger, to mark if he, too, held the same truth. For the first time it occurred to him, that his "cub," his pet, was no longer a little girl—that he might have done something fatally foolish in bringing that fine city aristocrat to his cabin. Had he not always hated and despised these dandified caricatures of men?—despised their vanity, falsehood, and affectation?—hated their vices, their kid-gloves, their perfumed handkerchiefs, and their fashionable nonsense? Yet, pleased with one of them, and on a mere matter of business, he had, without the wisdom of a fool, much less of a father, brought one of that very class to his house. How angry he was with himself his compressed lip alone revealed, as he sharply eyed his guest. Yet the laws of hospitality were too sacred with him to allow of his showing any rudeness to his guest, as a means of getting rid of him.

Unconscious of the bitter jealousy in her father's heart, Alice was as gay as a humming-bird. She had never been happier. We are formed for society; children are charmed with children, and youth delights in youth. Alice had been ignorant of this sweet want, until she learned it now, by having it gratified. For, although she had passed pleasant words with such young men as chanced to be employed by her father, they had never seemed to her like companions, and she naturally adopted the reserve which her father also used with them. His cabin was his castle. No one came there familiarly, except upon invitation. The "hands" were all fed and lodged in a house by themselves, near the mill. The gloom of the host gradually affected the vivacity of the others; and the whole household retired early to rest.

The next day, Philip set off to the mill with Mr. Wilde, carrying on his shoulder the excellent rifle of the latter, as he proposed, after business was over, to make a search for deer, now nearly driven away from that locality by the sound of the ax in those solitudes once so deep and silent.

"Tell Aunt Pallas I'll bring her a haunch of venison for supper," he said gayly to the young girl, touching his straw hat with a grace that quite confused her.

She looked after them wistfully as they went away. She felt lonely; her sewing fatigued her; the sun was too hot to go out on the water; she didn't know what to do. Even her new books failed for once to keep her interested many hours. When Pallas looked for her to help pick over berries to dry, she was not to be found. She had sought that delightful refuge of early youth—the garret; which in this

instance was but a loft over the main story, reached by a ladder, and seldom resorted to by any one, except when the raftsman stored away a bear-skin, a winter's store of nuts, or something of the kind. To-day Alice felt powerfully attracted toward a certain trunk which had stood in that garret ever since she could remember. It was always locked; she had never seen it open; and did not know its contents. Now, for a wonder, the key was in the lock; she never thought of there being any thing wrong in the act, as she had never heard the trunk mentioned, and had never been forbidden access to it, and lifting the lid, she sat down beside it and began an examination of its mysteries. Lifting up a napkin spread over the top, she was met by a lovely face, looking up at her from the ivory upon which it was so exquisitely painted. The breath died upon her lips.

"It must be my mother's; how very beautiful she was—my mother!"

Hot tears rushed up into her eyes at this life-like vision of a being she did not remember, of whom old Pallas often spoke, but whom her father seldom mentioned—never, save in the most intimate moments of their association. She was sorry she had opened the trunk, realizing at once that if her father had desired her to know of the miniature he would have shown it to her years ago; she had a glimpse of a white-silk dress, some yellow lace, a pair of white-silk slippers, and long white-kid gloves, but she would not gratify the intense curiosity and interest which she felt. She remembered hearing her father descend from the garret late in the preceding night; and she guessed now the purpose of his visit.

An impulse was given to her thoughts which drove away her restless mood; she retreated from the loft, and set very quietly to work helping Pallas with the blackberries. She was sitting in the kitchen-door, an apron on, and a huge bowl in her lap, when Philip Moore came through the pines, dragging after him a young deer which he had slain. Pallas was on a bench outside the shanty, and it was at her feet the hunter laid his trophy.

"Bress you, masser Moore, I'se mighty glad you went a huntin'. Miss Alice she laugh and say de deer needn't be afraid of you, 'cause you was a city gentleum, but I tol' her she didn't know nuffin' about it. I was afeard you'd get tired of white-fish and salmon, and bacon and fowls,—dis ven'sen jes' de meat I want."

"Well, Aunt Pallas, I shall claim one of your best pies as my reward," said the amateur hunter, laughing. "But little Alice here mustn't think no one can do any thing right except foresters and lumbermen."

"Oh, I don't!" exclaimed she, blushing. "I think you do every thing beautifully,

Mr. Moore, that you've been brought up to do, you know—but shooting deer—they don't do that in cities, do they?"

"Not exactly in cities; but there are wild woods near enough New York yet for young men to have a chance at gaining that accomplishment. I suppose you wouldn't trust me to take you out sailing, to-morrow, would you?"

"If she would, yer couldn't do it, for I want the boat myself. Captain Wilde's goin' to send me down to the pint with it."

Mr. Moore looked up in surprise at the speaker, who had just come up from the river, and whose looks and tones were still ruder than his words.

"Hi, Ben! yer as surly as a bar," spoke up Pallas; "yer haven't a grain of perliteness in yer body," she added, in a lower tone.

"I leaves perliteness to them as is wimmen enough to want it," answered Ben, throwing back a glance of defiance and contempt at the innocent stranger, as he stepped into the shanty. "I want them new saws as came home with the capt'n."

"There's somebody that looks upon me in the same light you do," laughed Philip, when the youth had secured the saws and departed.

"Oh, Mr. Moore, you don't know how I look upon you!" she exclaimed, earnestly; neither did he, any more than he knew how the fate of that black-eyed, heavy-browed mill-hand was to be mixed and mingled with his own.

He admired Alice Wilde as he would have done any other pretty and singular young creature; but he never thought of loving her; she was a child in his eyes, ignorant and uncultivated in many things, though always graceful and refined; a child, who would be out of place in any other sphere except that peculiar one in which she now moved. He did not guess that in her eyes he was a hero, almost supernatural, faultless, glorious—such as an imaginative girl who had seen nothing of the world, but who had read many poems and much fiction, would naturally create out of the first material thrown in her way.

No! all through that happy fortnight of his visit he talked with her freely, answering her eager questions about the world from which she was so secluded, roamed the woods with her, sailed the river, played his flute, sang favorite love-songs, and all without reflecting upon the deathless impression he was making. Keen eyes were upon him, and saw nothing to justify censure; he would have laughed at the idea of that little wild girl falling in love with him, if he had thought of it at all; but he did not think of it; sometimes he frolicked with her, as if they were both children; and sometimes he kindly took upon himself the

pleasant task of teaching her in matters about which she showed an interest. He was touched by her beauty and innocence; and was extremely guarded in her presence not to let a hint of evil be breathed upon that young soul—her father, Pallas, all who approached her, seemed naturally to pay her purity the same deference.

The raft for which Philip was waiting was now in readiness, and was to commence its drifting journey upon the next day. Alice had fled away into the pine-woods, after dinner, to anticipate, with dread, her coming loneliness; for her father was also to accompany it, and would be absent nearly three weeks. Her footsteps wandered to a favorite spot, where the grape-vine swing had held her in its arms, many and many a frolic hour. She sat down in it, swinging herself slowly to and fro. Presently a footfall startled her from her abstraction, and, looking up, she saw Ben Perkins coming along the path with a cage in his hand, of home manufacture, containing a gorgeous forest-bird which he had captured.

"I reckon I needn't go no further, Miss Alice," he said; "I war a bringin' this bird to see if you'd be so agreeable as to take it. I cotched it, yesterday, in the wood."

"Oh, Ben, how pretty it is!" she cried, quickly brushing away her tears, that he might not guess what she had been crying about.

"It sings like any thing. It's a powerful fine singer, Miss Alice—I thought mebbe 't would be some comfort to ye, seein' yer about to lose that flute that's been turnin' yer head so."

"What do you mean?—you speak so roughly, Ben."

"I know I ain't particularly smooth-spoken; but I mean what I say, which is more 'n some folks do. Some folks thinks it good sport to be telling you fine fibs, I've no doubt."

"Why do you wish to speak ill of those of whom you have no reason to, Ben? It isn't generous."

"But I *have* reason—O Alice, you don't know how much!" he set the bird-cage down, and came closer to her. "I've got suthin' to say that I can't keep back no longer. Won't you set down 'side of me on this log?"

"I'd rather stand, Ben," she said, drawing back as he was about to take her hand.

The quivering smile upon his lip when he asked the question changed to a look which half frightened her, at her gesture of refusal.

"You didn't object to settin' by that town chap; you sot here on this very log with

him, for I seen you. Cuss him, and his fine clothes, I say!"

"I can not listen to you, Ben, if you use such language; I don't know what's the matter with you to-day," and she turned to go home.

"I'll tell you what's the matter, Alice Wilde," and he caught her hand almost fiercely. "I can't keep still any longer and see that feller hangin' 'round. I didn't mean to speak this long time yet, but that stranger's driven me crazy. Do you 'spose I kin keep quiet and see him smirking and bowin' and blowin' on that blasted flute, around *you*; and you lookin' at him as if yer couldn't take yer eyes off? Do you s'pose I kin keep quiet and see him making a simpleton of the purtiest girl that ever growd? You needn't wince—it's true; jist as soon as he'd got away from here he'd forget all about you, or only think of you to laugh at your hoosier ways with some proud lady as fine as himself."

"Oh, I am afraid it's too true!" burst forth Alice, involuntarily.

"Yer may bet yer life on that, Alice Wilde! Or, at the best, he'd take yer away from yer own old father as loves the ground you tread, and try and make a lady of you, and never let you speak to your own flesh and blood agin. While I—I wouldn't do nuthin' but what yer father wanted; I'd settle down side of him, work for him, see to things, and take the care off his mind when he got old. Yer father hates them proud peacocks, Alice—he *hates* 'em, and so do I! I know he'd ruther have me. Say yes, do now, that's a good girl."

"I don't understand you, Ben," said Alice, coldly, trying to pass, for she was troubled and wanted to get away.

"I'll tell you then," he said, "I want you to marry me, Alice. I've been thinking about it these two years—night and day, night and day."

"Why, Ben," cried the startled child, "*I* never thought of it—never! and I can not now. Father will be very angry with you. Let go of my hand; I want to go home."

"You ain't a little girl any longer, Alice Wilde, and I guess yer father 'll find it out. He may be mad for a spell; but he'll get over it; and when he comes to think of the chances of his dyin' and leavin' yer alone, he'll give his consent. Come, Alice, say yes, do, now?"

The intense eagerness of his manner made her tremble, from sympathy, but she looked into his blazing eyes firmly, as she replied, "Never! so long as I live, never! And you must not speak of it again, unless you want to be discharged from—"

"Don't you threaten me, Miss Alice. I ain't the stuff to be threatened. If I'd have said what I've said this day, three weeks ago, you wouldn't have been so mighty cool. Not that I think I'm good enough for ye—there ain't the man livin' that's that; but I'm as good as some as thinks themselves better—and I won't be bluffed off by any broadcloth coat. I've loved you ever since you were a little girl, and fell in the mill-pond onct, and I fished ye out. I've loved ye more years than he's seen ye weeks, and I won't be bluffed off. Jes' so sure as I live, that man shall never marry you, Alice Wilde."

"He never thought of it; and it hurts me, Ben, to have you speak of it. Let me go now, this instant."

She pulled her hand out of his, and hurried away, forgetful of the bird he had given her.

Love, rage, and despair were in the glance he cast after her; but when, a few moments later, as he made his way back toward the mill, he passed Philip Moore, who gave him a pleasant, careless nod, *hate*—the dangerous hate of envy, jealousy, and ignorance, darkened his swarthy brow.

Poor Alice, nervous almost to sobbing, pursued her homeward way. She had never thought of marriage except as a Paradise in some far, Arcadian land of dreams which she had fashioned from books and the instincts of her young heart; and now to have the idea thrust upon her by this rude, determined fellow, who doubtless considered himself her equal, shocked her as a bird is shocked and hurt by the rifle's clamor. And if this young man thought himself a fit husband for her, perhaps others thought the same—perhaps her father would wish her to accept him, some time in the far future—perhaps Philip—ah, Philip! how almost glorified he looked to her vision as at that moment he came out of the forest-shadows into the path, his straw-hat in his hand, and the wind tossing his brown hair.

"Here is the little humming-bird, at last! was it kind of her to fly away by herself on this last afternoon of my stay?"

How gay his voice, how beaming his smile, while *she* was so sad! she felt it and grew sadder still. She tried to reply as gayly, but her lip trembled.

"What's the matter with the little Wilde-rose?" he asked, kindly looking down into the suffused eyes.

"I've been thinking how very lonely I shall be. My father is going away, too, you know, and I shall have no one but good old Pallas."

"And that handsome young man I just saw parting from you," he said, mischievously, looking to see her blush and smile.

"Oh, Mr. Moore, is it possible you think I could care for *him*?" she asked, with a sudden air of womanly pride which vanished in a deep blush the next instant.

"Well, I don't know; you *are* too good for him," he answered, frankly, as if the idea had just occurred to him.

An expression of pain swept over Alice's face.

"I know, Mr. Moore, how you must regard me; and I can not blame you for it. I know that I am ignorant—a foolish, ignorant child,—that my dress is odd, my manner awkward,—that the world, if it should see me, would laugh at me—that my mind is uncultivated,—but oh, Mr. Moore, you do not know how eager I am to learn—how hard I should study! I wish my father would send me away to school."

"That would just spoil your sweet, peculiar charms, little Alice."

He smoothed her hair soothingly, as he would have done a child's; but something in her tone had put a new thought in his mind; he looked at her earnestly as she blushed beneath this first slight caress which he had ever given her. "Can it be so?" he asked himself; and in his eyes the young girl suddenly took more womanly proportions. "How very—how exquisitely beautiful she is now, with the soul glowing through her face. Shall I ever again see a woman such as this—pure as an infant, loving, devoted, unselfish, and so beautiful?" Another face, haughty, clear-cut, with braids of perfumed black hair, arose before his mental vision, and took place beside this sweet, troubled countenance. One so unmoved, so determined, even in the moment of giving bitter pain—this other so confiding, so shy, so full of every girlish beauty. Philip was touched—*almost* to saying something which he might afterward regret; but he was a Moore, and he had his pride and his prejudices, stubborn as old Mortimer Moore's, nearly. These hardened his heart against the sentiment he saw trembling through that eloquent countenance.

"You are but a little girl yet, and will have plenty of chance to grow wise," he continued playfully. "This pretty Wilde-rose 'needs not the foreign aid of ornament.' When I come again, I hope to find her just as she is now—unless she should have become the bride of that stalwart forester."

"Then you are coming again?" she asked, ignoring the cruel kindness of the latter part of his speech, and thinking only of that dim future possibility of again

seeing and hearing him, again being in his presence, no matter how indifferent he might be to her.

For Alice Wilde, adoring him as no man ever deserved to be adored, still, in her forest simplicity, called not her passion love, nor cherished it from any hope of its being reciprocated. No; she herself considered herself unworthy of the thought of one so much more accomplished, so much wiser than herself. Her's was

"The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow;"

and now that there was a chance in the future for her to burn her white wings still more cruelly, she grew a shade happier.

"I have business with your father which will bring me here again, perhaps this fall, in October, certainly, in the spring. What shall I bring you when I come again, Alice? You've been a kind hostess, and I owe you many happy hours. I should like to make you some trifling return."

She looked up in his face sadly, thinking she should like to ask him to remember her, but she dared not trust herself.

"If you will select some books—such as you think I ought to study, my father will buy them for me."

"Don't you love jewelry and such pretty trifles as other girls seek after?"

"I really don't know; I've no doubt I could cultivate such a liking," she replied, with some of her native archness.

"I wouldn't try very hard—you're better without," he said, pressing a light kiss on her forehead; and the two went slowly home, walking more silently than was their wont.

Pallas saw them, as they came up through the garden, and gave them a scrutinizing look which did not seem to be satisfactory.

"Dat chile's troubles jes' began," she murmured to herself. "Ef dese yer ole arms could hide her away from ebery sorrow, Pallas would be happy. But dey can't. Things happen as sure as the worl'; and girls will be girls—it's in em; jes' as sartin as it's in eggs to be chickens, and acorns to be oaks. Hi! hi!"

CHAPTER V.

AN APPALLING VISITOR.

One bright September day, after David Wilde had been gone about a week with his raft, a wood-cutter came to the cabin with bad news. He informed Alice that the woods were on fire two or three miles back, and that the wind was driving the fire in a broad belt of a mile wide directly toward the house; that if the wind did not subside with the setting of the sun, nothing could preserve the place from destruction by the middle of the next day. Alice had been sitting at the window, thinking how delicious that soft, dry wind was, but now she prayed with all her heart that it might speedily die. It was yet many hours to sunset; and she, with Pallas, went into the forest until they could see the fire, and were in some danger from the drifting sparks. The foresters shook their heads and told her to be prepared for the worst; Pallas groaned and prayed as if she had been at a camp-meeting; but Alice, although she trembled before the mighty power of the conflagration, endeavored not to lose her presence of mind.

"I shall hope for the best," she said to the men, "but shall be prepared for the worst. Go to the mill and bring round by the river all the skiffs you can muster—there are two or three, are there not? They will be ready by evening, and if the wind does not change, or go down, by that time, we will try and save the furniture by means of the boats. Come, Pallas, let us go home and pack up the smaller things."

"Home!" The word sounded sweet, when destruction hovered so near; but Alice had a brave heart; she would think of nothing now but of being equal to the emergency; her calmness had a salutary effect upon the characteristic excitability of her sable attendant, who followed her back in quite a composed and serviceable mood.

Moving quietly about, putting her precious books into packages, and getting into movable shape all those little articles of household use which become so dear from association, a looker-on would hardly have guessed how anxiously the young girl waited for sunset—how earnestly she wished that her father had been at home.

"My! my! dat nigger of mine is a wusser fool 'an ever," said Pallas, as she bustled about like an embodied storm; "jes' see him, Miss Alice; he's went and

put on his bes' clo'es, and dar' he stands, nebber doin' a single ting, but jes' holding dem new boots of his."

"What are you dressed up for, Saturn," called Alice, laughing, in spite of her anxiety, to find that he had made provision for that which was dearest to him—his new suit would be saved if he was, and if he perished, it would share his fate.

"Oh, missus," he replied, looking foolish, "it's the easiest way to carry 'em."

"Better put your boots on, also; then you'll have your hands to work with," suggested Alice.

"Jes' so, missus; I never tought of dat;" and on went the boots, after which Saturn was ready to get as much in the way as possible.

At sunset, the boats, consisting of two little skiffs which would hold but small freightage, and one larger boat which would accomodate the heavier pieces of furniture, were moored under the stately old elm which had so long stood sentinel over that forest home. Three or four men, among whom was Ben Perkins, held themselves in readiness to give the necessary assistance.

The sun went down in a clear sky; there were no clouds to threaten a wished-for rain; but that cold, firm wind which sometimes blows unceasingly three days at a time, in the autumn months, rose higher and higher. There was no moon, and as twilight deepened into night, the thick smoke which hung above the earth rendered the darkness intense; and occasionally when heavy volumes of smoke dropped lower toward the earth, the atmosphere was suffocating.

Pallas prepared supper for all, with a strong cup of coffee to keep off drowsiness; and no one retired to bed that night. Shortly after midnight the fire traveled within sight; the roar of the conflagration swelled and deepened until it was like the dashing of a thousand seas; the hot breath of the flames aroused the wind, until it rushed in fury directly toward the cabin. Light flashes of flame would run from tree-top to tree-top, while farther back was a solid cone of fire—trunks from which all the foliage and lesser branches had fallen, stretching their glowing arms across the darkness, towering up against the starless background. Frequently these fiery columns would crumble, with crashes scarcely heard through the continuous roar, sending up a fitful shower of sparks to be whirled on high by the rushing currents of air.

Fascinated by the beautiful, appalling scene, Alice sat on the bank of the river, wrapped in a shawl, from which her pale, excited face shone like a star, kindling the enthusiasm of the rude men about her to do something in her service. As for

Ben, he scarcely looked at the fire—his eyes were upon the girl.

"It's no use," he said to her, about two o'clock in the morning, "waitin' any longer. That fire will be on this very spot by break of day. The wind's a blowin' a perfect gale. Ain't you cold, Miss Alice?"

"No, no—not at all. If you think it the only way, then let us begin. My father's desk, with his papers, stands in his bedroom. See to that first, Ben, and then the other things."

It did not take long for the active fellows engaged to clear the cabin of all its contents; every thing was put into the boats—and then, as Ben said, "it was high time to clear out."

The smoke was suffocating, and sparks and small branches of burning trees were beginning to fall around. Saturn and Pallas were safely stowed in the largest boat, while Alice paddled out into the stream in her own tiny canoe. The track of the fire was a mile in width; but the mill was not threatened by it, nor much troubled by the smoke, the wind carrying it in another direction. The house then occupied by the mill-hands must be the present shelter of the captain's family.

Down the river, in the full glare of the conflagration, floated the little convoy. The smoke was not so dense about them now; it hung high above, and rolled in dark billows far beyond. The stream was crimson with the reflection, and the faces of the party looked pallid in the lurid glare—always excepting those two sable faces, turned, with awe and dread, toward that sublime picture of devastation.

Suddenly Alice, who was in advance, dropped back.

"I must return to the house," she cried, as she came along side of the boat containing Ben and the old servants.

"No, you mus'n't," shouted Ben; "it's too late. It's getting mighty warm here now; and them flyin' branches 'll hit ye."

"I can't help it," replied Alice, firmly. "There's something in the garret I must have. Father would never forgive us for forgetting that trunk, Pallas."

"Law, suz! dat trunk! sure enough," groaned Pallas.

"I must get it," said the young girl.

"How can you, chile? it's locked, so yer can't get out the things, and of course *you* couldn't carry it down. Come back! oh, come back, dear chile, won't yer?

What's forty trunks to yer own precious life, chile? and them sparks 'll set your dress on fire, and the heat 'll smother yer all up."

"I've got a hatchet, and I'll break it open," shouted Alice, now fast rowing back toward the cabin.

"That girl's right down crazy," said Ben Perkins; "here Saturn, take these oars, and make 'em fly. I'm goin' after her."

He threw off his jacket and boots, plunged into the stream, swam ashore, and ran along the bank, keeping pace with the skiff. Both reached the house at the same instant, they were gone perhaps three minutes, and came forth again, Ben carrying the trunk upon his shoulder. One instant they paused to look upon the wall of fire behind them; but the heat was intolerable.

"These falling bits will sartainly set your clothing a-blaze," said Ben, hurrying the young girl away, who would fain have lingered yet around the home which had grown dear to her with her growth—already the garden was withering, and the vines she had planted were drooping before their impending ruin.

"My dress is woolen," she said; "but I will go. Oh, Ben, this is terrible, is it not?"

"Yes, Miss Alice, but if ye get away safe now, you may thank yer stars. I don't believe the canoe 'll hold you and the trunk both," he remarked, as he deposited his precious (to Alice) burden in the bottom of it.

"Yes it will—but you, Ben?"

"Oh, I ain't of as much consequence as a trunk," he replied, bitterly. "Take car' of yourself—don't mind me."

"I shan't stir from this spot until you come with me, Ben. So get into the boat, quick."

"Get in yourself, Miss Alice, and make good time. You'll be baked like a brick, if yer don't get out of this soon. I'm going to swim 'long side. What's a mile or two, swimmin' down stream?" He threw himself in the water, and struck out, as he spoke.

She kept beside of him, refusing to go faster than he, that she might give him aid, in case he became exhausted; the river at this spot was over a mile in width, and it would have been difficult for him, tired and heated as he already was, to make the opposite shore.

As they made their way along in this manner, the wind swept the hot breath of

the fire around them in suffocating waves. The cold surface of the river kept the air comparatively pure for two or three feet above it, or they would have smothered; but as it was, Alice gasped for breath convulsively at times.

"Alice! Alice! you are sufferin'—you can't stand it," cried her companion in a voice which betrayed the agony of his soul—it thrilled through her, it was so sharp with pain.

"Don't be uneasy, Ben, we're nearly clear of the fire, now;" but struggle as bravely as she might, she could endure the heat no longer, and she, too, leaped into the river, and sheltering herself beneath the shadow of the skiff, swam boldly on, holding a small rope in her hand which secured it from floating off.

As soon as the advance party had got out of the smoke and heat, they waited the return of the two, who made their appearance in an alarming condition, Alice having become exhausted in the water, and Ben having her in one arm, and swimming with the other, while he towed the skiff by a rope held between his teeth.

Alice fainted away when she found herself safe in Pallas' motherly arms; and Ben might have followed her example had not one of his comrades been ready with a flask of spirits. It was thought best to administer the same restorative to the young girl, who soon revived, murmuring: "Father will be so glad the trunk is safe, Pallas."

As the morning broke, the party reached the shelter of the mill. It was two or three days before Alice was well enough to visit the ruins of her beloved home; and then she could only row along the river and gaze upon the blackened and smoking mass, for the earth was still too hot to be ventured upon. The cabin smoldered in a heap; the top of the great elm was blackened and the foliage gone, but it had not fallen, and the grass was crisped and withered to the edge of the river.

The tears streamed down her cheeks as she gazed; but with the hopefulness of youth, she passed on, seeking a new spot to consecrate as a second home. It was vain to think of rebuilding in the same vicinity, as all its beauty was destroyed, and it would take some years for it to renew itself. She knew that her father did not wish to live too near to his mill, as he had always kept his home aloof from it; that he would be satisfied with such a spot as she liked; and she was ambitious to begin the work, for she knew the winter would be upon them before they could complete a new house, if plans were not early made. There was a lovely spot just beyond the ravages of the fire, where the river made a crescent which

held in its hollow a grove of beech and elm and a sloping lawn, standing in advance of the dark pines stretching back into the interior. As her father owned the land for some distance along the shore she was at liberty to make her choice, and she made it here.

Ben Perkins, when necessity demanded, was the carpenter of the place. He had a full set of tools, and there were others of the men capable of helping him. There was timber, plenty of it, already sawed, for the frame of the new house, and while a portion went to work upon it, boards were sawed for the siding, and shingles turned out of the shingle-machine. As the "hands" said, Alice made an excellent captain.

A little sleeping-apartment had been constructed for her off the main cabin, at the mill, and her own bed put up in it; but she did not like the publicity of the table and the place, and longed for the new home to be completed.

The emotions of David Wilde were not enviable when, upon his return, he came in sight of the blackened ruins of his home. He did not so much heed the vast destruction of valuable timber, as he did the waste of that snug little, vine-covered cabin, with the garden, the flowers, and the associations clustering about all. The first question he asked when he clasped his child to his heart, and found *her* safe, was of old Pallas: "That trunk in the garret—was it saved?"

"Pickaninny saved dat ar' trunk, masser. She tought you had suthin' important in it, and she *would* go back;" and Alice felt repaid for all the risk she had run, when she saw the look of relief upon her father's face.

Ben Perkins had planned the new house, the frame of which was ready to be raised the day after the captain's return. Whether he had cunningly calculated that the family would some time be increased, or not, certain it is that he made liberal allowance for such a contingency. He had much natural talent as an architect, and from some printed plans which had fallen into his possession, he contrived a very pretty rustic cottage, with sharp-pointed gables something in the Gothic style, and a porch in front. Alice was charmed with it.

"We'll get the house in livin' order in a month or two; but yer can't have all the fixin's over the windows and the porch afore spring; I'll have to make 'em all by hand, through the winter, when thar' ain't much else a-doin'."

Ben was ambitious to conciliate Alice, and to make her feel how useful he could be to her and her father. Love prompted his head and hands to accomplish wonders. Poor Ben! work as he might, gain her expressions of gratitude and admiration as he might, that was the most. There was always a reserve about her

which held his fiery feelings in check. His was not a nature, either to check and control its own strong passions, or to give up an object upon which they were once set.

A settled gloom came over his olive face, and his eyes burned like smoldering fires beneath their black brows. He no longer had pleasant remarks to make; no longer brought daily gifts of fish, birds, berries, squirrels, venison, or grapes to Alice; no longer tried to break down her reserve—he just worked—worked constantly, perseveringly, moodily.

Alice herself was scarcely more gay. He guessed whose image filled her mind, when she sat so long without moving, looking off at the frost-tinted forests; and the thought was bitterness.

It was necessary for Captain Wilde to go again to some settlement down the river, to get hinges, locks, window-sashes, glass, etc., for the new house, which was to be ready for those finishing touches, by the time of his return. He did not know, when he set out, whether he would go as far as Center City, or stop at some smaller point nearer home.

One day, about the time of his expected return, Ben had gone for Alice, to get her opinion about some part of the house. They stood together, on the outside, consulting about it, so interested in the detail that they neither of them noticed the boat upon the river, until it was moored to the bank, and the voice of the raftsman was heard calling to them.

Both turned at the same moment and saw that Philip Moore was in company with Mr. Wilde. Ben's eyes fixed themselves instantly upon Alice's face, which was first pale and then red. He saw the great throb her heart gave, heard the sudden catch in her breath; and he was still looking at her when Philip sprang gayly up the path and seized her hand—the man who loved her better than life saw all the blushes of womanhood coming and going upon her face at the touch of another's hand.

A threatening blackness clouded his brow; Alice saw it, and knew that he read her secret by the light of his own passion; she almost shuddered at the dark look which he flashed upon Philip; but her father was calling for assistance to unload his craft, and Ben went forward without speaking.

"What a surly fellow that is, for one so good-looking and young," remarked Philip, carelessly, looking after him.

"He is not always so surly," Alice felt constrained to say in his defense: "he's

vexed now about something."

"But that's an ill-tempered look for a youthful face, Alice. I'm afraid he'd hardly make a woman very happy—eh, Alice?"

"That's a matter which does not interest me, Mr. Moore, I assure you," answered the young girl, with an unexpected flash of pride.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COLD HOUSE-WARMING.

"It's an ill-wind dat blows nobody no good; and dat yar wind dat blowed de fire right down on our cabin did us some good ater all. Masser 'ud libbed in dat log-house till de day he died, hadn't been for dat fire dat frighted me so, and made me pray fasser 'n eber I prayed afore. Lord! Miss Alice, it looked like de judgment-day, when we sailed down de ribber in de light ob de pine-woods. 'Peared to me de worl' was all on fire. I see Saturn a shakin' in his boots. He tole me, nex' day, he tought it was de day of judgment, sure 'nuff. I heard him askin' de good Lord please forgib him fur all de 'lasses he'd taken unbeknown. My! my! I larfed myself to pieces when I tought of it arterward, case I'd never known where de 'lasses went to hadn't been for dat fire. Dis new house mighty nice. Ben didn't forget ole niggers when he built dis—de kitchen, and de pantry, and my settin'-room is mighty comfor'able. Ben's a handy young man—smart as a basket o' chips. He's good 'nuff for *most* anybody, but he's not good 'nuff for *my* pickaninny, and he ought to hab sense 'nuff to see it. Ye'd best be kerful, Miss Alice; he's high-tempered, and he'll make trouble. 'Scuse me for speakin'; I know ye've allers been so discreet and as modest as an angel. None can blame you, let what will happen. But I wish dat Mr. Moore would go way. Yes, I *do*, Miss Alice, for more 'n one reason. Don't tink ole Pallas not see tru a grin'-stone. Ef he wants to leab any peace o' mind behind him, he'd better clar out soon. Thar! thar, chile, nebber mind ole nigger. My! how purty you has made de table look. I'm much obleeged for yer assistance, darlin'. I'se bound to hab a splendid supper, de fust in de new house. 'Taint much of a house-warmin', seein' we'd nobody to invite, and no fiddle, but we've done what we could to make things pleasant. Laws! ef dat nigger ob mine wasn't sech a fool he could make a fiddle, and play suthin' for us, times when we was low-sperited."

Pallas' tongue did not go any faster than her hands and feet. It was the first day in the new house, and Alice and herself had planned to decorate the principal apartment, and have an extra nice supper. Ever since her father left for the mill, in the middle of the day, after the furniture was moved in, while Pallas put things "to rights," she had woven wreaths of evergreens, with scarlet dogberries and brilliant autumn-leaves interspersed, which she had festooned about the windows and doors; and now she was busy decorating the table, while the old colored

woman passed in and out, adding various well-prepared dishes to the feast.

Pallas had been a famous cook in her day, and she still made the best of the materials at her command. A large cake, nicely frosted, and surrounded with a wreath, was one of the triumphs of her skill. A plentiful supply of preserved strawberries and wild-plum marmalade, grape-jelly, and blackberry-jam adorned the board. A venison-pie was baking in the oven, and a salmon, that would have roused the envy of Delmonico's, was boiling in the pot, while she prepared a sauce for it, for which, in times gone by, she had received many a compliment.

Philip had been taken into the secret of the feast, as Alice was obliged to depend upon him for assistance in getting evergreens. He was now out after a fresh supply, and Alice was beginning to wish he would make more haste, lest her father should return before the preparations were complete.

Again and again she went to the door to look out for him; and at last, six o'clock being come and past, she said with a pretty little frown of vexation:

"There's father coming, and Mr. Moore not back!"

The feast waited until seven—eight—and yet Philip had not returned.

Several of the men who had been busy about the house during the day were invited into supper; and at eight o'clock they sat down to it, in something of silence and apprehension, for every one by this time had come to the conclusion that Philip was lost in the woods. Poor Alice could not force herself to eat. She tried to smile as she waited upon her guests; but her face grew paler and her eyes larger every moment. Not that there was any such great cause for fright; there were no wild animals in that vicinity, except an occasional hungry bear in the spring, who had made his way from some remote forest; but she was a woman, timid and loving, and her fears kept painting terrible pictures of death by starvation, fierce wolves, sly panthers, and all the horrors of darkness.

"Poh! poh! child, don't look so scart," said her father, though he was evidently hurrying his meal, and quite unconscious of the perfection of the salmon-sauce, "there's no cause. He's lost; but he can't get so fur in the wrong direction but we'll rouse him out with our horns and lanterns and guns. We'll load our rifles with powder and fire 'em off. He hasn't had time to get fur."

"Likely he'll make his own way back time we're through supper," remarked one of the men cheerfully, as he helped himself to a second large piece of venison-pie. ""Tain't no use to be in a hurry. These city folks can't find thar way in the woods quite like us fellers, though. They ain't up to 't."

Alice looked over at the speaker; and, albeit she was usually so hospitable, wished he *would* make more speed with his eating. Pallas waited upon the table in profound silence. Something was upon her mind; but when Alice looked at her anxiously she turned her eyes away, pretending to be busy with her duties.

Ben Perkins had been asked to supper, but did not make his appearance until it was nearly over. When he came in he did not look anybody straight in the face, but sitting down with a reckless, jovial air, different from his usual taciturn manner, began laughing, talking, and eating, filling his plate with every thing he could reach.

"Have you seen any thing of Mr. Moore?" was the first question put to him, in the hope of hearing from the absent man.

"Moore? no,—ain't he here? Thought of course he'd be here makin' himself agreeable to the women;" and he laughed.

Whether Alice's excited state exalted all her perceptions, or whether her ears were more finely strung than those around her, this laugh, short, dry, and forced, chilled her blood. He did not look toward her as he spoke, but her gaze was fixed upon him with a kind of fascination; she could not turn it away, but sat staring at him, as if in a dream. Only once did he lift his eyes while he sat at the table, and then it was toward her; they slowly lifted as if her own fixed gaze drew them up; she saw them clearly for an instant, and—such eyes! His soul was in them, although he knew it not—a fallen soul—and the covert look of it through those lurid eyes was dreadful.

A strange tremulousness now seized upon Alice. She hurried her father and his men in their preparations, brought the lanterns, the rifles, the powder-horns; her hands shaking all the time. They laughed at her for a foolish child; and she said nothing, only to hurry them. Ben was among the most eager for the search. He headed a party which he proposed should strike directly back into the wood; but two or three thought best to go in another direction, so as to cover the whole ground. When they had all disappeared in the wood, their lights flashing here and there through openings and their shouts ringing through the darkness, Alice said to Pallas:

"Let us go too. There is another lantern. You won't be afraid, will you?"

"I'll go, to please you, chile, for I see yer mighty restless. I don't like trabelling in de woods at night, but de Lord's ober all, and I'll pray fas' and loud if I get skeered."

A phantom floated in the darkness before the eyes of Alice all through that night spent in wandering through forest depths, but it was shapeless, and she would not, dared not give shape to it. All night guns were fired, and the faithful men pursued their search; and at daybreak they returned, now really alarmed, to refresh their exhausted powers with strong coffee and a hastily-prepared breakfast, before renewing their exertions.

The search became now of a different character. Convinced that the missing man could not have got beyond the hearing of the clamor they had made through the night, they now anticipated some accident, and looked closely into every shadow and under every clump of fallen trees, behind logs, and into hollows.

Drinking the coffee which Pallas forced upon her, Alice again set forth, not with the others, but alone, walking like one distracted, darting wild glances hither and thither, and calling in an impassioned voice that wailed through the wilderness, seeming to penetrate every breath of air,—"Philip! Philip!"

And now she saw where he had broken off evergreens the day before, and fluttering round and round the spot, like a bird crying after its robbed nest, she sobbed,—"Philip! Philip!"

And then she saw *him*, sitting on a log, pale and haggard-looking, his white face stained with blood and his hair mottled with it, a frightful gash across his temple and head, which he drooped upon his hand; and he tried to answer her. Before she could reach him he sank to the ground.

"He is dead!" she cried, flying forward, sinking beside him, and lifting his head to her knee. "Father! father! come to us!"

They heard her sharp cry, and, hastening to the spot, found her, pale as the body at her feet, gazing down into the deathly face.

"Alice, don't look so, child. He's not dead—he's only fainted. Here, men, lift him up speedily, for he's nigh about gone. Thar's been mischief here—no mistake!"

Captain Wilde breathed hard as he glared about upon his men. The thought had occurred to him that some one had attempted to murder the young man for his valuable watch and chain and the well-filled purse he was supposed to carry. But no—the watch and money were undisturbed;—may be he had fallen and cut his head—if he should revive, they would know all.

They bore him to the house and laid him upon Alice's white bed in the pretty room just arranged for her comfort; it was the quietest, pleasantest place in the house, and she would have him there. After the administration of a powerful

dose of brandy, the faint pulse of the wounded man fluttered up a little stronger; more was given him, the blood was wiped away, and cool, wet napkins kept around his head; and by noon of the same day, he was able to give some account of himself.

He was sitting in the very spot where they had found him, on the previous afternoon, with a heap of evergreens gathered about him, preoccupied in making garlands, so that he saw nothing, heard nothing, until *something*—it seemed to him a club wielded by some assailant who had crept up behind him—struck him a blow which instantly deprived him of his senses. How long he lay, bleeding and stunned, he could only guess; it seemed to be deep night when he recalled what had happened, and found himself lying on the ground, confused by the pain in his head and faint from loss of blood. He managed to crawl upon the log, so as to lean his head upon his arms, and had been there many hours. He heard the shouts and saw the lights which came near him two or three times, but he could not make noise enough to attract attention. When he heard Alice's voice, he had lifted himself into a sitting posture, but the effort was too great, and he sank again, exhausted, at the moment relief reached him.

His hearers looked in each other's faces as they heard his story. *Who* could have done that murderous deed? What was the object? the pleasant young stranger had no enemies,—he had not been robbed; there were no Indians known to be about, and Indians would have finished their work with the scalping-knife.

Alas! the terrible secret preyed at the heart of Alice Wilde. She knew, though no mortal lips had revealed it, who was the would-be murderer. A pair of eyes had unconsciously betrayed it. She had read "*murder*" there, and the wherefore was now evident.

Yet she had no proof of that of which she was so conscious. Should she denounce the guilty man, people would ask for evidence of his crime. What would she have to offer?—that the criminal loved her, and she loved the victim. No! she would keep the gnawing truth in her own bosom, only whispering a warning to the sufferer should he ever be well enough to need it; a matter by no means settled, as David Wilde was doctor enough to know.

Despite of all the preventives within reach, a fever set in that night, and for two or three days, Philip was very ill, a part of the time delirious; there was much more probability of his dying than recovering. Both Mr. Wilde and Pallas had that skill picked up by the necessity of being doctors to all accidents and diseases around them; and they exerted themselves to the utmost for their unfortunate

young guest.

Then it was that Mr. Wilde found where the heart of his little girl had gone astray; and cursed himself for his folly in exposing her to a danger so probable. Yet, as he looked at her sweet face, worn with watching and trouble, he could not but believe that the hand of the proudest aristocrat on earth was none too good for her, and that Philip would recognize her beauty and worth. If she *must* love, and be married, he would more willingly resign her to Philip Moore than to any other man. Alice lacked experience as a nurse, but she followed every motion of the good old colored woman, and stood ready to interfere where she could be of any use.

Sitting hour after hour by Philip's bedside, changing the wet cloths constantly to keep them cool, she heard words from his delirious lips which added still more to her despair—fond, passionate words, addressed not to her, but to some beloved woman, some beautiful "Virginia," now far away, unconscious of her lover's danger, while to her fell the sad pleasure of attending upon him.

"Oh, that he may live, and not die by the hand of an assassin, so innocent a victim to a needless jealousy. Oh, that he may live to save this Virginia, whoever she may be, from the fate of a hopeless mourner. It will be joy enough for *me* to save his life," she cried to herself.

The crisis passed; the flush of fever was succeeded by the languor and pallor of extreme prostration; but the young man's constitution was excellent, and he recovered rapidly. Then how it pleased Pallas to cook him tempting dishes; and how it pleased Alice to see the appetite with which he disposed of them. Women love to serve those who are dear to them; no service can be so homely or so small that their enthusiasm does not exalt it.

Yet the stronger Philip grew, the more heavily pressed a cold horror upon the soul of Alice. Ben Perkins had not been to the house since the wounded man was brought into it; and when Alice would have asked her father of his whereabouts, her lips refused to form his name. She hoped that he had fled; but then she knew that if he had disappeared, her father would have mentioned it, and that the act would have fixed suspicion upon him. She felt that he was hovering about, that he often beheld her, when she was unaware of the secret gaze; she could not endure to step to the door after dark, and she closed the curtains of the windows with extremest care, especially in Philip's room.

The first light snow of November had fallen when the invalid was able to sit up all day; but, although he knew that his long absence would excite consternation

among his friends at Center City, and that business at home required his attention, he found each day of his convalescence so pleasant, that he had not strength of will sufficient to break the charm. To read to his young friend while she sewed; to watch her flitting about the room while he reclined upon a lounge; to talk with her; to study her changing countenance, grew every day more sweet to him. At first he thought it was gratitude—she had been so kind to him. But a thrilling warmth always gathered about his heart when he remembered that passionate voice, crying through the pine-woods with such a sobbing sound —"Philip! Philip!"

Finding himself thus disposed to linger, he was the more chagrined to perceive that Alice was anxious to have him go; she gave him no invitation to prolong his visit, and said unequivocally, that if he did not wish to be ice-bound for the winter, he would have to depart as soon as his strength would permit. Her father had promised him, when he came up, to take him down the river again when he was ready, as he should be obliged to go down again for his winter stores; and he now waited his visitor's movements.

No words had passed between Alice and Pallas on the subject of the attempted murder, yet the former half knew that the truth was guessed by the faithful servant who also hastened the departure of their guest.

"I declare, Aunt Pallas, I believe I have worn out my welcome. I've been a troublesome fellow, I know; but it hurts my vanity to see you getting so tired of me," he said, laughingly, one day, when they were alone together, he sitting on the kitchen-steps after the lazy manner of convalescents, trying to get warmth, both from the fire within and the sun without.

"Ole folks never gets tired of young, bright faces, masser Philip. But ole folks knows sometimes what's fer de best, more 'n young ones."

"Then you think Miss Alice wants to get rid of me, and you second your darling's wishes—eh, Pallas?" and he looked at her, hoping she would contradict him.

"I'd do a' mos' any thing for my pickaninny—I lub her better den life; an' dar' never was anudder such a chile, so pretty and so good, as *I* know as has been wid her sence she drew her firs' bref. If I tought she wanted you to go, I'd want you to go, too, masser, not meanin' any disrespeck—and she *do* want you to go; but she's got reasons for it;" and she shook her yellow turban reflectively.

"Do you think she is getting to dislike me?"

"Dat's her own bisness, ef she is; but dat ain't de main reason. She don't like de look of that red scar down your forrid. She knows who made dat ugly scar, and what fer they did it. She tinks dis a *dangerous* country for you, Masser Moore, and Pallas tink so too. Go way, masser, quick as you can, and nebber come back any more."

"But I *shall* come back, Aunt Pallas, next spring, to bring you something nice for all you've done for me, and because—because—I shan't be able to stay away," he answered, though somewhat startled and puzzled by her revelation.

"Why not be able to stay 'way?" queried she, with a sharp glance.

"Oh, you can guess, Aunt Pallas. I shan't tell you."

"People isn't allers satisfied with guessing—like to have things plain, and no mistake 'bout 'em," observed Pallas.

"Just so. *I* am not satisfied with guessing who tried to kill me, and what their object was. I am going to ask Alice, this evening. She's evidently frightened about me; she won't let me stir a step alone. So you think your pickaninny is the best and the prettiest child alive, do you?"

"Dat I do."

"So do I. What do you suppose she thinks of such a worthless kind of a person as myself? Do, now, tell me, won't you, auntie?"

"You clar out, young masser, and don't bozzer me. I'se busy wid dis ironin'. You'd better ask *her*, if yer want to find out."

"But can't you say something to encourage me?"

"You go 'long. Better tease somebody hain't got no ironin' on hand."

"You'll repent of your unkindness soon, Aunt Pallas; for, be it known to you, to-morrow is set for my departure, and when I'm gone it will be too late to send your answer after me;" and the young man rose, with a very becoming air of injured feeling which delighted her much.

"Hi! hi! ef it could only be," she sighed, looking after him. "But we can't smoof tings out in dis yere worl' quite so easy as I smoof out dis table-cloth. He's one ob de family, no mistake; and masser's found it out, too, 'fore dis."

That night the family sat up late, Pallas busy in the kitchen putting up her master's changes of linen and cooked provisions for the next day's journey, and the master himself busied about many small affairs demanding attention.

The two young people sat before a blazing wood-fire in the front room; the settle had been drawn up to it for Philip's convenience, and his companion at his request had taken a seat by his side. The curtains were closely drawn, yet Alice would frequently look around in a timid, wild way, which he could not but notice.

"You did not use to be so timid."

"I have more reason now;" and she shuddered. "Until you were hurt, Mr. Moore, I did not think how near we might be to murderers, even in our house."

"You should not allow it to make such an impression on your mind. It is passed; and such things scarcely happen twice in one person's experience."

"I do not fear for myself—it is for you, Mr. Moore."

"Philip, you called me, that night in the woods. Supposing I *was* in danger, little Alice, what would you risk for me?"

She did not answer.

"Well, what would you risk for some one you loved—say, your father?"

"All things—my life."

"There are some people who would rather risk their life than their pride, their family name, or their money. Supposing a man loved a woman very much, and she professed to return his love, but was not willing to share his meager fortunes with him; could not sacrifice splendor and the passion for admiration, for his sake—what would you think of her?"

"That she did not love him."

"But you do not know, little Alice; you have never been tempted; and you know nothing of the strength of fashion in the world, of the influence of public opinion, of the pride of appearances."

"I have guessed it," she answered, sadly.

He thought there was a shadow of reproach in those pure eyes, as if she would have added, that she had been made to feel it, too.

"I loved a woman once," he continued; "loved her so rashly that I would have let her set her perfect foot upon my neck and press my life out. She knew how I adored her, and she told me she returned my passion. But she would not resign any of her rank and influence for my sake."

"Was her name Virginia?"

"It was; how did you know?"

"You talked of her when you were ill."

"I'll warrant. But *she* wouldn't have sat up one night by my bedside, for fear her eyes would be less brilliant for the next evening's ball. She drove me off to the West to make a fortune for her to spend, in case she did not get hold of somebody else's by that time. Do you think I ought to make it for her?"

There was no answer. His companion's head was drooping. He lifted one of her hands, as he went on:

"I was so dazzled by her magnificence that, for a long time, I could see nothing in its true light. But my vision is clear now. Virginia shall never have my fortune to spend, nor me to twist around her jeweled finger."

The hand he held began to tremble.

"Now, little Alice, supposing I had told *you* of such love, and you had professed to answer it, what sacrifices would you have made? Would you have given me that little gold heart you wear about your neck—your only bit of ornamentation?"

"I would have made a sacrifice, full as great in its way, as the decline in pomp and position might have been to the proud lady," she replied, lifting her eyes calmly to his face. "I would have *refused* the offered happiness if, by accepting it, I thought I should ever, by my ignorance of proprieties, give him cause to blush for me—if I thought my uncultivated tastes would some time disappoint him, that he would grow weary of me as a friend and companion because I was not truly fitted for that place—if I thought I was not worthy of him, I would sacrifice *myself*, and try to wish only for his best happiness."

Her eyes sank, as she ceased speaking, and the tears which would come into them, gushed over her cheeks.

"Worthy! you are more than worthy of the best man in the world, Alice! far more than worthy of *me*!" cried Philip, in a rapture he could not restrain. "O Alice, if you only loved *me* in that fashion!"

"You know that I do," she replied, with that archness so native to her, smiling through her tears.

"Then say no more. There—don't speak—don't speak!" and he shut her mouth

with the first kiss of a lover.

For a while their hearts beat too high with happiness to recall any of the difficulties of their new relation.

"We shall have small time to lay plans for the future, now. But I shall fly to you on the first breezes of spring, Alice. Your father shall know all, on our way down the river. Oh, if there was only a mail through this forlorn region. I could write to you, at least."

"I shall have so much to do, the winter will speedily pass; I must study the books you brought me. But I shall not allow myself to hope too much," she added, with a sudden melancholy, such as sometimes is born of prophetic instinct.

"*I* can not hope too highly!" said Philip, with enthusiasm. "Here comes your father. Dear Alice, your cheeks are so rosy, I believe he will read our secret to-night."

CHAPTER VII.

SUSPENSE.

What was the consternation of Alice when her father returned the evening of the day of his departure and told her he had concluded he could not be spared for the trip, and so, when they reached the mill, he had chosen Ben to fill his place! Every vestige of color fled from her face.

"O father! how could you trust him with Philip?" burst forth involuntarily.

"Trust Ben? Why, child, thar ain't a handier sailor round the place. And if he wan't, I guess Moore could take care of himself—he'll manage a craft equal to an old salt."

"Can't you go after them, father? oh, do go, now, this night—this hour!"

"Why, child, you're crazy!" replied the raftsman, looking at her in surprise. "I never saw you so foolish before. Go after a couple of young chaps full-grown and able to take care of themselves? They've the only sail-boat there is, besides—and I don't think I shall break my old arms rowing after 'em when they've got a good day's start," and he laughed good-naturedly. "Go along, little one, I'm 'fraid you're love-cracked."

Got the only sail-boat there was! There would be no use, then, in making her father the confidant of her suspicions. It seemed as if fate had fashioned this mischance. Several of the men had got into a quarrel, at the mill, that morning; some of the machinery had broken, and so much business pressed upon the owner, that he had been obliged to relinquish his journey. He had selected Ben as his substitute because he was his favorite among all his employees; trusty, quick, honest, would make a good selection of winter stores, and render a fair account of the money spent. Such had been the young man's character; and the little public of Wilde's mill did not know that a stain had come upon it—that the mark of Cain was secretly branded upon the swarthy brow which once could have flashed back honest mirth upon them.

They say "the devil is not so black as he is painted;" and surely Ben Perkins was not so utterly depraved as might be thought. He was a heathen; one of those white heathen, found plentifully in this Christian country, not only in the back streets of cities, but in the back depths of sparsely-settled countries.

He had grown up without the knowledge of religion, as it is taught, except an occasional half-understood sensation sermon from some travelling missionary—he had never been made to comprehend the beauty of the precepts of Christ—and he had no education which would teach him self-control and the noble principle of self-government. Unschooled, with a high temper and fiery passions, generous and kindly, with a pride of character which would have been fine had it been enlightened, but which degenerated to envy and jealousy of his superiors in this ignorant boy-nature—the good and the bad grew rankly together. From the day upon which he "hired out," a youth of eighteen, to Captain Wilde, and saw Alice Wilde, a child of twelve, looking shyly up at him through her golden curls, he had loved her. He had worked late and early, striven to please his employer, shown himself hardy, courageous, and trustworthy—had done extra jobs that he might accumulate a little sum to invest in property—all in the hope of some time daring to ask her to marry him. Her superior refinement, her innate delicacy, her sweet beauty were felt by him only to make him love her the more desperately. As the sun fills the ether with warmth and light, so she filled his soul. It was not strange that he was infuriated by the sight of another man stepping in and winning so easily what he had striven for so long—he saw inevitably that Alice would love Philip Moore—this perfumed and elegant stranger, with his fine language, his fine clothes, and his fine manners. He conceived a deadly hate for him. All that was wicked in him grew, choking down every thing good. He allowed himself to brood over his wrongs, as he regarded them; growing sullen, imprudent, revengeful. Then the opportunity came, and he fell beneath the temptation.

Chance had saved him from the consummation of the deed, though not from the guilt of the intent. He had thought himself, for half a day, to be a murderer,—and during those hours the rash boy had changed into the desperate man. Whether he had suffered so awfully in conscience that he was glad to hear of the escape of his intended victim, or whether he swore still to consummate his wish, his own soul only knew.

Everybody at Wilde's mill had remarked the change in him, from a gay youth full of jests and nonsense to a quiet, morose man, working more diligently than ever, but sullenly rejecting all advances of sport or confidence.

If he *was* secretly struggling for the mastery over evil, it was a curious fatality which threw him again upon a temptation so overwhelming in its ease and security of accomplishment.

Ah, well did the unhappy Alice realize how easily now he could follow his intent

—how fully in his power was that unsuspicious man who had already suffered so much from his hands. Appetite and sleep forsook her; if she slept it was but to dream of a boat gliding down a river, of a strong man raising a weak one in his grasp and hurling him, wounded and helpless, into the waters, where he would sink, sink, till the waves bubbled over his floating hair, and all was gone. Many a night she started from her sleep with terrified shrieks, which alarmed her father.

""Tain't right for a young girl to be having the nightmare so, Pallas. Suthin' or another is wrong about her—hain't no nerves lately. I do hope she ain't goin' to be one of the screechin', faintin' kind of women folks. I detest sech. Her health can't be good. Do try and find out what's the matter with her; she'll tell you quicker 'an she will me. Fix her up some kind of tea."

"De chile ain't well, masser; dat's berry plain. She's getting thin every day, and she don't eat 'nuff to keep a bird alive. But it's her *mind*, masser—'pend on it, it's her mind. Dese young gentleum make mischief. Wish I had masser Moore under my thumb—I'd give him a scoldin' would las' him all his life."

"Cuss Philip Moore, and all others of his class," muttered the raftsman, moodily.

Both Mr. Wilde and Pallas began to lose their high opinion of the young man, as they witnessed the silent suffering of their darling. His going down the river without his expected company had cheated Philip out of the revelation he had desired to make; and Alice, with that excessive delicacy of some timid young girls, had not even confided her secret to her good old nurse.

Much better it would have been for her peace of mind, had she told all to her friends—her love and her fears. Then, if they had seen good reason for her apprehensions, they might have chased the matter down, at whatever trouble, and put her out of suspense. But she did not do it. She shut the growing terror in her heart where it fed upon her life day by day.

There was no regular communication between Wilde's mill and the lower country, and in the winter what little there had been was cut off. The lovely, lingering Indian-summer days, in the midst of which the two voyagers had set out, were over, and ice closed the river the very day after the return of Ben.

A sudden agony of hope and fear convulsed the heart of Alice, when her father entered the house one day, and announced Ben's arrival.

"Did he not bring me a letter? was there no letter for you, father?"

It would be so natural that he should write, at least to her father, some message of good wishes and announcement of his safe journey—if she could see his own

handwriting, she would be satisfied that all was well.

"Thar' was none for me. If Ben got a letter for you, I s'pose he'll tell you so, as he's coming in with some things."

"Have you any thing for me—any message or letter?"

It was the first time she had met Ben, face to face, since that never-to-be-forgotten night of the house-warming; but now he looked her in the eyes, without any shrinking, and it appeared to her as if the shadow which had lain upon him was lifted. He certainly looked more cheerful than he had done since the day of Philip's unexpected arrival at the new house. Was it because he felt that an enemy was out of the way? Alice could not tell; she waited for him to speak, as the prisoner waits for the verdict of a jury.

"Thar' ain't any letter, Miss Alice," he replied, "but thar's a package—some presents for you, and some for Pallas, too, from Mr. Moore. He told me to tell you that he was safe and sound, and hoped you'd accept the things he sent."

His eyes did not quail as he made this statement, though he knew that she was searching them keenly. Perhaps there was a letter in the bundle. She carried it to her own room and tore it open. No! not a single written word. The gifts for the old servant—silk aprons, gay-colored turbans, and a string of gold beads—were in one bundle. In another was a lady's dressing-case, with brushes, perfumeries, and all those pretty trifles which grace the feminine toilet, a quantity of fine writing materials, paper-folder, gold-pen, some exquisite small engravings, and, in a tiny box, a ring set with a single pure pearl. That ring! was it indeed a betrothal ring, sent to her by her lover, which she should wear to kiss and pray over? or was it intended to help her into a bond with his murderer? Eagerly she scanned every bit of wrapping-paper to find some proof that it was Philip's own hand which had made up the costly and tasteful gifts. She could find nothing to satisfy her. They might have been purchased with his money, but not by him. The ring which she would have worn so joyfully had she been certain it had come from him, she put back in its case without even trying it on her finger.

"O God!" she murmured, throwing herself upon her knees, "must I bear this suspense all this endless winter?"

Yes, all that endless winter the weight of suspense was not to be lifted—nor for yet more miserable months.

December sat in extremely cold, and the winter throughout was one of unusual severity.

As the Christmas holidays drew near, that time of feasting so precious to the colored people raised in "ole Virginny," Saturn bestirred himself a little out of his perpetual laziness. If he would give due assistance in beating eggs and grinding spices, chopping suet and picking fowls, as well as "keep his wife in kindling-wood," Pallas promised him rich rewards in the way of dainties, and also to make him his favorite dish a—woodchuck pie.

"'Clar' to gracious, I don't feel a bit of heart 'bout fixin' up feastesses dis yere Chris'mas," said she to him, one evening in the midst of the bustle of preparation. "We've allers been Christian folks 'nuff to keep Chris'mas, even in de wilderness; but what's de use of cookin' and cookin' and dar's Miss Alice don't eat as much as dat frozen chick I brought in and put in dat basket by de fire."

"But dar's masser, *he* eat well 'nuff,—and I—I'se mighty hungry dese days. Don't stop cookin', Pallas."

"You hain't got no more feelin's den a common nigger, Saturn. Nobody'd tink you was brought up in one de best families. If I could only tink of somethin' new dat would coax up pickaninny's appetite a little!"

"P'raps she'll eat some my woodchuck pie," suggested Saturn.

It was a great self-denial for him to propose to share a dish which he usually reserved especially to himself, but he, too, felt as tender as his organism would permit, toward his youthful mistress.

"Our missus eat woodchuck pie! you go 'long, Saturn; she wouldn't stomach it. Dat's nigger's dish. I declar' our chile begins to look jus' as missus did de year afore she died. I feel worried 'bout her."

"Does you? Mebbe she's got de rheumatiz or de neurology. I got de rheumatiz bad myself dis week pas'. Wish you'd fix up some of yer liniment, wife."

"Wall, wall, eberybuddy has der troubles, even innocen' ones like our chile. Dis is a wicked and a perwerse generation, and dat is de reason our woods tuk fire and our house burn up; and now our dear chile mus' go break her heart 'bout somebody as won't say wedder he lubs her or not. She'll go of consumption jes' as missus went. Lor'! who'd a thought our family wud ever come to sech an end? I remember when Mortimer Moore kep' up de plantation in gran' style 'fore he sol' ebery buddy but you and I, Saturn, and kep' us cause we wouldn't leab de family, and tuk us to New York. Mebbe it was wicked of me to take sides with my young missus, and help her to get married way she did, and run 'way wid her, and see to her tru thick and thin. But I see her die, and now, likely, I'll be

resarbed to see her chile die. Dun know what poor old woman lib for to bury all her children for. When I tink of all de mince-pies and de chicken-pies I use to make, and see eat, for Chris'mas, I don't feel no heart for to lif' dis choppin'-knife anodder time."

Yet the preparations progressed, and on Christmas and New Year's day the men at the mill were supplied with a feast; but Alice could not bring herself to decorate the house with wreaths of evergreen, according to custom—it brought back hateful fears too vividly. The unceasing cry of her heart was for the river to open. She counted the hours of the days which must drag on into weeks and months.

Ben now came frequently to the house. If Alice would not talk to him, he would make himself agreeable to the old servants; any thing for an excuse to linger about where he could obtain glimpses of the face growing so sad and white. Mr. Wilde had always favored him as a work-hand, and now he invited him often to his home. He hoped that even Ben's company would amuse his daughter and draw her away from her "love-sickness."

It was a few weeks after the holidays that, one evening, Mr. Wilde took Alice upon his knee, smoothing her hair as if she were a baby, and looking fondly into her face.

"I've some curious news for you, little one," he said, with a smile. "Would you believe that any one had been thinking of my little cub for a wife, and had asked me if he might talk to her about it?"

"Was it Ben, father?"

"Yes, it was Ben. No doubt you knew of it before, you sly puss!"

"I refused him long ago, father. Didn't he tell you that?"

"No."

"Would you be willing I should marry a person like him?"

"No, not willing. Once I'd have set him afloat if he'd had the impudence to mention it. But you're failing so, Alice, and you're so lonesome and so shut up here. I know how it is. The young must have their mates; and if *you* want him, I shan't make any serious objection. He's the best there is in these parts. He's better than a flattering, deceiving *gentleman*, Alice. I *was* fool enough once to imagine you'd never marry, but live your lifetime with yer old father; but I ought to have known better. 'Tain't the way of the world. 'Twasn't my way, nor your mother's

way. No, Alice, if yer ever in love, and want to marry, unless I know the man's a villain, I shall make no objections. Ben loves you, my dear, desperately. A girl should give two thoughts before she throws away such a love as his. 'Tain't every man is capable of it."

"But I'm engaged to Philip Moore, father. *We* love each other." Her blushing cheek was pressed against his that he might not see it.

"Alice, my child," said the raftsman very gently, in a voice full of pity and tenderness; "Mr. Moore is a rascal. He may have told you that he loved you, but he don't. He don't intend to marry you. He's a d—— proud aristocrat!" waxing wrathy as he went on. "There! there! don't you feel hurt; I know all about him. Knew't he made fun of us, after all we'd done for him, in his store down to Center City, when he didn't know Ben was listenin'. Besides, he advised Ben to marry you, to keep you from breakin' your heart about *him*; said you expected him back in the spring, but he was goin' on East to marry a girl there. So you see you must think no more of that rascally fellow, Alice. If he ever does come back here I'll whip him."

"Ben told you this?" cried Alice, her eyes flashing fire and her white lips quivering. "And you believed the infamous lie, father? No! no! Ben has *murdered* him, father—he has murdered my Philip, and has invented this lie to prevent our expecting him. O Philip!"—her excitement overpowered her and she fainted in her father's arms.

Now that the tension of suspense had given way, and she deemed herself certain of the fate of her lover, she yielded for a time to the long-smothered agony within her, going from one fainting-fit to another all through that wretched night.

The next day, when composed enough to talk, she told her father all—Ben's offer of marriage, his threats, the circumstantial evidence which fixed the guilt of the assault in the woods upon him, and her belief now that Philip had been made away with. The raftsman himself was startled; and to quiet and encourage his child, he promised to set off, by to-morrow, upon the ice, and *skate* down to Center City, that her fears might be dispelled or confirmed. But that very night the weather, which had been growing warm for a week, melted into rain, and the ice became too rotten to trust. There was nothing to do but to wait.

""Tain't by no means certain he's done sech a horrible thing. And if you'll pick up courage to think so, and make yerself as easy as you can, I'll start the very first day it's possible. Likely in March the spring 'll open. You may go 'long with me, too, if you wish, so as to learn the news as soon as I do. I'll say nothing of my

suspicions to young Perkins, but try to treat him the same as ever, till I know he desarves different."

CHAPTER VIII.

AWAY FROM HOME.

A quaint party were to be seen passing through some of the streets of Center City one April day of the following spring. A tall and vigorous man, with a keen, intelligent face, clad in a calico shirt, a blue-woolen hunter's frock and buckskin breeches, strode on as if anxious to reach his destination; or, rather, as if used to making good time over endless prairies and through unsurveyed forests. By his side walked a young girl whose dress, though of the best materials, was antique as our grandmothers'; a broad-brimmed hat shaded a face the loveliest ever beheld in that city; her little slippers with their silver buckles peeped out from beneath her short frock. Those who were fortunate enough to see her as she passed did not know which to admire most—the exquisite, unstudied grace of her manners, which was as peculiar as her beauty, or the seraphic innocence of her expression. She kept pace with her companion, looking gravely forward with those great blue eyes, only occasionally giving the crowd a fawn-like, startled look, when it pressed too near. A few paces behind trudged an ancient colored couple, the man short, and white-eyed, rolling smiles as he passed, evidently supposing all the attention of the lookers-on to be concentrated on his flaming vest, his flowered coat, and bran-new boots; the woman a perfect black Juno, really superb in her air and physique, wearing her neatly-folded yellow turban as if it were a golden crown. She seldom took her eyes off the young mistress whom she followed, except occasionally to frown at some impudent fellow who stared too hard.

The group wended their way onward until they read the names of "Raymond & Moore," in gilt letters over a new four-story brick store of this thriving new town, and here they disappeared from the view of outsiders.

"Captain Wilde! how do you do? you're down early this spring. Well, the mill's waiting for you to feed it. Come down on a raft?"

"Yes, Mr. Raymond, a thundering big one. Brought my family this time to give 'em a chance to pick out a few things for themselves. My daughter, sir."

The merchant gave the young lady a chair. She took it, mechanically, but her heart, her eyes, were asking one question of the smiling, curious man, the friend and partner of her own Philip, who for the first time began to suspect the cause

which had kept the latter so long, "hunting and fishing" up at Wilde's mill. Could he look so smiling, so assured, and her Philip be dead? The cry: "Where is he?" trembled silently on her lips.

"Yes, a thundering big raft we got out this spring. Wood-choppers to work all winter," continued the raftsman, walking along farther from his daughter, and speaking with apparent carelessness. "By the way, where's Mr. Moore? did he get home safe, after his spell of sickness, at our house last fall?"

"Oh, yes! he got home safe and in fine spirits. He was soon as well or better than ever. I expect he got pretty good care," and the merchant glanced over at the young girl respectfully.

Mr. Raymond was a good-hearted, refined young married man; but if he had been gross or impure, or not over-fastidious, or fond of a jest, there was something about both father and child to suppress all feelings but those of respect and wondering admiration, Alice Wilde's beauty was of a kind to defy criticism. She might have worn sackcloth and ashes, or flannel and thick boots, or a Turkish dress, or a Puritan maiden's, or a queen's robe, it would have made but small difference; her loveliness was of that overmastering kind which draws the hearts of high and low, and makes every man feel in her presence, forgetful of every lesser consideration—lo! here is a beautiful woman! Such charms as hers have had great power whenever they have been found—they have exalted peasant women to thrones, and led men of genius and rank, as if they were children, hither and thither. It is not strange that Alice's personal loveliness, added to her still more unusual unconsciousness of it, and infantile innocence, should at once have commanded the reverence of people of the world, in spite of the quaintness of manner and attire, in themselves pretty and piquant.

Although her father had spoken in a low voice, Alice had heard his question and the answer. The splendor of happiness broke over her countenance—blushes rose to her cheeks and smiles to her eyes; she hardly dared to glance in any direction lest she should see her lover unexpectedly, and betray her joy to strangers.

"Is he about the store this morning; or will I have to go to the mill to see him?" asked the raftsman.

"You will not see him at all, this trip, I'm afraid. Mr. Moore has gone on East; he's been away several weeks now, and I hardly know when to expect him. He was called there quite unexpectedly, upon business connected with his uncle, and their relatives in England. It would not surprise me at all if he should bring a

bride home—that is, if he can persuade his fair cousin that the West is not such a terrible savage wilderness as she supposes."

Mr. Raymond was perfectly honest in this remark. He knew that Virginia Moore used to be the idol of his friend; and as Philip had not communicated the change in his ideas, he still supposed that Philip was only waiting to get rich enough to go home and marry her; and as Philip was now doing so well with his western enterprises, he had planned it all out in his own imagination—fortune, acceptance, and the happy *finale* of a grand wedding. He could not help looking over at the pretty forester to see how she received the news, but the portly person of the old colored woman had come between them, and he could not see her face.

"Laws, Miss Alice, do see them yere calikers—they're sruperb! Look at that red one with the blue flowers—'tain't so handsome though, as this with the yaller. My! my! thar's a jewerlly shop across the way. Yer fadder ought to take yer in dar', fust place. Young gals likes them places. Laws, darlin', dis don't compare wid New York City. Le's have a drink of water, and step over de street."

All this volubility was to screen the young girl from scrutiny. A pitcher of water stood on the counter, near her, and she poured a glass for her mistress. But Alice waved the glass away, and arose without any signs of grief and pain in her face; but the expression had changed—an icy pride composed every feature; she asked the merchant to show her some of his goods in a clear, low tone as sweet as it was passionless. Her hand did not tremble as she turned over silks and laces.

"Good for her! She's got her father's grit," thought the raftsman to himself, while his own throat swelled almost to choking with anger and grief, and he felt that if he only had Philip Moore within sight he would have the satisfaction of thrashing a little conscience into him.

Neither he nor Alice any longer doubted the statements of Ben Perkins. Mr. Moore *had* ridiculed them—*had* mockingly given another permission to console her whom he had forsaken—*had* said that he was going East to marry a more fit companion. As the raftsman looked in the quiet face of his child which repelled sympathy with a woman's pride—that pride so terrible because it covers such tortured sensibilities—his blood boiled up with ungovernable rage. He was not accustomed to concealing his sentiments upon any subject.

"Let them finnified fixin's alone, Alice," he said, taking her hand and drawing her away. "Men that make it a business to handle that sort of thing, grow about as flimsy as their wares. I despise 'em. I want you to understand, Mr. Raymond,

that all connection between me and this firm, business or other, is dissolved. I won't even take your cussed money. When Mr. Moore returns, tell him that the laws of hospitality practised by your four-story-bricks ain't known in squatters' cabins, and if he ever comes on my premises again I'll consider myself at liberty to shoot him down for a dog;" and before the surprised merchant could reply he had strode forth.

"Come 'long, Saturn! don' stan' dar' starin'; don't yer see masser's gone? I shall be sorry I brought yer 'long ef yer don't behabe wid more propisciousness. What der s'pose folks 'll tink your missus and masser is, ef you don't act like a fust-family nigger? Ef yer don't do credit to Miss Alice, I'll nebber bring you 'way from home agin;" and Pallas took "her nigger" by the elbow and drew him away from the fascinating array of dry-goods and ready-made clothing.

That afternoon Captain Wilde and his daughter sat in a little private sitting-room of the hotel, overlooking the street. Every thing was novel to Alice. This was absolutely her first experience away from her forest home. Yet upon all the busy, bustling scene beneath her she gazed with vacant eyes.

About the rapid rise and growth of some of our western cities there is an air peculiar to themselves—an experience unique in the history of civilization. Situated amid scenes of unparalleled beauty, they seem to jar upon and disturb the harmony of their surroundings; brick and plaster, new shingles, and glowing white paint, unsubdued by time, rise up in the midst of fairy-land; rude wharves just over the silver waters where erst the silent canoe of the Indian only glided; wild roses flush the hill-sides crowned with sudden dwellings; stately old forests loom up as backgrounds to the busiest of busy streets. The shrill cry of the steam-whistle startles the dreamy whippoorwill; the paddle-wheel of the intrusive steamboat frightens the indolent salmon from his visions of peace. As the landscape, so the people; curiously mixed of rough and refined. Center City was one of the most picturesque of these young towns; and, at present, one of the most prosperous. Broken-down speculators from the East came thither and renewed their fortunes; and enterprising young men began life with flattering prospects.

It was upon the principal street that Alice sat and looked. Streams of people hurried by, like the waves of the river past her cabin in the wood. She saw ladies dressed in a fashion differing widely from her own; across the way, in a suite of parlors in the second story, she saw, through the open blind, a young girl of about her own age sitting at a musical instrument, from which she drew, as if by magic, music that held her listener as by golden chains. New thoughts and aims

came into the mind of the raftsman's daughter. Pride was struggling to heal the wounds which love had made.

"Father, will you send me to school?"

For a long time there was no answer; his head was bent upon his hand. She crept upon his knee, in her little-girl way, and drew away the hand.

"It'll be undoin' the work of sixteen year to send you to one of them boarding-schools. They'll learn you plenty of vanity and worse things, my child; they'll make you unfit to be happy and contented with yer plain old father. But that you are already. I've made a failure. You're too good for them that's about you, and not good enough for them you wish to be like. Go to school if you want to, child; go, and learn to put on airs and despise those who would give their heart's blood for ye. I shall make no objections."

"Do you think I could learn to be so very bad, father? If you can not trust me, I will not go. So let us say no more about it," and she kissed him.

"Thar', thar', child, I didn't mean to deny ye. But I feel bitter to-day—hard and bitter—as I used to in days gone by, when your mother died, turned off by them that were ashamed of yer father. If you'll only keep like yer mother, you may do what you will. *She* went to school, and she knew more than a dozen fine-lady scholars; but it didn't spoil her. May be I've done wrong to bring you up the way I have—to visit my experience and my doubts on your young head. We must all live and learn for ourselves. Go to school, if you want to. I'll try and get along without my little cubbie for a year or two."

"It's hard, father—hard for me—but I wish it." Pride was steeling the heart of the forest maiden. "But are you able, father; can you pay the expense."

This thought never came to her until after she had his promise.

"Yes, I'm able—and if it's done, it shall be done in the best style. I haven't cut down all the pine timber I've set afloat for the last fifteen year, without laying up something for my cub. I want you to dress as well as any you see, and study whatever you like, and play lady to yer heart's content. You'd better find a dress-maker, the first thing, and not be stared at every time you step out of the door. Get yourself silks and satins, girl, and hold your head up like the queen of the prairie."

When Captain Wilde returned up the river, he and his sable suite made a melancholy journey; for the light of their eyes, the joy of their hearts, was left behind them.

A young ladies' seminary, "a flourishing young institution, beautifully located in a healthy region, with spacious grounds enjoying the salubrious river-breezes," etc., etc., held prisoner, the wild bird of the forest.

"Where's your daughter?" asked Ben Perkins of his employer, when he saw the returning party land without Alice. His face was blanched to a dead-white, for he expected certainly to hear that she had been claimed as his bride by Philip Moore.

"Yer story was true, Ben, though I did ye the wrong to doubt it. Alice will never be the wife of that counter-jumper. But she'll never be yours, neither; so you might as well give up, first as last. Go off somewhere, Ben, and find somebody else; that's my advice."

"Look-a-here, Captain Wilde, I know you mean the best, and that my chance is small; but I tell you, sir, jest as long as Alice is free to choose, and I've got breath and sense to try for her, I shan't give her up. Never, sir! I'll work my fingers off to serve you and her—I'll wait years—I'll do any thing you ask, only so you won't lay any thing in my way."

The raftsman looked pityingly in the haggard face of the speaker—the face which a year ago was so bright and boyish. He saw working in those dark lineaments, in the swart blood coursing under the olive skin, in the gleam of the black eyes, passions difficult to check, which might urge him in future years to yet other crimes than the one into which he had already been betrayed.

"You're high-tempered, Ben, my boy, and a little too rough to suit a girl like mine. She knows what your temper has already led you to do;" and he looked straight at the youth as he spoke, whose eyes wavered and sunk to the ground—it was the first intimation he had had that his guilt was suspected. "Why not go off, and find some one more like yourself—some pretty, red-cheeked lass who'll think you the best and handsomest fellow on the earth, and be only too happy to marry you? Thar's plenty such chances—and you'd be a deal happier."

"Don't, *don't* talk so!" burst forth Ben, impetuously. "I *can't* do it, and that's the end on 't. I've tried to get away, but I'm bound here. It's like as if my feet were tied to this ground. I've done bad things in my determination to keep others away. I know it, and I own up to it. I've been desp'rate-crazy! But I ain't a bad fellow. If Miss Alice would smile upon me, 'pears to me I *couldn't* be bad—'pears to me I'd try to get to be as good as she is. Even if she never would marry me, if she'd let me stay 'round and work for you, and she didn't take up with nobody else, I'd be content. But if I have to give her up entirely, I expect I'll

make a pretty bad man, cap'n. I've all kinds of wicked thoughts about it, and I can't help it. I ain't made of milk-and-water. I'd rather fight a bar' than court a girl. I shan't never ask another woman to have me—no, sir! I'd 'ave made you a good son, if all hands had been willin'. But if Miss Alice means to make herself a fine lady to catch some other sweet lady-killer like the one that's given her the mitten, it's her choice. She'll up and marry somebody that won't speak to her old father, I s'pose."

"Thar's no telling," answered the raftsman, sadly; for, in truth, the changed manner of his darling before he left her, lay like a weight upon his memory and heart. He felt a chord of sympathy binding him to the young man, as if theirs was a common cause. Alice seemed to have receded from them, as in a dream, growing more cold and reserved, as she glided into the distance. Her trouble, instead of flinging her more closely into her father's arms, had torn her from him, and taught her self-control. She had deserted her home, had left him to care for himself, while she fitted herself for some sphere into which he could not come. That "sharper than a serpent's tooth—a thankless child," he was tempted to call her. Yet his heart refused such an accusation. She had been suddenly shaken in her innocent faith in others, had been wounded in pride and deserted in love—and her present mood was the high reaction of the blow. Presently she would be herself again, would come back to her home and her humble friends with the same modest, affectionate, gentle character as of old.

But he would treat her differently; he would gratify her love of the beautiful. She should have books, music, fine furniture, fine clothes. He did not ask himself what all these would be worth without that paramount necessity of the youthful mind—companionship. Alas! the raftsman, bringing up his idol in seclusion, had foolishly and selfishly thought to fix her heart only upon himself; but the little bird had learned to fly and had gone out of the parent nest, fluttering out into the untried world, impelled by the consciousness of wings.

CHAPTER IX.

A ROLAND FOR AN OLIVER.

"You are rich, Philip!"

"Yes, Virginia, or soon shall be."

"How like a fairy-story it all sounds."

"Or a modern novel."

"*We can be happy now, Philip!*"

The two young people were leaning over the balustrade of a balcony of the summer residence of Mortimer Moore. The rich moonlight was still permeated with the rosy tinges of sunset; the early dew called out the fragrance of a near meadow in which the grass had been cut that day, and its odors were mingled with the perfumes of roses and lilies in the garden beneath the balcony. It was an hour to intoxicate the souls of the young and loving. If Virginia had been dressing herself for a ball she would not have used more care than she had shown in the simple afternoon toilet she now wore—simple, and yet the result of consummate tact. A single string of pearls looped up the heavy braids of black hair, an Indian muslin robe, in whose folds lurked precious perfumes, floated about her form, the wide, full sleeves falling away from the ivory arms, gave softness to their rounded outlines. A bunch of violets nestled in the semi-transparent fabric where it was gathered over her bosom. The creamy tint of her low, smooth forehead just deepened in her cheek to that faint flush which you see in the heart of a tea-rose; her straight brows, long lashes, and the deep, dark eyes smiling under them, all showed to wonderful advantage in the delicious light.

As she uttered the last words, she laid her hand lightly upon Philip's arm, and looked up into his face. He was fully aware, at that moment, of her attractions; a smile, the meaning of which she could not fully fathom, answered her own, as he said:

"I *hope* we can be happy, my fair cousin. I expect to be very much blessed as soon as a slight suspense which I endure is done away with."

"Why should you feel suspense, Philip? every thing smiles upon you."

"I see *you* are smiling upon me, my beautiful cousin; and that is a great deal, if not every thing. You always promised to smile upon me, you know, if I ever got gold enough to make it prudent."

"It seems to me as if there was sarcasm in your voice, Philip. You know that I have always thought more of you than any one else; and if I would not marry you when poor, it was because I dared not. Now we are equal—in fortune, youth, health. My father is so much better. He was out walking this afternoon; the country air has benefited him. The doctor thinks it may be years before he has another attack. You've been very kind to him, Philip. When our fortunes are joined, we can live almost as we please—as well as I care to live. Won't it be charming?"

The tapering white hand slid down upon his own.

"Very. You remember that trite passage in the Lady of Lyons, which the mob, the vulgar crowd, are still disposed to encore. Supposing we change the scene from the Lake of Como to the banks of the Hudson—listen, Virginia! how prettily sentiment sounds in this moonshine:

> "'A palace lifting to eternal summer
> Its marble walls, from out a glossy bower
> Of coolest foliage, musical with birds,
> Whose songs should syllable thy name! At noon
> We'd sit beneath the arching vines, and wonder
> Why earth should be unhappy, while the heavens
> Still left us youth and love. We'd have no friends
> That were not lovers; no ambition, save
> To excel them all in love—that we might smile
> To think how poorly eloquence of words
> Translates the poetry of hearts like ours.
> And when night came, amidst the breadthless heavens,
> We'd guess what star should be our home when love
> Becomes immortal; while the perfumed light
> Stole through the mist of alabaster lamps,
> And every air was heavy with the sighs
> Of orange-groves and music of sweet lutes,
> And murmurs of low fountains that gush forth
> In the midst of roses! Dost thou like the picture?'

Go on, Virginia, can't you act your part?"

"Let me see, can I recall it?—

"'Oh, as the bee upon the flower, I hang
Upon the honey of thy eloquent tongue;
Am I not blest? And if I love too wildly—
Who would not love thee like Virginia?'"

"A very passable actress you are, cousin. I'd have thought you really meant that, once, you put such fervor in your voice. But—

"'O false one!
It is the *prince* thou lovest, not the *man*.'"

"Nay, Philip, like Pauline, I must plead that you wrong me. Already, before my father summoned you, before we heard the whisper of your coming fortune, I had resolved to search you out and take back my cruel resolution—more cruel to myself than to you. I found that I had overrated my powers of endurance—that I did not know my own heart. Dear Philip, will you not forgive me? Remember how I was brought up."

Two tears glimmered in the moonlight and plashed upon his hand. They ought to have melted a stonier susceptibility than his.

"Willingly, Virginia. I forgive you from my heart—and more, I thank you for that very refusal which you now regret. If that refusal had not driven me into the wilds of the West, I should never have met my perfect ideal of womanhood. But I have found her there. A woman, a child rather, as beautiful as yourself—as much *more* beautiful, as love is lovelier than pride; an Eve in innocence, with a soul as crystal as a silver lake; graceful as the breezes and the wild fawns; as loving as love itself; and so ignorant that she does not know the worth of money, and didn't inquire about the settlements when I asked her to marry me. Think of that, Virginia!"

"Are you in earnest, Philip?"

"I am. I am sorry for your disappointment, my sweet cousin, and hope you have not thrown away any eligible chances while waiting for me. I'm going to-morrow, as fast as steam can carry me, to put an end to that suspense of which I spoke. My little bird is deep in the western forests, looking out for me with those blue eyes of hers, so wistfully, for I promised to be back long ago. Your father's affairs are in a tangled condition, I warn you, Virginia; and you'd better make a

good match while you've still the reputation of being an heiress. I've been trying to get my uncle's matters into shape for him; but I'm quite discouraged with the result."

"Perhaps that's the reason you have forgotten me so easily, Philip."

"I should expect you, my disinterested and very charming cousin, to entertain such a suspicion; but my pretty forester lives in a log-cabin, and has neither jewels nor silk dresses. So, you see, I am not mercenary. *Her* 'loveliness needs not the foreign aid of ornament.' She looks better with a wild-rose in her hair than any other lady I ever saw with a wreath of diamonds."

"You are in a very generous mood, this evening, Philip Moore. You might at least spare comparisons to the woman you have refused."

"I couldn't inflict any wounds upon your *heart*, cousin; for that's nothing but concentrated carbon—it's yet beyond the fusible state, and it's nothing now but a great diamond—very valuable, no doubt, but altogether too icy cold in its sparkle for me."

"Go on, sir. My punishment is just, I know. I remember when *you* were the pleader—yet I was certainly more merciful than you. I tempered my refusal with tears of regret, while you spice yours with pungent little peppery sarcasms."

"Don't pull those violets to pieces so, Virginia, I love those flowers; and that's the reason you wore them to-night. If you'd have followed your own taste, you'd have worn japonicas. But, seriously, I must go to-morrow. I have remained away from my business much longer than I should; but I could not desert my uncle in his sickness and difficulties until I saw him better. He was kind to me in my boyhood, he made me much of what I am, and if he did not think me fitted to carry the honors of his family to the next generation, I can still be grateful for what he did do."

"You do not give me credit for the change which has come over me—if you did, you could not leave me so coolly. I'm not so bound up in appearances as I was once. Ah, Philip! this old country-house will be intolerably lonely when you are gone."

He looked down into the beautiful face trembling with emotion; he had never seen her when she looked so fair as then, because he had never seen her when her feelings were really so deeply touched. The memory of the deep passion he had once felt for her swept back over him, tumultuous as the waves of a sea. Her cheek, wet with tears, and flushed with feeling, pressed against his arm. It was a

dangerous hour for the peace of that other young maiden in the far West. Old dreams, old habits, old hopes, old associates, the glittering of the waves of the Hudson, familiar to him from infancy, the scent of the sea-breeze, and the odors of the lilies in the homestead garden, the beautiful face upon his arm which he had watched since it was a babe's rosy face in its cradle,—all these things had power, and were weaving about him a rapid spell.

"What does that childish, ignorant young thing know of love, Philip? If some rustic fellow with rosy cheeks, who could not write his own name, had been the first to ask her, she would have said 'Yes' just as prettily as she did to you. But I have been tried—I know others, myself, and you. My judgment and my pride approve my affection. Then the West is no place for a man like you. You used to be ambitious—to plan out high things for your future. I adore ambition in a man. I would not have him sit at my feet day and night, and make no effort to conquer renown. I would have him great, that I might honor his greatness. I would aspire with and for him. You might be a shining light here, Philip, where it is a glory to shine. Why will you throw yourself away upon a rude and uncultivated community? Stay here a week or two longer, and think better of the mode of life you have chosen."

The moon hung in the heavens, high and pure, drawing the tides of the ocean, whose sighs they could almost hear; and like the moon, fair and serene, the memory of Alice Wilde hung in the heaven of Philip's heart, calming the earthly tide of passion which beat and murmured in his breast. He remembered that touching assurance of hers that she would sacrifice *herself* for him, at any time, and he could not think her love was a chance thing, which would have been given to a commoner man just as readily.

"I have tarried too long already, Virginia; I must go to-morrow."

He did not go on the morrow; for while they stood there upon the balcony in the summer moonshine, a servant came hastily with word, that the master of the house was again stricken down, in his library, as he sat reading the evening paper.

He was carried to his room, and laid upon his bed in an unconscious state. Everybody seemed to feel, from the moment of his attack, that this time there was no hope of his recovery. The family physician had only left him and returned to the city a day or two previously. The evening boat would be at the landing just below in fifteen minutes; Philip ordered a trusty servant to proceed on board of her to New York, and bring back the medical attendant by the return

boat in the morning. Meanwhile he did what little he could for the relief of the unconscious man, while Virginia, pale as her dress, the flowers in her bosom withering beneath the tears which fell upon them, sat by the bedside, holding the paralyzed hand which made no response to her clasp. Hours passed in this manner; toward morning, while both sat watching for some sign of returning sensibility to the deathly features, the sufferer's eyes unclosed and he looked about him with a wandering air—

"Where is Alice? Alice! Alice! why don't you come? I've forgiven you, quite, and I want you to come home."

"He is thinking of my sister," whispered Virginia, looking with awe into the eyes which did not recognize her, and drawing her cousin nearer to her side.

"Don't tell me she is dead—Alice, the pride of my house—not dead!"

"Oh, it is terrible to see him in such a state. Philip, can't you do something to relieve him?"

"Virginia, poor child! I'm afraid he is beyond mortal aid. Be brave, my dear girl, I will help you to bear it."

Philip could not refuse, in that sad hour, his sympathy and tenderness to the frightened, sorrowful woman who had only him to cling to. Presently the wild look faded out of the sick man's eyes.

"Virginia, is that you? My poor child, I am dying. Nothing can save me now. I leave you alone, no father, no mother, sister, or brother, or husband to care for you when I am gone. Philip, are you here? will you be all these to Virginia? Do not hesitate, do not let pride control you in this hour. I know that I rejected you once, when you asked to be my son; but I see my mistake now. You have been very kind and unselfish to me since I sent for you. You are a man of prudence and honor. I should die content, if I knew Virginia was your wife, if you had not a thousand dollars to call your own. Poor girl! she will have very little, after all my vain seeking of wealth for her. Gold is nothing—*happiness* is all. Virginia, take warning by me. I am a witness of the hollowness of pride. I have been a sad and discontented man for years. The memory of my cruelty to my Alice has stood like a specter between me and joy. Choose love—marry for love. Philip is more than worthy of you; try to make him happy. My boy, you do not speak. Take her hand, here, and promise me that you will take good care of my last and only child."

He had uttered all this in a low voice, rapidly, as if afraid his strength would not

last him to say what he wished. Virginia turned to her cousin and seized his hand.

"Philip! Philip! can you refuse—can you desert me, too? O father! I shall be alone in this world."

"Why do you not promise me, and let me die in peace?" exclaimed the old man with some of that stern command in his voice which had become a part of him; "do you not love my child?"

"Not as I did once. At least—but that's no matter. Do not distress yourself, uncle, about Virginia. I will be to her a true and faithful brother. I promise to care for her and share with her as if she were my sister."

"If I could see her your wife, my boy, I should feel repaid for all I have done for you, since you were thrown upon my hands, an orphan and friendless, as my child will soon be. Send for the priest, children, and make it sure."

Philip was silent; his cousin, too, was silent and trembling.

"Don't you see I'm going?—do you want to let me die unsatisfied?"—the querulous voice was weak and sinking.

"I promise to be a brother to Virginia—to care for her as if she were my own, uncle. Is not that enough?"

"No—no—no!" fretted the dying man, who, having been unreasonable and exacting all his life, could not change his nature at the hour of death.

Distressed and uncertain what to do, tempted by the force of circumstances, Philip wavered; but the moment when his promise would have given his uncle any satisfaction had passed—the awful change was upon his face, the sweat upon his brow, the rattle in his throat.

"O, my father!" sobbed Virginia, sinking upon her knees and flinging her arms over the heart which had ceased to beat.

The gray morning broke over her as she wept wildly beside the bed. Philip was obliged to draw her away from the room by force, while others came to attend upon the dead. To see her so given up to grief, so desolate, with no one but himself to whom she could turn, touched him with pity and tenderness.

"Weep, if you will, poor girl, it will be better than choking back all those tears. Weep in my arms, for I am your brother now," he said, very gently, as he seated her upon a sofa and drew her head to his shoulder, soothing her and quieting her

excess of emotion, until, from fatigue and exhaustion, she dropped asleep on his bosom.

"How lovely she is, with her arrogance and vanity all melted away by some real sorrow," he thought, as he laid her carefully upon the pillow, and went out to give directions to the disturbed household.

During the next week Philip made himself of use to all, overseeing, quietly directing and controlling every thing; and when the funeral was over, the outer excitement subsided, and nothing left but that emptiness and shadow of the house from which the dead has recently been borne, then he had to consult with the orphan girl what should be done for the future.

"Will you stay where you are for the summer, while I go back and attend to my affairs at the West? If you will, I can come back again in the autumn, and we can then decide upon some settled plan for the future."

"I can stay here, if you think best. But it seems to me as if I shall go wild with fear and loneliness in this great house, with no one but the servants, after you are gone. I don't know *what* to do, Philip."

"Is there no friend of your own sex who would be comfort and company, whom you could invite to stay with you till I come back? You will not wish to go into town this weather. Besides, my dear girl, I must tell you that the town-house will not be long in your hands. When the estate is settled up, this property here, and a small annuity possibly, will be all that I can save for you. Will it not be best for you to break up, dismiss the expensive array of servants, rent your house, and board in some agreeable family?"

"Oh, Philip, I don't know. I can't think and I can't decide. I know nothing of business. I wish you to do every thing for me;" her helplessness appealed to him strongly.

She could only think of one way with which she should be happy and content; but he did not propose that way.

"I can only suggest this, then, for the present: stay where you are now until I go home and arrange matters there. I *must* go home for a few weeks. In the mean time the affairs of the estate will be closing up. When I return, I will see to them; and when all is settled, if you wish to go to the West with me, you shall go. If I have a home by that time, you shall share it."

"How share it, Philip?"

He did not reply. He was resolved to see Alice Wilde again, to satisfy himself her character was all he had dreamed it—her love what he hoped; if so, nothing should tempt him from the fulfillment of the sweet promise he had made himself and her—neither gratitude to the dead nor sympathy with the living.

CHAPTER X.

RECONCILIATION.

Alice Wilde had been taught by her father to "read, write, and cipher," and was not ignorant of the rudiments of some of the sciences; for, curiously enough, considering surrounding circumstances, there was quite a little library of books at the cabin-home, and some old-fashioned school-books among the number. If, when she first went into the seminary at Center City, some of the young ladies were disposed to ridicule her extreme ignorance upon some matters, they would be surprised by superior knowledge upon others; and finally were content to let her assert her own individuality, and be, what she was—a puzzle; a charming puzzle, too, for her kindness and sweetness made her beauty so irresistible that they could look upon it without envy. Another thing which helped her along both with teachers and pupils was the excellence of her wardrobe and her lavish supply of pocket-money, for it is tolerably well known that the glitter of gold conceals a great many blemishes. Before the first term was over she was the praise, the wonder, and the pet of the school; flying rumors of her great beauty and her romantic "belongings" having even winged their way over the pickets which sentineled the seminary grounds, and wandered into the city.

The evening that Philip Moore reached home, after his eastern journey, chanced to be the same as that upon which the seminary began its annual exhibition, previous to closing for the long August holiday. He would not have thought of attending any thing so tiresome; but, taking tea with his partner, whose pretty wife was going and urged him to accompany them, he was persuaded against his inclination.

"As you are already spoken of for mayor, Raymond, and as I am one of the city fathers, I suppose we must show a becoming interest in all the various 'institutions' which do honor to our rising town," laughed Philip, as he consented to attend with his friends.

"It will be very encouraging, especially to the young ladies, to see your wise and venerable countenance beaming upon them," remarked Raymond.

"But really, Mr. Moore, there's somebody there worth seeing, I'm told—somebody quite above the average of blue-ribbon and white-muslin beauty. I've heard all kinds of romantic stories about her, but I haven't seen her yet," chatted

the young wife. "She's the daughter of a fisherman, I believe, who's grown enormously rich selling salmon and white-fish, and who's very proud of her. Or else she's an Indian princess whose father dug up a crock of buried gold—or something out of the common way, nobody knows just what."

Philip's heart gave a great bound. "Could it be?" he asked himself. "No—hardly—and yet"—he was now as anxious to be "bored" by the stupid exhibition as he had hitherto been to escape it.

They took seats early in the hall, and had leisure to look about them. Philip bowed to acquaintances here and there. After a time he began to feel unpleasantly conscious of some spell fastening upon him—some other influence than his own will magnetizing his thoughts and movements, until he was compelled to look toward a remote part of the room, where, in the shadow of a pillar, he saw two burning eyes fixed upon him. The face was so much in the shade that he could not distinguish it for some time; but the eyes, glowing and steady as those of a rattlesnake, seemed to pierce him through and transfix him. He looked away, and tried to appear indifferent, yet his own eyes would keep wandering back to those singular and disagreeable ones. At last he made out the face: it was that of the young man who had brought him down from Wilde's mill the last autumn. What was Ben Perkins doing in such a place as this? He began to feel certain who the mysterious pupil was.

"She has thought to please and surprise me," he mused; "yet I believe I would rather she would have kept herself just as unsophisticated as she was, until she learned the world under *my* tutelage."

Young ladies came on to the stage, there was music and reading—but Philip was deaf, for *she* was not amid the graceful throng.

At last she came. His own timid wild-flower, his fawn of the forest, stole out into the presence of all those eyes. A murmur of admiration could be heard throughout the hall. She blushed, yet she was self-possessed. Philip gazed at her in astonishment. Her dress, of the richest blue silk, the flowers on her breast and in her hair, the bow, the step, the little personal adornments, were all *a la mode*. His woodland sylph had been transformed into a modern young lady. He was almost displeased—and yet she was so supremely fair, such a queen amid the others, that she looked more lovely than ever. He wondered if everybody had been teaching her how beautiful she was. There was nothing of coquetry or vanity in her looks—but a pride, cold and starry, which was entirely new to her.

He turned to look at Ben Perkins, who had leaned forward into the light so that

his face was plainly visible; and the suspicions he had often entertained that the youth loved Alice were confirmed by his expression at that moment.

"Poor boy! how can he help it?" thought the proud and happy gentleman, regarding the untaught lumberman with a kind of generous compassion. He now saw that Mr. Wilde was sitting by Ben's side, his heart and eyes also fixed upon the stage.

"I've seen that face before," whispered Mr. Raymond; "where was it? Ah, I remember it well, now. I can tell you who she is, Philip. She's the daughter of Captain Wilde, that queer customer of ours, who hails from the upper country. She's a glorious, remarkable girl! By the way, Phil., did you flirt with her? Because I've a message for you. Capt. Wilde told me to inform you that if you ever set foot on his premises again he should consider himself at liberty to shoot you."

"Flirt with her! let me tell you, Raymond, I'm engaged to her, and intend to marry her just as soon as I can persuade her to set a day. I love her as deeply as I honor her. There's something gone wrong, somewhere, or her father would not have left such word—he's a stern, high-tempered man, but he does not threaten lightly. They could not have received my letters."

"I presume I made part of the mischief myself," confessed Raymond, "for almost the first thing I told them when they entered my store this spring, was, that you had gone off to marry your elegant cousin. You needn't look so provoked, Phil.; I told them in good faith. You used to love Virginia in the days when you confided in me; and if you'd have kept up your confidence, as you should, I would have been posted, and could have given your friends all the information they were in search of. Don't you see 'twas your own fault?"

"I suppose it was," replied Philip, with a smile, but still feeling uneasy, and oh, how intensely anxious to get where he could whisper explanations to the heart, which he now saw, had suffered more in his absence than he could have dreamed. Henceforth his eyes were fixed only upon Alice. Soon she perceived him; as their eyes met, she grew pale for a moment, and then went on with her part more calmly than ever. To him, it seemed as if they both were acting a part; as if they had no business in that hour, to be anywhere but by each other's side; he did not even know what share she had in the performances, except that once she sung, and her voice, full, sweet, melancholy, the expression of the love-song she was singing, seemed to be asking of him why he had been so cruel to her.

The two hours of the exercises dragged by. The people arose to go; Philip

crowded forward toward the stage, but Alice had disappeared. He lingered, and presently, when she thought the hall was vacated, she came back to see if her father had waited to speak with her. He was there; other parties were scattered about, relatives of the pupils, who wished to speak with them or congratulate them. She did not see him, but hurried down the aisle to where her father and Ben were standing. She looked pale and fatigued—all the pride had gone out of her air as the color had gone out of her cheek.

"Alice! dear Alice!" exclaimed Philip, pressing to her side, just as she reached her father.

Instantly she turned toward him with haughty calmness.

"Mr. Moore. Allow me to congratulate you. Was that your bride sitting by your side during the exercises."

"That was Mrs. Raymond, my partner's wife. But what a strange question for *you* to ask, Alice. I supposed *you* had consented to take that name, if ever any one. Mr. Wilde, I received your message through Mr. Raymond, but I knew you were once too sincere a friend of mine, and are always too honorable a man, to refuse me a chance of explanation."

"Say your say," was the raftsman's curt reply.

"You need not speak one word, Philip. It is I who ought to beg *your* forgiveness, that I have wronged you by doubting you. Love—oh, love, should never doubt—never be deceived!" exclaimed Alice.

"It would have taken much to have disturbed my faith in you, Alice."

"Because I had every motive for loving you; while you—you had pride, prejudice, rank, fashion, every thing to struggle against in choosing me."

"Indeed!" cried Philip. "Yes, every thing, to be sure!" and he cast such an expressive glance over her youthful loveliness that she blushed with the delicious consciousness of her own charms. "Old, ugly, awkward, and ignorant, how ashamed I shall be of my wife!"

"But, Philip!" her tearful eyes, with the smiles flashing through them, made the rest of her excuses for her.

Holding her hand, which was all the caress the presence of strangers would permit, Philip turned to the raftsman.

"I asked you for your daughter's hand, in the letter which I sent you on the return

of the young man who brought me from your home, last autumn, since your sudden change of plans prevented my asking you in person. I have not yet had your answer."

When he said "letter" Alice's eyes turned to Ben, who had been standing within hearing all this time; he met her questioning look now with one of stubborn despair.

"You gave us no letters, Ben."

Philip also turned, and the angry blood rushed into his face.

"Did you not deliver the letters I sent by you, young man?"

"Ha! ha! ha! no, by thunder, I didn't! Did you think a man was such a fool as to help put the halter round his own neck? I didn't give the letters, but I told all the lies I could to hurt you, Philip Moore. You ought to be a dead man now, by good rights. The game's not up yet. Let me tell you that!" and scowling at the party, he strode away into the night.

"He ought to be arrested—he is a dangerous fellow," said Mr. Wilde, looking after him uneasily.

"I am sorry for him," said Philip, "but that can do him no good."

"Look out for him, Philip; you can not be too wary—he will kill you if he gets a chance. Oh, how much trouble that desperate boy has given me. I can not be happy while I know he is about."

"Thar', thar', child, don't you go to getting nervous again. We'll take care of Ben. Don't you trouble your head about him."

"If you could guess what I have suffered this winter past," whispered Alice, pressing closer to her lover.

"My poor little forest-fawn," he murmured. "But we must stop talking here; eavesdroppers are gathering about. I suppose this ogre of a seminary will shut you up to-night; but where shall I see you to-morrow, and how early? I have yet to explain my absence to you and your father—and I'm eager, oh, so eager to talk of the future as well as the past."

"Meet us at the Hotel Washington, at my room," replied Mr. Wilde, speaking for her. "We will be there at nine o'clock in the morning. And now good-night, puss. You did bravely to-night. I'm going to see Philip safe home, so you needn't dream of accidents."

Alice kissed her father good-night. That she wanted to kiss his companion too, and that he wanted to have her, was evident from the lingering looks of both; but people were looking askance at them, and their reluctant hands were obliged to part.

That night the store of Raymond & Moore was discovered to be on fire; the flames were making rapid headway when the alarm was given; it was the hour of night when sleep is soundest, but the alarm spread, and persons were thundering at the door and windows in two minutes.

"Does any one sleep in the store?" shouted one.

"Yes! yes! young Moore himself—he has a room at the back."

"Why don't he come out then? He'll be burned alive. Burst in the doors. Let us see what has happened him."

"The fire seems to come from that part of the building. He will surely perish."

The crowd shouted, screamed, battered the doors in wild excitement—some ran round to the back, and a ladder was placed at the window of his room, which was in the second story. Light shone from that room. David Wilde, whose hotel was not far distant, mingling with others who rushed out at the alarm, as is the custom in provincial towns, was the first to place his foot upon the ladder; his strength was great, and he broke in the sash with a stroke of his fist, leaped into the building, appearing in a moment with the young man, whom he handed down to the firemen clambering up the ladder after him.

"He's nigh about suffocated with the smoke—that's all. Dash water on him, and he'll be all right presently," he cried to those who pressed about. "It's that Ben, I know—cuss me, if I don't believe the boy's crazy," he muttered to himself.

Philip soon shook off the stupor which had so nearly resulted in the most horrible of deaths, and was able to help others in rescuing his property. The fire was got under without much loss to the building, though its contents suffered from smoke and water. The young firm was not discouraged by this, as all loss was covered by insurance; they had the promise of a busy time "getting to rights" again, but that was the worst.

It was apparent, upon examination, that the fire was the work of an incendiary; Philip felt, in his heart, what the guilty intention was, and shuddered at his narrow escape. It was decided by him and Mr. Wilde to put the authorities upon the proper track; but the perpetrator had fled, and no clue could be got to him in the city. Mr. Wilde at once suspected he had gone up the river, and feeling that

they should have no peace until he was apprehended, and not knowing what mischief he might do at the mill, he took the sheriff with him and started for home, leaving Alice, for the present, at the school, with permission of the principal to see her friends when she chose, as it was now vacation. Before he left there was a long consultation between the three—Philip, Alice, and her father. Philip explained his absence. As he went on to speak of Mortimer Moore and his daughter, of his death, the troubled state of the family affairs, etc., the raftsman betrayed a keener interest than his connection with those affairs would seem to warrant.

"Poor Virginia! she is all alone, and she is your cousin, Philip," said Alice.

"She tried hard to get back her old power over me, Alice. You must beware how you compassionate her too much. But when we are married, and have a home of our own, we will share it with her, if you consent. I've no doubt she can find somebody worthy of her, even in this savage West, as she thinks it. And, by the way, I think we ought to get a home of our own as soon as possible, in order to have a shelter to offer my cousin—don't you, Alice?"

"She's tongue-tied. Girls always lose their tongues when they need 'em the most."

"Now, father, I should think you might answer for me," said Alice, trying to raise her eyes, but blushes and confusion would get the better of her, and she took refuge in her father's lap.

"Well, puss, I s'pose you want to go to school five or six years yet—tell him you've made your cacklations to keep in school till you're twenty-two."

"School! I'll be your teacher," said Philip.

"Choose for yourself, puss. I s'pose the sooner you shake off yer old father, the better you'll like it."

"I shan't shake you off, father. Neither shall I leave you alone up there in the woods. That matter must be settled at the start. I shall never marry, father, to desert you, or be an ungrateful child."

"Suppose we arrange it this way then. We will live with your father in the summer, and he shall live with us in the winter. I don't want a prettier place than Wilde's mill to spend my summers in."

"Oh, that will be delightful," exclaimed the young girl; and then she blushed more deeply than ever at having betrayed her pleasure.

"Then don't keep me in suspense any longer, but tell me if you will get ready to go back to New York with me in the latter part of September. We will be gone but a few weeks, and can be settled in the new mansion I've given orders for, before the winter is here. Shall it be so?"

"Say 'yes,' cubbie, and done with it, as long as you don't intend to say 'no.' I see she wants to say 'yes,' Mr. Moore, and since it's got to be, the sooner the suspense is over, the better I'll like it;" and with a great sigh, the raftsman kissed the forehead of his child and put her hand in that of Philip. With that act he had given away to another the most cherished of his possessions. But children never realize the pang which rends the parent heart, when they leave the parent nest and fly to new bowers. "All I shall be good for now, will be to keep you in spending-money, I s'pose. You're going to marry a fashionable young man, you know, cubbie, and he'll want you tricked out in the last style. How much can you spend before I get back?" and he pulled his leather money-bag out of his pocket.

"I haven't the least idea, father."

"Sure enough, you haven't. You'll have to keep count of the dollars, when you get her, Mr. Moore; for never having been indulged in the pastime of her sex, going a-shopping, she won't know whether she ought to spend ten dollars or a hundred. Like as not, she'll get a passion for the pretty amusement, to pay for having been kept back in her infancy. You'd better get some of your women friends to go 'long with you, puss. Here's, then, for the beginning." He poured a handful or more of gold into her lap.

"Nay, Mr. Wilde, you need not indulge her in any thing beyond your means, upon *my* account, for—although she may have to conform to more modern fashions, as she has already done, since moving among others who do—she will never look so lovely to me in any other dress, as in those quaint, old-fashioned ones she wore when I learned to love her. And Alice, whatever other pretty things you buy or make, I request you to be married in a costume made precisely like that you wore last summer—will you?"

The raftsman heard, two or three times, on his way up the river, from boatmen whom he hailed, of Ben's having been seen only a little way ahead of him, and he, with the sheriff, had little doubt but they should capture him immediately upon their arrival at Wilde's mill. But upon reaching their destination they could not find him. The men had seen him hovering about the mill, and Pallas had given him his dinner only a few hours before, when he came to the house, looking, as she said, "like a hungry wild beas', snatching what I give him and

trotting off to de woods agin."

Help was summoned from the mill and the woods scoured; but no farther trace of the fugitive could be discovered. They kept up the search for a week, when the sheriff was obliged to return. David Wilde wished to believe, with the officer, that Ben had fled the country and gone off to distant parts; but he could not persuade himself to that effect. He still felt as if the unseen enemy was somewhere near. However, nothing further could be done; so cautioning the house-servants to keep a good watch over the premises, and the mill-hands to see that the property was not fired at night, or other mischief done, he returned for his daughter.

"Give Pallas this new dress to be made up for the occasion, and tell her to be swift in her preparations, for the time is short. It will be a month, Alice, before I see you again—a whole, long month—and then I hope for no more partings. I shall bring Mr. and Mrs. Raymond to the wedding, with your permission," said Philip, with other parting words, which being whispered we can not relate, as he placed her on the sail-boat, well laden down with boxes and bales containing the necessary "dry-goods and groceries" for the fete.

"We'll charter a steam-tug next time," growled the raftsman, looking about him on the various parcels.

CHAPTER XI.

A MEETING IN THE WOODS.

Pallas was in "her elements." There's nothing a genuine cook likes so well as to be given *carte blanche* for a wedding. If the Wildes had invited a hundred guests to stop with them a fortnight, she would hardly have increased the measure of her preparations. No wonder the old soul was happy in the prospect of the really excellent match her darling was to make, as well as in the promise that she was to go with her and take the culinary department of the new household under her charge.

"We's goin' to lib soon whar' de clo'es massa gives us 'll do us some good, Saturn. We can go to meetin' once more like 'spectable colored quality should. An' de house 'll be bran new, and I'm to keep de keys of all de closets myself—and young missus will set at de head ob de table, wid plenty of silber, as my missuses have allers done. An' you'll have to have some pride about you, and get ober bein' so sleepy. Nebber hear nor see any ting so cur'us as we goin' back into dat berry family. Now, Saturn, don't you let me cotch you cookin' or eatin' a single egg, 'cause I want 'em all for cake. Masser only brought home twenty dozen, which ain't near enough. I want ebery one dem pullets lays. An' you feed em chickens up good and fat an' dem wild turkeys in de pen. Dis isn't a bad country for a cook, arter all. I've been reck'nin' up, an' I find we can have wild turkey and partridges and salmon and ven'sen and chicken, and masser's brought home ebery ting from de grocery-stores a pusson could ask. Whar's dat citron now? Saturn, has you been in dat citron? Laws, I cotch you in *dat*, you'll nebber forget it! Stop eatin' dem raisins! I declar' to gracious, ef I trus' you to chop a few raisins for me, you eat half of 'em up. Cl'ar out de kitchen—immejetly! I'd rudder get 'long alone."

Poor Saturn had to "fly round" more than was agreeable to his temperament; but he contrived to keep up his strength and his spirits upon stolen sweets, and he tried to be excessively useful.

"Wall, wall, his arpetite does beat all; he's gettin' ole and childish, my nigger is and I s'pose I mus' humor him a little. His heart is set on de good tings ob dis worl'. I'se 'fraid he'll hate to gib up eatin' and sleepin' when he comes to die. Dar ain't no eatin' and drinkin' *thar*, Saturn; no marryin' nor givin' in marriage."

"Wha' for? is eatin' wicked, Pallas?"

"Not on dis yearth, where it is a necessary evil. But *dar*—dar's better tings. We'll sing dar, Saturn," she continued, anxious to rekindle the religious ardor which she was fearful of cooling by her picture of the purely spiritual pleasures of the next world. "We'll set under de tree ob life, by side de beautiful ribber, and sing all de hymns and psalms;" and she struck up, in a voice of rich melody,

"O Canaan, my happy home,
Oh, how I long for thee!"

while her husband joined in the strain with equal fervor.

Alice loved to hear them singing at their work; not only because of their musical voices, but the enthusiasm, the joy and expectation swelling through them, awakened her own young soul to hope and prayer.

A happier face than hers, as she sat in the little parlor, sewing upon the wedding-garments, it would be difficult to find—a kind of intense radiance from the utter content and love within shone through her features. When a young girl is about to marry the man she loves, with the full approval of her judgment and conscience, the consent of parents and friends, when her heart is full of hopes, when she blushes in solitude at her own happy thoughts, as she sits quietly sewing upon rich and delicate fabrics which are to enhance her beauty in *his* eyes, then she experiences the most blessed portion of her life.

The sunshine of promise rested upon the house. All its delightful activity was pervaded by thrilling anticipations. And yet there was a shadow—a light shadow, which at times would darken and again entirely disappear. It was the dread of Ben. The men at the mill reported having caught glimpses of some one whom they were quite sure was him, at different times, in different lonely places in the forest.

Saturn came in, one day, with the whites of his eyes of frightful circumference, averring that a ghost had run after him in the woods. What could be the purpose of a person thus hovering about in concealment? surely nothing good. Alice was not herself, personally, much afraid. She did not think Ben would harm her, but she felt that he was hanging about, that his eyes watched every preparation, that he would know when Philip came, and she was afraid he would have another opportunity to attempt his life. The courage which would not quail on the battle-field will fail before a secret and unknown evil. Even the raftsman, brave and powerful as he was, felt that uneasiness which springs from such a source. Many a time he went out with his rifle on his shoulder, resolved that if he met with the wretched and desperate youth, he would deal with him severely. His search was always in vain. Alice gave up all her rambles, much as she longed to get again into the heart of the whispering pine-forest.

One afternoon, when her father was at the mill, and Pallas, as usual, busy in the kitchen, as she sat sewing and singing to herself in a low voice, the bright room

suddenly grew dark, and looking up at the open window, she saw Ben standing there gazing at her. If she had not known of his vicinity, she would not have recognized him at the first glance; his face was haggard, his eyes bloodshot, his hair long and tangled, his clothing soiled and worn.

"Don't scream!" he begged, as he saw that she perceived him, in a voice so hollow that it checked the cry rising to her lips. "I ain't going to harm you. I wouldn't harm a hair of your head—not to save the neck yer so anxious to see hanging from the gallows. I know where your father is, and I just crept up to have a look at you. You look happy and content, Alice Wilde. See me! how do you like your work?"

"It is *not* my work, Ben, and you know it. Do not blame me. I pity you; I pray for you. But do go away from here—do go! I would rather you would harm me than to harm those I love. Oh, if you really care for me, go away from this spot—leave me to my happiness, and try and be happy yourself. Be a man. Go, Ben—let us alone. If you do *not* go, you will certainly be taken by others, and perhaps punished."

"Catch a weasel asleep, but you can't catch me. You may put twenty men on the watch. How pleasant it must be for you to sit here making your weddin'-clothes; I think of it nights, as I lay on the hemlock boughs, with my eyes wide open, staring up at the stars. What's that song I used to like to hear you sing so well, Alice?

"'They made her a grave too cold and damp
For a soul so warm and true;
And she's gone to the lake of the Dismal Swamp,
Where, all night long, by the fire-fly lamp,
She paddles her light canoe.'"

The maiden shuddered to her heart's core as his voice rose wild and mournful in the sweet tune to which the ballad was set, "Ha! ha! Alice, it's the same little canoe that you used to come up to the mill in so often, in those pleasant old times—

"'And her fire-fly lamp I soon shall see,
Her paddle I soon shall hear;
Long and loving our life shall be,
And I'll hide the maid in a cypress-tree,
When the footstep of death is near.'"

Alice seemed to be listening to her own dirge;

"'Away to the Dismal Swamp he speeds—
His path was rugged and sore:
Through tangled juniper, beds of reeds,
Through many a fen, where the serpent feeds,
And man never trod before!'"—

and with an unearthly shriek he bounded away through the garden and into the woods, leaving Alice so overcome, that Pallas, who had been attracted to the door by the strange voice, brought her the "camfire" bottle to restore her.

"He's a ravin' maniac, that poor boy is, my chile. He ought to be cotch'd and put in de 'sylum at onct 'fore harm's done. Mercy, chile, I was jus' goin' to take down de rifle to 'fend my pickaninny. I was 'fraid he'd t'ar you all to pieces, like a ragin' wild beas'."

"You wouldn't have had courage to fire, would you? I'm sure I shouldn't."

"In course I should have had courage. S'pose I'd stan' by and see my chile toted off into the woods by a madman? Tush! even a hen'll fight for her chickens. Ef I hadn't a rifle, I'd spring on 'em, tooth and nail, ef he laid a hand on my chile;" and the old negro woman breathed hard, holding herself erect, and looking so determined, that she inspired courage in the one who regarded her.

"Then I shall choose you for my body-guard," said Alice, "for I begin to feel like a poor little chick in a big field, with an unseen hawk in the air which might pounce on it at any time. Oh, Pallas, didn't he look fearful?"

"Awful, missus, awful! We can't be too kerful of a fanatick—and poor Ben's got to be one, sure 'nuff. Poor Ben! a year ago he was as merry a young pusson as dese yere ole eyes car' for to see; and so willin' and kind, allers lookin' out to do a little sarvice, bringin' us game and berries, and makin' us furnitur' and fixin's about de house,—ready to work all day, jus' to hab you say, 'Tank you, Ben,' or gib him one smile. I jes' wish dis weddin' was safe ober. I has a sense as suthin' is goin' to happen. And you know, chile, when ole Pallas has a sense, it allers comes to suthin'."

"Don't tell me of it, if you have, Pallas, for I'm nervous enough already. There comes father now. I feel safe when he is near."

Upon hearing her account of Ben's looks and words, the raftsman resolved more firmly than ever to take him into custody if possible. Leaving Pallas, who was a

better man than her husband, with a double-barreled gun, to defend the house, if necessary, in their absence, he summoned his full force and hunted the woods for twenty-four hours without success. He then stationed two men in the outskirts, in view of the house, to be relieved every eight hours by two others, and to keep up the watch, on double wages, day and night, till the enemy was taken or the wedding over.

On the third day of his watch, one of the men, while standing by the garden-fence, eating his lunch, his rifle leaning against the rails beside him, was suddenly knocked down, and by the time he got upon his feet again, he saw Ben Perkins vanishing into the forest with the weapon on his shoulder. The news of this mishap was any thing but encouraging, for the chances of his doing mischief were increased tenfold by the fact of his having possession of a loaded gun. Yet Alice sung and sewed, praying silently to Heaven that all might be well, and, happy in the faith and hope of youth, went on with her preparations; and Pallas finished shelves full of frosted cake and other niceties; and Saturn hewed wood and brought water, receiving his reward as he went, from his wife's benevolent hand; and Mr. Wilde was alert and vigilant, ready for all emergencies.

It was now near the middle of September; the blackberries were gone; and the grapes were yet green and unpalatable. Pallas was in want of wild-plums to pickle, and of wild-mint to flavor some of the dressings for dishes yet to be cooked. She set forth into the woods, having no occasion for personal fears, and not finding what she desired, wandered further into their depths than she had intended. Suddenly she started, with a—"Hi! hi! what's this?"

"If you've any thing in that basket a starving man can eat, give it to me." It was Ben Perkins who spoke, from behind a fallen tree, where he was crouching, lifting his emaciated face to her view.

"I hab nothin' at all; and ef I had, why should I gib it to you, when you'se makin' us all de trouble you can?"

"You've turned against me, too, Aunt Pallas," he said, in so hopeless a tone, that she paused from her purpose of getting away as fast as she could. "I've done you many favors in days gone by; I've never refused to lend you a helpin' hand, and I've never done nothin' to injure you; but you, too, will try to get me on to the gallows. Go and tell 'em where I am, if you want to. I don't know as I've strength to get away any longer. It's a week sence any thing has passed my lips but a nest full of bird's-eggs I climbed up after yesterday. Say, won't you bring me a piece of bread?"

"You go home wid me, and behabe yourself, and you shall hab all de bread you want. Nobody's starving you but yourself."

"Ha! ha! you're a cute 'un, ain't you now? I don't think I shall put my foot into that trap."

"Well, den, you gib me dat gun what you've got thar'. Gib me dat gun and I'll bring you suthin' to eat, and won't tell where you are."

"No—no! you can't come that game."

"You doesn't s'pose I'd bring you any ting to eat or help keep you alive, when you're tryin' yer bes' to kill my masser's frien's, do ye? It's *you* is foolish, Ben. What for you be so bad, so wicked for, Ben? You use to be a nice boy. I like you berry much a year ago. I can't bar' to see you hurtin' yerself so—let alone odders. Come, now, yer gib me back dat gun, an' ac' like a man 'stid of a wil' beas', and I'll do all I can for you, sartain sure, Ben."

"Pallas, I tell you, I'm starving. I want somethin' to eat. Let that gun alone. I swear to you, I won't use it on any of your family. I wouldn't hurt a hair of Alice's head—nor her father's. But I want that rifle—it's none of your business why. Won't ye give me suthin' to eat, for the sake of old times, Pallas?"

That miserable, hungry, beseeching look—how could she refuse it?

"You've acted like a crazy man, Ben, and you've done berry wrong to yourself as well as odders. I can't help you, 'less you promise to do better. Gib me dat gun, and take yer Bible oath you'll never try to hurt him that's to be Miss Alice's husband, an' I'll help you all I can."

"Why should I promise not to harm him? hasn't he done all he could to injure me? hadn't I *ought* to kill him if I can? wouldn't it be right and justifiable for me to take his heart's blood?—as he's taken mine, but in a different way. I was a homeless, poor, hard-workin' young man, with nuthin' but my hands to rely on. I hadn't no education, I hadn't no money, but I loved the captain's daughter—I worshiped her shadow. She'd have been mine—I know she would—if he hadn't come along and got her away from me. He, who had every thing, came and robbed me of the only thing I cared to have. He used his education and his money and his fine ways to steal my only hope. As soon as he come hangin' round I was nuthin'—Miss Alice walked right over me to get in his arms. I tell ye, that man has robbed me and wronged me and murdered me, as it were. I *ought* to be revenged."

"You is wuss den crazy, Ben Perkins; and I'll tell ye de trute, if ye get as mad as

fire at me for it. 'Tain't noways likely my missus would eber 'ave taken up wid ye, if Philip Moore had neber seen her. She's a lady, born and bred; she came of a high family—and it was in her blood. She wouldn't neber have taken up wid you. She liked you, and we all liked you; but she wouldn't a married you. You'd no business to 'spect she would. It's you is all de wrong. Den when a young man what is suitable to her comes along, and can't no more help fallin' in love wid her sweet face den you can, when he loves her, and wants to marry her, and she loves him, as she naturally would, you get wicked and ugly, and want to kill him. Fie, man! you *don't* love her! Ef you did, you couldn't neber break her heart, killing her husband as is to be. What would you gain by it? 'Stid of likin' and pityin' you, she'd shudder to hear your name, and she'd wilt away and die, and you'd be her murderer, well as his. For shame! call dat love? Why, ef you *really* loved her, you'd try to make her happy, and seein' you couldn't hab her, you'd be glad she got de man she like bes'. You is a bad fellow, Ben Perkins, and you jus' show how lucky it is Miss Alice didn't take up wid you."

"*She* thinks I'm so bad, too, doesn't she?—oh, yes, of course she must; she must hate me, and wish me dead. I know it, but I couldn't help it. Oh, Pallas, tell her not to think too hard of me. I was never well brought up. I'd only my wild passions to guide me. I've done wrong only because my heart was so set upon her. Yet I've struggled against temptation—I've tried to wish she could be happy without me. Tell her, when I was on the river alone with Philip Moore, I might have put him out of the way, but for her sake I wouldn't do it. Often and often as we sat together in that little boat, alone on the water, the devil in my heart set me on to strangle him and throw him overboard, I don't know why I didn't do it, 'ceptin' it seemed as if Alice's eyes was lookin' at me and wouldn't let me do it. One night he was asleep, his head on his arm, and I was bending over him—my hand was on his throat, when *she* took hold of me and held me back. I seen her as plain as I see you now. She had on a long, white dress, and her hair was streamin' down her shoulders, and her feet was bare. She looked at me *so*—I couldn't stand it; and I made up my mind never to lay hands on that person again. And I felt so much more like a man, I could look her straight in the face agin, when I got back. But I told lies, and tried to get in her good graces. Do you think that was so very bad, under the circumstances, Aunt Pallas? I never meant to do nuthin' worse; but when I seen all my plans knocked in the head, and that person meeting her agin and making up, and she lookin' so like an angel, and so proud and happy, and all of 'em casting scornful eyes on me, the devil broke out again worse 'an ever, and I set fire to Philip Moore's store, hopin' to burn him up; and since then I've been about as desp'rate as a man ever gets to be. Part the time

I'm as good as crazy, I think such thoughts out here in the woods alone—and agin I'm quite cool and reflect all over my bad conduct. I'd take it all back, if I could, for *her* sake;" and he burst out weeping.

"Yer poor, mis'able soul, I pity you. But I mus' say you did wrong. 'Tain't too late to repent and be saved. Gib up all dose wil', wicked feelin's, be resigned to de will ob Providence which doesn't allow of your having the girl you happen to love fust. 'Tain't for us to hab all we want in dis yere worl'. 'Tain't for us to revenge our enemies. Chris' says do good to dem dat despitefully use yer. And nobody has used you bad. He says love your enemies. O Ben! Ben! ef, instid of bein' de wicked bein' you has, you had prayed to de Lord Jesus to sabe yer from temptation, and sence yer couldn't be happy in dis life, to make yer good, yer wouldn't be hidin' here in dis state. People has had troubles 'fore yer. Don't tink yer de only one, poor boy. Dar's plenty of tears for Chris' to wipe away on dis yearth."

"I don't know nuthin about it. I've never been taught. 'Tain't nateral for a man to love his enemies. I can't do it. But if I thought you'd pity me and pray for me—if I thought Miss Alice would pray for me, I'd give up wicked thoughts, and try to govern myself."

"She does pray for yer, Ben, wid all her heart every time she prays. I've seen her cry about yer many time. She'd gib her right hand mos', to hab you good and happy. Masser's sorry for yer, too; he tought so much of you once; but course he can't let you kill his friends. Come, now, Ben, you promise to do right, and I'll stan' by yer tru thick and thin."

"Some of the time I'm good, and agin I'm bad. I didn't use to be so. It's only wretchedness has made me so ugly. I don't know how to try to be better."

"May I pray for you, Ben?"

"Yes—if you want to be such a fool," he said, reluctantly.

The good old colored woman went down on her knees there upon the mossy cushion of the earth, pouring out her soul in prayer for the haggard being, who sat, with his chin in his hands, listening to her appeal in his behalf. Tears streamed down her cheeks; the earnestness, the pathos of her sincere petitions to that great Father whom she seemed to believe had power to comfort and take care of him and adopt him as a child, touched his lonely, sullen, misanthropic nature—his sobs accompanied her "Amen!"

"I shouldn't be such a baby as to cry," he said, when she had finished, "if I wasn't

so weak; but when a fellow's fasted a week he ain't none of the bravest. I thank you, though, for your prayer, Aunt Pallas—I'll remember it to my dyin' day. Here's the gun—take it. P'raps if I keep it an hour longer, I'll want to do some mischief with it. Take it, while you can get it; and bring me some food, as you promised. If you break your promise, and bring them men here to take me up, I shan't never have no faith in prayers. If you want to make a Christian of me, you mus'n't fool me."

"Neither will I," said Pallas; "I'll be back here in an hour wid bread and meat. You'd better make up your mind, by dat time, to go home wid me, gib yerself up to masser, and let him do as he feels is best wid yer. He'll act for de bes', be sure."

She took the gun and hastened off with it, glad to get that means of harm away from him. She was firmly resolved not to break her promise to him, much as she desired that he might be put in safe quarters, and this uncomfortable suspense be done away with. As he had confessed himself so changeable in his moods, she did not rely much upon his present one. Reaching home, she stowed the rifle away, saying nothing about it, and filling her basket with substantial food, she returned to the appointed spot. To her surprise, Ben was not there. She waited a few minutes, but he did not come.

"I can't bar to know a human critter is starving to def," she muttered, setting the basket in a branch of the fallen tree. "I'll leave dis here—and now I've kep' my promise I'll go straight home and tell masser all 'bout it, and he can take sech steps as he tinks bes'."

She gave a graphic account of the whole interview to the raftsman as soon as he came in to tea. When she came to that part of his confession where he spoke of being about to choke Philip, while on the river, Alice turned pale, saying with a shudder—as she recalled one of those visions which haunted her dreams during that terrible period of the journey of her lover with his deadly enemy:

"Yes! yes! I did—but it was in a dream. I beheld the skiff gliding along in the starlight, Philip sleeping, his arm under his head, and his carpet-bag for a pillow; Ben was stooping over him, his face was white as ashes, his teeth were clenched, his hands were creeping toward Philip's throat—I sprang upon him—I held his hands—I drew him back—I screamed—and the scream awoke me, and father rushed into my room to see what was the matter. You ridiculed my nightmare, father, don't you recollect?"

"Poor boy," said the raftsman, wiping a tear from his cheek, when his servant

had concluded her relation. "I'm right down sorry for the lad. And when you are married and out of the way, puss, I'll take him in hand, and try and reclaim him. He'll make a man yet."

"He ain't to blame fer his faults, seeing he's never had no good broughten' up. I'll teach him the New Testament doctrines ef he'll only let me, once Miss Alice is 'way," remarked Pallas.

Mr. Wilde went to the spot indicated by Pallas—the basket of food had been taken away, but no one was in the vicinity.

CHAPTER XII.

FAMILY AFFAIRS.

It was the day before the wedding. The house was in order, to the full satisfaction of the sable housekeeper. Viands, worthy of the occasion, filled the store-room to overflowing. Philip, with his suite, including the minister who was to officiate, was expected to arrive by supper-time. The last touches were given to the arrangements, and Alice was dressed to receive her guests, by the middle of the afternoon. The motherly heart of her old nurse was so absorbed in her, that she came very near making fatal mistakes in her dressings and sauces. Every five minutes she would leave her work to speak with the restless young creature, who, beautiful with hopes and fears, fluttered from room to room, trying to occupy herself so that her heart would not beat quite so unreasonably.

"They are coming!" she cried, at last, having stolen out for the hundredth time to the top of a little knoll which gave her a farther view of the river. How gladly the ripples sparkled, how lightly the winds danced, to her joyous eyes. "Oh, Pallas, they are coming! what shall I do?" and she hid her face on the old woman's bosom, as if flying from what she yet so eagerly expected.

"Do, darlin'? oh, my chile, you got to be a woman now; no more little chile to run away and hide. Masser Moore berry proud of his wife dat is to be. Don't make him 'shamed, darlin'."

Ashamed of her! mortify Philip! the thought was death to Alice's sensitive spirit. She lifted her head and became calm at once.

"There, nursie, I don't feel so startled any more. I think I can meet them, clergyman and all, without flinching."

Her father, who had been on the look-out, took a little skiff and went down to meet the party. Alice stood on the shore, as she had done upon the day of Philip's first arrival. A soft rose glowed in either cheek, which was all the outward sign of the inward tumult as she saw her bridegroom sailing near enough to recognize and salute her. She saw in the boat Philip, the minister, Mr. and Mrs. Raymond, and a young lady whom she had never met, and a strange young gentleman.

It was the proudest moment of Philip's life when that young lady turned and grasped his arm, exclaiming in a low voice:

"I don't wonder you refused *me*, cousin Philip. I did not know such beings existed except in poetry and painting."

Pallas, standing in the door, in an extra fine turban and the new dress sent for the occasion, thought her pickaninny did credit to *her* "broughten' up," as she saw the manner, quiet, modest, but filled with peculiar grace, with which Alice received her guests.

"Alice," said Philip, placing the fair hand of the proud stranger in hers; "this is my cousin Virginia."

"I have come to wish you joy, Alice," said Virginia, kissing her cheek lightly, and smiling in a sad, cold kind of way.

Her mourning attire, and the evident melancholy of her manner, touched the affectionate heart of her hostess, who returned her kiss with interest.

"For de law's sake, Saturn, come here quick—quick! Who be dat comin' up de walk wid masser and de comp'ny? Ef dat ain't little Virginny Moore, growed up, who is it?"

"It's Virginny, sure 'nuff!" ejaculated her husband.

In the mean time that young lady herself began to look about with quick, inquiring glances; she peered into the raftsman's face anxiously, and again toward the old servants, a perplexed look coming over her face as she neared the house.

"You needn't say a word, Miss Virginny—it's us, sartain—Pallas and Saturn, your fadder's people, who had you in our arms ebery day till you was eight year old. You do remember old Pallas, don't you now, honey? My! my! what a han'some, tall girl you is growed—de picture ob your fadder. Yer a Moore tru and tru, Missus. My ole eyes is glad to see you."

"Hi! hi! Miss Virginny!" chuckled Saturn, bowing and scraping.

"Come 'long and let me get your bunnit off. I want to take a good look at ye, honey. Missus Alice neber was a Moore—she was like *her* mudder, small and purty and timid-like; but ye's a perfect Moore, Miss Virginny. My! my! I know 'em all, root and branch. I tol' my ole man Masser Philip belonged to our Mooreses, but Masser Wilde he neber let on"—she had the visitor's bonnet off by this time, talking all the time, and oblivious, in her excited state, of the other guests.

"Yes, Miss Virginia," said the raftsman, drawing his powerful figure up to its full

height, "I am that brother-in-law you have been taught to detest and be ashamed of. You would hardly have come to the wedding, if you had known what poor company you were to get in."

All those of the company who knew him looked at him in surprise, for he had dropped his hoosier form of speech and took on the air of a superior man. Virginia looked at him a moment calmly, taking, as it were, an estimate of the mind and heart outside of that athletic frame, and gleaming through those noble though weather-beaten features.

"I do not see any thing to be ashamed of," she said, with a smile, giving him her hand, frankly, in a sisterly manner. "I was but a little child, you know, when your connection with our family commenced. Doubtless I have been influenced by what I have heard. If my father wronged you, David Wilde, it is time for you to forgive it—lay up no hard thoughts against the dead."

Her lip trembled over the last sentence.

"Dear Virginia! is it possible my Alice is to find in you—"

"An aunt? yes, Philip,—and you are about to marry your third cousin. It's rather curious, isn't it?"

"We'll talk it over after supper," said the host. "Pallas, our guests are hungry. The river breeze sharpens the appetite."

Pallas wanted no further hint. Perfectly content that she had the means of satisfying any amount of hunger, she retired, with her subordinate husband, to dish up the feast.

"I 'spect I'll spile half dese tings, I'se so flusterated. Did you mind whar' I put dat pepper, Saturn? I declar' I can't say wedder I put it in de gravy or in de coffee. I jes' turn 'round and put it in de *suthin'* on de stove, wile I was tinkin' how cur'us tings happens. Dear! dear! I put it in de coffee, sure 'nuff, and now dat's all to be trowed away! 'Spect tings won't be fit to eat. Why don' you fly round and grin' more coffee? You is de stupidest nigger!"

In spite of small tribulations, however, the supper was served in due season and with due seasoning. Gay conversation prevailed; but Alice, though bright and attentive, felt uneasy. Her glance frequently wandered to the windows and open doors. A certain dark figure had so often started up in unexpected places, and seemed to hover about so when least expected, that she could not be entirely at her ease. It was true that several men were on guard, and that Ben had not been heard of for a week; but he was so sly, so subtle, she felt almost as if he might

drop out of the roof or come up out of the earth at any instant.

Philip was warned to be on the look-out. He laughed and said he was a match for Ben in a fair fight, and if the other had no fire-arms, he could take care of himself.

Long after the rest of the party, fatigued with their journey, had retired for the night, David Wilde, Alice, Philip, and Virginia sat up, talking over the past, present, and future.

Alice, who had never known the particulars of her mother's marriage and death, except as she had gathered hints from her old nurse, now listened with tearful eyes to brief explanations of the past.

Her father, in his youth, had been a medical student, poor, but possessed of talent —a charity-student, in fact, who, one day had, at the risk of his own life, saved the lovely daughter of Mortimer Moore from the attack of a rabid dog in the street. He had actually choked the ferocious creature to death in his desperate grip. Grateful for the noble and inestimable service, the father invited him to the house to receive a substantial token of his gratitude in the shape of a sum of money sufficient to carry him through his course of study. But the courage, the modesty, the fine address and respectful admiration of her preserver, made a deep impression upon Alice Moore—it was a case of love at first sight upon both sides—they were young and foolish—the father opposed the match with contempt and indignation. His rudeness roused the ire of the proud student; he resolved to marry the woman he loved, in spite of poverty. They fled, accompanied by Pallas, the attendant of the young girl; the father refused to forgive them; and then, when sickness and suffering, untempered by the luxuries of wealth, came upon his delicate wife, the young husband realized what he had done in persuading her away from her home and the habits of her life. If he had first finished his studies and put himself in the way of gaining even a modest living, and she had chosen to share such a lot, he would have done right in following the dictates of his heart. Now he felt that he had been cruelly rash. A year of strange, wild happiness, mixed with sorrow and privation passed, and the wife became a mother. Pallas nursed her with tireless assiduity; her husband, bound to her sick couch, could not exert himself as he might have done alone; they grew desperately poor—he could not see her suffer without humbling his pride, and writing to her father to send *her*, not him, the means necessary to her comfort and recovery. They were coldly denied. Privation somewhat, but care, grief, and trouble more, retarded her recovery,—she fell into a decline, and died in his arms, who swore a great oath over her beloved corpse to forsake a world

so unjust, so cruel, so unhappy. Sending a bitter message to her father, he disappeared with their infant child. The old colored nurse, who had also persuaded her husband to accompany them, went with him as foster-mother to the child. They traveled to the far West—much farther in those days than now—and when they first settled where they now were, they were isolated in the wilderness.

Mr. Wilde took up his portion of government land. By the time other emigrants had made settlements down the river, he had made enough from it to purchase more. He felled timber with his own hands, and drifted it down to where it was wanted. As years passed, he employed hands, built a mill, and as towns grew up within market-distance, found business increasing upon him. During all this time he had nurtured his spleen against the civilized world; natures strong and wayward like his, are subject to prejudice—and because one haughty old aristocrat had allowed a fair child to perish neglected, he condemned refined society *en masse*. He adopted the conversation and manners, to a great degree, of those by whom he was surrounded.

All these things explained to Philip many incongruities in the talk and habits of Mr. Wilde—the possession of books, the knowledge of man—which had hitherto challenged his curiosity.

It had been the object of the raftsman to bring up his daughter in strict seclusion from the world he despised; he had not thought of further consequences than to keep her innocent, unselfish, unsuspicious, and free from guile. Chance threw Philip in their way. His frankness, pleasant temper, and sincerity excused his fashionable graces in Mr. Wilde's estimation; more intimate association with him did much to wear away the prejudices he had been heaping up unchallenged for so long; and when it came to the certainty that his daughter must choose between one of the rough and uneducated men around her, or on a man like Philip, he could not conceal from himself that Philip was his choice.

"And what do you think brought *me* out here at this critical moment?" asked Virginia. "I come to throw myself upon Philip's charity—to become a pensioner upon his bounty. Yes, Mr. Wilde, upon closing up my father's estate, there was absolutely nothing left for his only child. He lived up to all that he possessed, hoping, before his poverty became known, that I would make a brilliant match. A fortnight ago my lawyer told me there would be nothing left, but a small annuity from my mother, which they can not touch. It is a sum barely sufficient to dress me plainly—it will not begin to pay my board. So I, unable to bear my discomfiture alone, friendless, sorrowful, thought it less bitter to begin anew

among strangers than in the scenes of my former triumph. I came on to beg Philip to find me some little rural school where I might earn my bread and butter in peace, unstung by the coldness of past worshipers. I'll make a good teacher,—don't you think so?—so commanding!"

Yet she sighed heavily, despite her attempt at pleasantry. It was easy to be seen that earning her own living would go hard with the accomplished daughter of Mortimer Moore.

"But Philip will never let you go away from us, I am sure," said Alice's soft voice, caressingly.

"Until she goes to a home of her own," added her cousin, with a mischievous smile. "I wouldn't be guilty of match-making; but I own I had a purpose in asking my friend Irving to stand as groomsman with Virginia. How do you like him, my sweet cousin?—be honest now."

"Not as well as I have liked some other man, sir?"

"Oh, of course, not yet; but you'll grow to it; and he has no stain upon his escutcheon—he isn't even a flour-merchant or mill-owner."

"You haven't told me what he is yet," said Virginia, with a slight show of interest.

"He's my book-keeper."

"Oh, Philip! you're jesting."

"No, indeed, I'm not. He has not a cent, saving his salary; but he's a gentleman and a scholar, and has seen better days."

"Well, I like him, anyhow," she remarked, presently.

"You ought to encourage him to pay his addresses to you. You could teach school, and he could keep books. You could take a suite of three rooms, and wait upon yourselves. I'll promise to furnish the rooms with dimity, delf, and rag-carpeting."

"You are generous, Philip."

"And to send you an occasional barrel of flour and load of refuse kindling-wood."

"My prospects brighten."

"Don't tease the girl," said the raftsman, "she'll do better'n you think for yet.

Since my own chick has deserted me for another nest, I don't know but I shall adopt Virginia myself."

"I wish you would," and the great black eyes were turned to him with a mournful, lonely look. "Everybody else is so happy and blessed, they do not need me. But I should love to wait upon you, and cheer you, sir."

It was a great change which misfortune was working in the spirit of the proud and ambitious girl. Philip, who knew her so well, regarded her present mood with surprise.

"Well, well, without joking, I intend to adopt this orphan girl. She's the sister of my own dead wife, and she shall share equally with my little Alice in all that the rough old raftsman has."

"Which won't be much, father," said Alice, with a smile, glancing around upon their humble forest home.

"Don't be too sure of that, little one. I haven't felled pine logs and sawed lumber for fifteen years to no account. Did you think your two dresses a year, your slippers, and straw-hats had eaten up all the money-bags I brought home with me upon my trips? Here's a check for five thousand dollars, puss, to furnish that new house with; and when Philip gets time to 'tend to it, the cash is ready to put up a steam saw-mill nigh about here, somewhere—the income to be yours. It'll bring you in a nice little bit of pocket-money. And if Virginia concludes to accept that pale-faced book-keeper, thar's an equal sum laid aside for her—and home and money as much as she wants in the mean time. It shan't be said the old raftsman's pretty daughters had no wedding portion."

Virginia took his rough hand in her two white ones, and a tear mingled with the kiss which she pressed upon it.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TORNADO.

When Alice came out of her room dressed for the marriage ceremony she looked quaintly lovely. Old Pallas sobbed as she looked at her, and her father wiped the dimness again and again from his eyes; for it was as if the fair young bride of long ago had come to life.

Philip had made it an especial request that she should dress in a costume similar to that she wore when he first loved her; and her father had told her to provide no wedding-robe, as he wished her to wear one of his own choosing. She had been attired in the bridal robe and vail, the high-heeled satin slippers, the long white gloves which had lain so many years in the mysterious trunk. Philip's gift, a bandeau of pearls, shone above a brow not less pure—set in the golden masses of her hair.

Virginia laid aside her mourning for that day, appearing in a fleecy muslin robe, as bride-maid, and none the less queenly on account of the simplicity of her dress. Her face had gained an expression of gentleness which added very much to her superb attractions, and which was not unnoticed by her companion in the ceremonies.

The words had been said which made the betrothed pair man and wife. A more romantic wedding seldom has occurred than was this, in which wealth and elegance were so intimately combined with the rude simplicity of frontier life. To see those beautiful and richly-dressed ladies flitting in and out the modest house buried in the shadows of the western woods; the luxurious viands of the cook's producing served upon the plainest of delf, to have the delicate and the rough so contrasted, made a pretty and effective picture against the sunshine of that September day. The spirit of the scene was felt and enjoyed by all, even the venerable clergyman—rich voices and gay laughter blent with the murmur of the river—fond, admiring eyes followed every motion of the bride. The bride! where was the bride?

She had been standing on the lawn, just in front of the door with Mrs. Raymond, who was saying—

> "'Happy is the bride the sun shines on,'"

just the previous moment; Mrs. Raymond had run down to the river-bank, and was throwing pebbles in the water.

Mr. Wilde, ever apprehensive, ever vigilant, had just missed her, and was turning to inquire of the bridegroom, when a shriek, wild, sharp, agonizing, paralyzed for an instant every faculty of the listeners.

"Great God, it is that madman!" burst from the father's lips.

Philip and he sprang out-of-doors together, just in time to see her borne into the forest, flung like an infant over the shoulder of her abductor, who was making great leaps along the path with the speed and strength of a panther. The two men appointed as guards were running after him. Mr. Wilde sprang for his rifle—the bridegroom waited for nothing.

"Don't shoot!" he shouted to the men; "you will kill the girl!"

Philip reached and distanced the men; the raftsman, strong and tall, and accustomed to the woods, passed him even, madly as he exerted himself.

"If I only dared to fire," he breathed, between his clenched teeth. "If he would give me just one second's fair and square aim—but my child, she is his shield!"

Two or three times the two foremost pursuers came in sight, almost within arm's reach of the terrified girl, crying, "Philip! father!" in such piercing tones of entreaty.

"Can not you save me, Philip?" once he was so near, he heard the question distinctly—but the furious creature who grasped her, gave a tremendous whoop and bound, leaping over logs and fallen trees, brooks, and every obstacle with such speed, that his own feet seemed to be loaded with lead, and he to be oppressed with that powerlessness which binds us during terrible dreams. He flew, and yet to his agony of impatience, he seemed to be standing still.

"Philip—father—Philip!"

How faint, how far away. At length they heard her no more; they had lost the clue—they knew not which way to pursue. The forest grew wilder and denser; it was dim at mid-day under those tall, thick-standing pines; and now the afternoon was wearing toward sunset.

"Philip," said the raftsman in a hoarse voice, "we must separate—each man of the party must take a different track. Here is my rifle; I will get another from the men. Use it if you dare—use it, *at all risks*, if that devil seeks to harm her. His strength must give up some time."

"Don't despair, father," said the new-made husband, but his own heart was cold in his bosom, and he felt so desperate that he could have turned the rifle upon himself.

Not knowing but that he was going farther from instead of nearer to the objects of his search, with every step, he had to pause frequently to listen for some sound to guide him. Wandering on in this wild, unsatisfactory way, his brain growing on fire with horror, suddenly he heard a sharp voice chanting—

"'I'll hide the maid in a cypress-tree,
When the footstep of death is near.'"

The next moment he came face to face with Ben Perkins—but no Alice was in his arms now, nor was she anywhere in sight.

"Fiend! devil! what have you done with my wife?"

His eyes shone like coals out of a face as white as ashes, as he confronted his enemy with a look that would have made any sane man tremble; but the wretch before him only stared him vacantly in the face with a mournful smile, continuing to sing—

"'And her fire-fly lamp I soon shall see,
Her paddle I soon shall hear.'"

"Where is she—answer me, devil?"

The hand of Philip clutched the lunatic's throat, and with the strength of an anguish as superhuman as the transient power of the other had been, he shook him fiercely as he repeated the question. The madman wilted under his grasp, but as soon as the hold was relaxed, he slid from under it, and sprang away.

"'They made her a grave too cold and damp,'"

he chanted, darting from tree to tree, as Philip, hopeless of making him tell what he had done with Alice, tried to shoot him down.

"He has murdered her," he thought; and getting a momentary chance, he fired, but without effect; Ben climbed a tree, springing from branch to branch like a squirrel, until he reached the top, and like a squirrel, chattering nonsense to himself. "If I had another shot I would put an end to his miserable existence," muttered Philip, turning away to trace, if possible, the track of the man, and find where he had dropped Alice.

Soon he came out upon a small, open, elevated space—the river was upon one side, the woods all around. Something strange was in the air—nature seemed to be listening—not a breath rippled the water or made a leaf quiver—he felt hot and suffocated. Despite of all his mental misery, he, too, paused and listened like the elements—his ear caught a far-away murmur. The day had been very warm for that season of the year; it grew, now, oppressive. A low bank of dark clouds lay along the south and west, hanging over the prairie on the opposite side of the stream—it was such a bank of clouds as would seem to threaten rain before midnight; but even while he gazed, a great black column wheeled up from the mass and whirled along the sky with frightful rapidity. The distant murmur grew to a roar, and the roar deepened and increased until it was like the surf-swell of a thousand oceans. Stunned by the tumult, fascinated by the sublime terror of the spectacle, he followed with his gaze the course of the destructive traveler, which flew forward, sweeping down upon the country closer and more close. The air was black—night fell upon every thing—he saw the tornado—holding in its bosom dust, stones, branches of trees, roofs of houses, a dark, whirling mass of objects, which it had caught up as it ran—reach the river, and with an instinct of self-preservation, threw himself flat upon the ground, behind a rock which jutted

up near him. He could tell when it smote the forest, for the tremendous roar was pierced through with the snapping, crackling sound of immense trees, broken off like pipe-stems and hurled in a universal crash to the earth.

A short time he crouched where he was, held down in fact, pressed, flattened, hurt by the trampling winds; but nothing else struck him, and presently he struggled to his feet.

What a spectacle met him, as he looked toward the forest from which he had so lately emerged! A vast and overwhelming ruin, in the midst of which it seemed impossible that any life, animal or vegetable, should have escaped. A desolation, such as poets have pictured as clinging to the "last man," came over the soul of Philip Moore. Where were his friends? where that gay party he had invited from their distant homes to meet this fate? where was Alice, his wife of an hour? His manhood yielded to the blow; he cowered and sobbed like a child.

The darkness passed over for a brief time, only to come again with the setting sun, which had sent some lurid gleams of light, like torches to fire the ruin, through the storm, before sinking from sight. A drenching rain fell in torrents, the wind blew chilly and rough.

"I will search for her—I will find her, and die beside her mangled remains," murmured Philip, arising and turning toward the forest.

The incessant flashes of lightning were his only lamps as he struggled through the intricate mazes of fallen trees. It was a task which despair, not hope, prompted, to toil through rain and wind and darkness, over and under and through splintered trunks and tangled foliage, looking, by the lightning's evanescent glare, for some glimpse of the white bridal robe of his beloved. The hours prolonged themselves into days and weeks to his suffering imagination, and still it was not morning. As if not content with the destruction already wrought, the elements continued to hurl their anger upon the prostrate wilderness; ever and anon the sharp tongue of the lightning would lick up some solitary tree which the wind had left in its hurry; hail cut the fallen foliage, and the rain fell heavily. It was a strange bridal night.

Not knowing what moment he might stumble upon the crushed body of some one of his friends, Philip wandered through the storm. He felt more and more as if he were going mad—reason trembled and shuddered at his misfortunes. Two or three times he resolved to dash his brains out against a tree, to prevent himself the misery of going mad and yet living on in those dismal solitudes, till hunger conquered what grief refused to vanquish. Then the lightning would glimmer

over some white object, perchance the bark freshly scaled from some shattered trunk, and he would hurry toward it, calling—"Alice!" as once she had called, "Philip," through a less wretched night.

It seemed to him that if no other morning began to come before long, the morning of eternity must open its gates upon the world; the strength of the tempest was spent; only fitful gushes of wind swept past; here and there a star looked down hurriedly through the drifting clouds; the solemn roll of the thunder resounded afar, like the drums of an enemy beating a retreat.

Exhausted, he sank at the foot of one of those Indian mounds common in western forests. A gleam of the vanishing lightning flickered over the scene. Hardly had it faded into darkness before a voice close to his side whispered his name; a warm hand felt through the night, touching his; a form glowing with life, soft, and tender, albeit its garments were cold and drenched, sank into his outstretched arms.

"Yes, Philip, it is I—safe, unhurt. And you—are you uninjured?"

He could not answer; his throat was choked with the sweetest tears which ever welled from a man's heart; he could only press her close, close, in the silence of speechless delight.

In that hour of reunion they knew not if they had a friend left; but the thought only drew them more near in heart than ever they had or could have been before. Weary and storm-beaten, but filled with a solemn joy, they clasped each other close and sank upon the wet sod, to sleep the sleep of exhaustion, until the morning should dawn upon them to light their search for their friends.

CHAPTER XIV.

GATHERING TOGETHER.

The first ray of morning startled the young couple from their sweet but troubled sleep.

"You shiver!" exclaimed Philip, looking at the damp, disordered attire of his wife; "I ought not to have allowed you to fall asleep in those wet garments."

"It is but a momentary chill, dear Philip. Oh, let us go and find my father. Certainty will be more endurable than this dreadful suspense."

They arose, pursuing their search through the gray dawn which brightened soon into as glorious a September day as ever shone. There was no use in trying to convict Mother Nature of crime and bloodshed; she appeared totally unconscious of the waste and ruin she had spread over the land the previous day. Through the wrecked wilderness they struggled forward, silent, sad, looking in every direction for traces of their friends, and making their way, as correctly as they could discern it, with the river for a guide, toward the home which they expected to find overwhelmed and scattered by the storm.

It was four or five hours before they came in sight of the cabin, so toilsome was their course; many times Alice had been obliged to rest, for hunger and fatigue were becoming overpowering, and now Philip had to support her almost entirely, as she clung to his arm.

"Take courage, dearest,—there is the house, and standing, as I live!"

The storm, sweeping on, had just touched with its scattering edges the house, which was unroofed and the chimney blown down, and otherwise shaken and injured, though not totally demolished. As the two came in sight of it, they perceived old Pallas, sitting on the front step in an attitude of complete despondency, her apron thrown over her face, motionless and silent. She did not hear them nor see them until they stood by her side.

"Pallas! what is the news? where is my father?"

The old woman flung her apron down with a mingled laugh and groan.

"Oh, my chile, my darlin', my pickaninny, is dat you, an' no mistake?" Springing

up, she caught her young mistress to her bosom, and holding her there, laughed and sobbed over her together. "Sence I seen you safe agin, and young masser, too, bof of you safe and soun', as I neber 'spected to behold on dis yearth agin, let me go now, 'long wid my ole man—O Lord! let thy serbent depart in peace!"

"My father—have you heard from him since the storm?"

"No, darlin', not from one single soul, all dis awful night. De ladies dey were wid me till de mornin' broke, den dey set out, cryin' and weepin' and wringin' dere han's, to look for all you who was in de wood. Oh, dis has been a turrible season for a weddin'. I had a sense all de time suthin' was goin' to happen. My poor ole man!"

"What's become of him?" asked Philip.

"De Lord above alone knows where he be now—oh! oh! He was tuk right up to glory, wid his weddin' garment on. I see him sailin' off, but I couldn't help him. Laws! if missus isn't a goin' to faint dead over."

"Give her to me, and get something for her to eat and drink, if you can find it, Pallas. She's worn out."

"I've kep' up a fire in de kitchen, which is low, an' not much hurt. I'll spread a bed down dar and lay her down on de floor till I make some right strong tea. Lord be merciful to me a sinner! It's times as make ole Pallas's heart ache. Come 'long wid her, masser—I'll tro a mattress on de floor. Dar, lay her down, I'll hab de tea direckly. Sech sights as I see yesterday is 'nuff to unsettle anybody as sots dar heart on de tings ob dis worl'. When I heard my chile scream, I tought a knife went right tru me—I could n' run, nor do nuthin', I was jes' all weak and trimbling. Dar I stood, lookin' into de woods, wid eberybody out ob sight, when I hear de storm a comin'. First I tought it was de ribber broking loose; I looked round, but *dat* was jes' as peaceable as a lamb. Here, honey, set up, and drink yer tea. Den I tought de woods on fire, as dey was onct, when dey made sech a roar, but dey wan't. Den I looked up to see if de sky was fallin', which was de fust I saw ob de wind. It war a whirlin' and a roarin' like eber so many tousend, hundred mill-wheels. It look for all de worl' like a big funnel wid water pourin' tru. I was so scart, I run back to de house, hollerin' for my ole man, who was settin' on de fence, lookin' t'odder way. But he didn' hear me. It went right past, holdin' me up agin de wall as ef I war nailed. I seen de air all full ob ebery ting, chickens and pigs and boards and trees, and it tuk my ole man right up off dat fence an' carried him up to de nex' worl'. I see him, wid my own eyes, ridin' off in de chariot ob de wind, way over de woods, way off, off, out ob sight. Oh,

missus, when I see him goin' so, I mos' wish I was 'long. I know Saturn was a foolish nigger, and a mighty sleepy-headed. He was n' no use to me much—he was a great cross; but dar neber was a better-hearted husband. He min' me like a chile. And he was so fond of presarbed plums, and such a hand to help 'bout de kitchen—'pears to me I hain't no heart. But laws, what bus'ness I to speak *my* troubles, and you neber to know where your own fadder is. If masser don't come back, I'll jes' lay down an' die. Poor ole nigger no more use. Dar's Saturn tuk away in de clouds wid his bes' raiment on, as de Bible commands; and neber one moufful ob de weddin' feas' which is standin' on de table, and de rain leaking down upon it—oh! hi! hi!"

"Poor Pallas, I'm sorry for you. But, Philip, I must go—I feel stronger now."

"No, no, my own darling Alice, you are not fit for further exertion. Remain here in the hands of your nurse. Pallas, I leave my wife to your care. She is in a fever now. Change her clothing and give her hot drinks. I must be off. Keep up heart, dearest, till I get back."

He had hastily disposed of a cup of tea and a few mouthful of food, kissed his bride, and was hurrying from the house, to go again into the woods for tidings, when a tumult outside drew all three to the door. Every one of the missing party, except poor old Saturn, whose own case was hopeless, and the raftsman himself, were coming up in a group. Virginia and Mrs. Raymond had encountered them in their search for the clearing, and had led them out of the woods. Mr. Raymond and the clergyman had been together overtaken by the tempest; but it was not so severe where they were, as in that part of the forest reached by Mr. Wilde and Philip. Trees had fallen before and around them, but they had escaped unharmed. Night coming on, and the rain and changed character of the scene bewildering them, they had not been able to make their way out of the woods; and of course had suffered from anxiety, in common with their friends. Their astonishment and joy at beholding the bride and groom in safety were only held in check by the uncertainty which hung about the fate of their host. Not one would enter the house, until that fate was known; taking from Pallas the cakes and cold meat she brought them, they hastened away—all but Alice, who was really too ill from exposure and surpense, to make any further effort.

"Yes, you rest yourself, and try to be composed, honey. Ef your dear, good father is really taken away, you hab much to be thankful for, that yer not left unpertected in this bleak worl'. You've a husband dat loves you as his heart's blood—and yer father himself will smile in de heaben above, to tink how glad he is, all was made right, and you with some one to care for you, 'fore he was

tooken away. Dar', dar', don't hurt yourself a sobbin' so. I cried all night, and now dese poor ole eyes hab no more tears lef'. When I tought I was lef' all alone—no masser, no missus, no husband—my heart was like a cold stone. I feel better now. Ef masser war here, I could almost rejoice, spite of my 'flictions. I mus' bustle round and get suthin' ready for all dese tired, hungry people to eat, and get dem bed-clo'es dried where de rain beet in. De table sot, jus' as it wos, when I was out here goin' fer to put de coffee on, and herd you scream. My poor ole man. He's gone up, sure, for I saw him go. Saturn 'll neber eat no more woodchuck pie in dis life—hi! hi! Now, now, pickaninny, guess whose comin', and who they're a-bringin'. You needn't jump out of yer skin, chile, if it *is* yer own father—hurt, too, I'm afraid, by the way he looks."

Alice sprang to the door. Philip was lending her father the aid of his strong young arm. Mr. Wilde walked with difficulty, and his arm hung down in a helpless manner.

"Oh, father, are you hurt?"

"Nothing to speak of—not worth mentioning,—a little bruised, and my left arm broken. Positively, I don't feel a bit of pain, since I see you unharmed, my darling."

"But you'll come to a realizing sense of it, by the time we have set it, after its going so long unattended to," said Philip.

"If I groan, punish me for it," replied the sturdy raftsman.

The broken limb was soon set and splintered, and the friends had time to look in each others' faces, and realize they were altogether and safe.

"You have not told us how you escaped so remarkably," said they to Alice.

"Not anodder word at presen'," said Pallas, opening the door to the dining-room. "De weddin'-feas' has not been eaten—sech as it is, ye mus' stan' in need of it. 'Tain't what it would have been yesterday,—but I've did my bes' under de circumstances."

"Take my place, Philip; I'll lie here on this lounge, and when puss is through, she can feed me."

"If missus'll cut up his food, I'll wait on massa."

As the declining energies of the party were recruited by the dinner, their spirits rose to something of the hilarity of the previous day;—if it had not been for genuine sympathy with the sorrow of the old servant, mirth would have

prevailed in proportion to their past distress. An occasional exclamation, smothered in its birth, told them their host was not quite so easy as he affected to be; but he would let no one pity him, bearing his pain with fortitude.

In the center of the table stood the bride's-cake, a snowy pyramid, the triumph of Pallas's skill, wreathed about with garlands. It was fair to look upon, within and without, and sweet to the taste as agreeable to the eyes.

"Dar' was de whites of fifty eggs beaten up in dat cake," its maker declared, in an aside to Virginia.

"Then I should call it a very egg-spensive and egg-stravagant article," remarked Mr. Raymond, who had heard the assertion.

"'Tain't any too nice for de bride it was made fer, masser."

"There's a ring in it," said Alice, as she performed the duty of the occasion by cutting the cake. "Who has it?"

Everybody took their piece with curiosity, and finally Mr. Irving held up the golden circlet, giving, at the same time, a glance towards Virginia, too expressive to be misunderstood.

"You'll be married next, Mr. Irving, and we hold ourselves all invited to the wedding," said Mrs. Raymond.

"I hope I may be," replied that gentleman, with a second glance toward the bride-maid; but she was looking to her plate, and did not seem to hear him.

Virginia had pursued the art of flirtation too long to abandon it at once.

As they lingered over the closing cup of coffee, Alice related the circumstance which had probably saved her life. It seemed she could not endure to dwell upon the terror of her flight in that wild maniac's arms, passing it over as briefly as possible.

"When I had given up all hope of rescue, and felt as if actually dying, from the terror of my situation, my abductor suddenly paused, before what seemed to be a small ledge of rock, such as frequently juts out of the ground in these woods, especially near the river. Pushing aside a vine which trailed thickly before it, he thrust me into the mouth of a cave, but instead of following me in, as I expected, he drew the vine carefully over it again, and sprung away, singing,—

"'I'll hide the maid in a cypress-tree,
When the footstep of death is near.'

"The feeling of exquisite relief which came to me in that moment was quickly superseded by the thought of his speedy return. While I stood there, trembling, waiting for him to get out of sight and hearing, in the hope that I might creep out and elude him, I heard the roar of the approaching tempest. Peering through the foliage, I felt my rocky shelter tremble, and saw the forest fall prostrate. As soon as the first shock was over, I crept out, thinking nothing but of the destruction of my friends. Too distracted to feel any personal fear, I wandered through the storm, I knew not how many hours, until, by the merest chance, a flash of lightning revealed Philip, not four feet away from me."

"The first thing you did, I suppose, was to give him a curtain-lecture, for staying out nights," remarked Mr. Raymond.

"And now, dear father, I think the roof blew off, and the house blew to pieces almost, and your arm was broken, on purpose to convince you of the necessity of spending your winter with us. It would be foolish to try to make this comfortable again, this fall. Your men can put a roof on, to protect it from the weather, and we'll leave it to its fate."

"Since he's disabled and can't defend himself, we'll take him captive," said Philip.

"Have it as you like, children, I expect to be led around by apron-strings after this. Next spring, I'll take Virginia, and come back here, and will put up the handsomest mansion that ever graced this river-side—it shall be large enough to accommodate the whole family, present and prospective. *You* needn't color up, little girl,—I was only thinking of Virginia's future spouse—eh, Virginia,—what's Mr. Irving blushing for?"

"I don't know—men should never blush—it's a weakness."

"I wish I could be as unmoved as you," he whispered in her ear, for he sat by her side. "It would be more becoming to me than it is to you. Women were made to blush and tremble."

"*Were* they, Mr. Irving, then you'd better leave those things to them, and not be intruding upon their sphere."

"Perhaps I shall obey you, Miss Moore," he said, recovering all his coolness.

She felt that he was a man not to be trifled with. Sensitive and full of sensibility as he might be, he was not the man to let a woman put her foot on his neck. He might worship the foot, but he would not submit to be trampled upon by it. He would love, truly and deeply, but he must be respected and loved in return. His

was just the spirit fitted to take the reins and curb the too headstrong and wilful disposition of Virginia—under the control of a wise and gentle nature like his, her faults might change into virtues.

Philip was secretly regarding them, delighted to see how soon he recovered his self-possession, and how quietly he made his companion feel it. He saw that she fretted under it, and finally, giving up, exerted herself to be friendly and agreeable.

"They will be well matched. I never saw a better mate for my naughty cousin. I had an idea of it, when I invited him to act as groomsman. She'll be a good while giving up, though."

That Virginia would not yield to this new mastership very soon was evident. When they had left the dining-room, and were standing on the portico, Mr. Irving desired to place the ring which had fallen to him upon her finger—but she refused it with considerable hauteur.

"I only desired you to wear it for safe-keeping. It's a lady's ring, and I don't know what to do with it. Mrs. Raymond, will you accept it?"

He placed it on the finger of the married lady with as pleasant an air, as if it had been accepted where he first offered it.

"I had not ought to wear it; give it to some fair maiden."

"There is but one, and she will not have it. If there were others, I should certainly offer it. So you see it is chance only that has left it to you."

"Well, I'm not very much flattered Mr. Irving—but the ring is just as pretty, and I ought to be thankful to chance."

So the ring was lost to Virginia, without the satisfaction of her having annoyed the one who offered it.

CHAPTER XV.

BEN AND ALICE.

"Now that the wedding-feast is disposed of, I must remind you all that there is yet work to be done. I have not heard from the mill; and poor old Saturn must be searched for, as well as that unfortunate young man who has made us so much trouble. It frets me to think I can do nothing. Philip, you must do service in place of my broken arm."

The party were making ready to go out again, when two or three men came from the mill, to inquire after the family, and to relate to the captain the story of the vast damage his property had sustained.

"Oh, what is de riches of dis worl', masser," said Pallas, as she, too, paused from her work to hear their interesting narrative of wreck and chaos upon every side, with accounts which had reached them from people farther down, where the tornado had made a yet more terrible visitation. "What is de riches of dis worl', when a bref of de Almighty can sweep 'em away like as dey were dust and trash. My ole masser he turn you 'way, 'cause yer had no riches, and your chile-wife, she die of grief; and you come out here and work and work in de wilderness half as long as de chil'en of Israel—and you set your foot down, *you* will be rich, and your chile shall have much to gib her husband when she got one—and de storm come, and all yer pine-trees is laid low, and yer mill-wheel is broken at de fountain, and your riches pass 'way in de whirlwind."

"It's time for me to begin thinking of these things I suppose, Pallas. But, as to my losses—I can stand 'em. My wood-choppers must work briskly this winter, among this fallen timber—and as for the old mill, I think it has gone to pieces to hasten the fulfillment of my plan of erecting a steam-mill in its place. I've worked for Alice, and now I must work for Virginia."

"Let us at least," said the clergyman, who was standing by, "be reminded of our duty by this humble colored woman—let us offer up thanks for our wonderful preservation."

All knelt, except the disabled raftsman, while the minister offered up a heartfelt thanksgiving, when the party set forth into the tangled forest again. Alice, who had been overcome more by anxiety than by fatigue, was so recruited, that she

insisted upon going with Philip. Her familiarity with the woods she thought would enable her to trace the way to the spot where Ben would doubtless be found a corpse; the fact that he was high up in the branches of a tall tree when the tempest struck the spot, making it almost certain that he was destroyed. Two or three foresters, Raymond, and Philip, followed their guide, as she wound through and climbed over matted branches and fallen trunks, pausing occasionally for some trace of the familiar aspect of yesterday. In many places the forest looked actually as if a band of giant reapers had passed that way and mowed down the trees in mighty swaths. Again, when the tornado had taken a more whirling moment, the great trunks would be twisted and snapped off in long splinters, ten or twelve feet from the ground. An overwhelming sense of the terrific power of their unwelcome visitor oppressed them, as they beheld its ravages in the broad daylight.

"And yet, dear Philip, it may have been sent by Providence to save me from a fearful fate—or at least, it *did* save me, and I am grateful—oh, so grateful," whispered the young wife, as Philip assisted her over a huge tree which lay, torn up by the roots, across their path.

"It must have been somewhere about here," she said, presently.

"I am sure I have no idea of the locality," answered Philip.

"Yes! there is the ledge of rock, and the cavern into which he thrust me. Poor Ben! I forgive him all. I hardly dare go on—I am afraid I shall see some dreadful sight;" and she shuddered.

"Perhaps you had better rest yourself, while we search this vicinity closely."

"Oh, no! I am too nervous to be left alone. I will keep by your side," and she clung to his arm, growing paler every moment, and scarcely daring to look before her.

"Hush!" exclaimed one of the foresters, half-an-hour later, turning back toward the young couple who were some distance behind. "Don't let her come near. We've found him; he's dead as a hammer."

Alice sat down upon a fallen tree-trunk, faint and trembling.

"Stay here, dearest, a few moments. I will come back to you," and Philip went forward with the men to where, amid the ruins of the forest,—Ben lay, a crushed and senseless human thing. He was dreadfully mutilated, and to every appearance dead. They dragged him out from under the heavy branches, and as they did so, a low groan startled them. One of the men sank down and took the

head upon his knee.

"Where's Alice?"

Ben unclosed his eyes, as he asked the question, moving them about from one face to another with a searching glance.

"I'm dying—bring her quick. Oh, do bring her, won't you?"

The gasping voice was loud and thrilling in the eagerness of its entreaty. Philip turned away and went for his wife.

"Do you think you can bear the sight?"

"If he wishes to see me, I shall not deny a dying man. He took many a step for me, in his better days—poor boy."

Ben seemed to distinguish her footsteps as she drew near. He could not stir, but his eyes turned in that direction.

"Are you cryin' for me?" he asked, as she stood by his side, the tears flowing down her cheeks like rain. "It's enough to make a man die happy to see you cryin' for him, Alice."

"O Ben! I wish I could help you," she sobbed.

"I'm past earthly help, and I'm glad of it. It's the best thing could happen to a used-up fellow like me. I don't blame you for it, Alice, but I'm to blame for things I've done, and I won't ask you to forgive me. My head's been on fire for weeks—I've been in a strange state—I can't recall what I've did or said. Then I got hurt, I don't know how—and when I could think again, that burning pain in my head was gone. I knew I was dyin', and I wanted to see you. I wanted to carry the pictur' of your face to the next world. I shouldn't be ashamed to show it to the angels—if they'll have any thing to do with a poor, ignorant fellow like me, as Pallas said they would. You're married, ain't you?"

"She is my wife," said Philip, gently, taking her hand.

"It made me crazy to think of it once; but it's over now. Alice, you've my blessin' and my wishes that you may be happy all your life. Forgive me the trouble I've made ye, and may you and him be happy long after the grass grows over poor Ben Perkins."

Alice sobbed aloud, and the rough men standing around were grave and silent. The last sentence had been spoken in a whisper, and it was evident that life was ebbing away rapidly. He closed his eyes, and the sweat gathered on the pallid

face, but a short time since, rich with the olive and crimson of health and youth.

"I shan't be twenty-two till next month," he whispered, with shut eyes. "Put it on my tombstone, and let 'em put on it—

"'Oh, his heart, his heart was broken
For the love of Alice Wilde.'"

They stood looking at him.

"Alice—good-by. Alice—where are you? Alice!"

"Here, Ben—here I am;" but she spoke to a corpse.

He died with the name of the woman he had loved with all the power of his passionate nature trembling upon his last breath.

The next day they buried him in a lovely spot on the bank of the river; and, spite of all his errors and crimes, he was not unwept and not unmourned. Once he had been gay and frank, kind and honest, handsome and merry—and the memory of his good qualities swept away the judgment passed upon his later actions.

Poor Saturn's remains were not discovered; and Pallas, with the superstition of her class, was inclined to believe that he had been translated bodily, in the chariot of the wind, to that better world of which they had spoken so much together. It was a pleasant belief, and afforded her great consolation.

"He allers was so fond of dressin' and good clo'es; and he'd been taken up in his new suit as if a-purpose to please him. Ef he'd only a partaken of de weddin'-feas', he couldn't hab been better prepared 'an he was. Hi! hi!"

It was a picturesque-looking party which sailed away from Wilde's mill one brilliant day in September.

"One doesn't see such a bridal-party every day, or take such a bridal tour," remarked Virginia to the groomsman by her side. "It's better than six fashionable weddings, with the usual routine. I used to have a contempt for the romantic—but I'm beginning to like it."

Yes, even the aristocratic Virginia, the beautiful metropolitan, began to be infatuated with the romance of the forest.

We may yet hear of more remarkable changes than her change of opinion. We may yet see a villa, charming as those which grace our lordly Hudson, rising amid the elms and beeches on the banks of that fairer Western river—for love,

beauty, taste, and money can accomplish wonders more surprising than making the wilderness blossom like a rose—and "out West" Aladdin's lamp is no myth.

But, for the present, we will leave this picturesque party sailing down this broad, silver river in the purple and gold of an autumn day—leave it to its joyous light, and leave that one new-made grave to its silence and shadow.

THE END.

THE GOLDEN BELT

CHAPTER V.

THE CARIB'S PLEDGE.

The next day Hernando mounted his charger, and went forth to the forest. Guarcia's flower had withered, though he had kept its stem in crystal water all night. He was impatient to hear her voice again, athirst for the sweet words that told him of her love. As he galloped through the forest, followed by the hounds that had learned to crouch at Guarcia's feet and play lovingly with her fawns, a figure stepped suddenly across his path and seized his horse by the bit. The horse, restive at feeling a strange hand near his head, made an attempt to rear, but the Carib savage drew him back to the earth with a wrench of his strong arm, and, before Hernando could speak, was looking him gravely in his face.

"Come with me, stranger, there is a black cloud over this path."

"I am used to danger, chief, as some of your tribe may know," said Hernando, smiling, as he touched the hilt of his sword.

"Vipers are not killed with weapons like that," answered the chief; "it is with them you have to deal."

"Well, what of them? I prefer an open foe, like the warriors of your tribe. You are an enemy to our people, but now and straightforward what other assailant need I fear?"

"We are foes to the Spaniard, but not to you. Come, and I will show you the snares which white men lay for each other."

"But what if this were itself a snare?"

The Indian drew a knife from his belt, and seizing Hernando's hand in his iron grasp, pierced a vein with the point. Applying his lips to the cut, he drew a mouthful of blood and swallowed it. Then dashing one clenched hand against his broad chest, he exclaimed, with vehemence:

"The blood of my pale brother flows here. What Carib ever betrayed his own blood?"

Hernando knew that this was a sacred pledge, and turning to the Indian, with a smile, bade him lead on.

The Indian did not smile, but his eyes broke into a blaze of delight, and, with a gesture, he plunged into the forest.

Some four or five miles from the place of the encounter lay a stretch of swampy land, dark and dismal as stagnant water and the slimy growth of swamp vegetation could render it. Many a rough passage and deep gully lay between the broad savannas and this dreary spot; but the savage passed them without halting, and Hernando followed, though his good steed grew restive with the broken path. At last they came out on a precipice which it was impossible that the horse could descend.

"Leave your beast here—he will be safe," said the Indian pointing to a footpath which wound like a black serpent down the precipice.

Hernando dismounted, tied his horse to a sapling, and prepared to follow his guide on foot. With a step as firm and more rapid than a wild goat's, the savage took to the path. Hernando followed. With a fearless and steady step, they wound their way still on the edge of the precipice, till the moon had risen, and flung her luxuriant gilding upon every object. They now walked more rapidly, and soon took a southern course, and began to descend. Hernando now understood where he was going. The continual and monotonous cries of the frogs, and the tall trees with their long festoons of Spanish moss—which hung over the alluvial bottom, like the curtains of a funeral pall—indicated sufficiently that they were approximating, or had already reached the Cypress Swamp. Many a slimy toad hopped croaking out of their way, as they advanced in the swamps, and the angry scream of some huge "swamp owl," as it flapped its broad wings, and malignantly snapped its bill at them, gave him a hint that it was time to tread warily in the tracks of his guide, or he might suddenly be precipitated headlong into the mud and slime, for they were approaching the interior of the swamp.

After walking for some time, till even the Indian, whose knowledge of that country was unlimited, was constrained to step with extreme caution, for fear of sinking into the deceptive mud, they stopped. The scene around bore a terrifying appearance—not one step further could they advance, without being overwhelmed in mud and water. As far as the eye could see, by the imperfect light which penetrated that dismal spot, was but one sickening sight of the green mud and water, where no human foot could tread without sinking ten feet or more, to find death at the bottom.

"Look upon that spot," said the savage, pointing with his finger to a pool of stagnant water; it had the appearance of being deep, and a large green frog sat on

a broken stump that floated there, with his gray eyes fixed upon them, and with his hind legs drawn under him, as if preparing to leap into their faces. Hernando turned his eyes away from this loathsome sight. "That spot," continued the savage, still pointing toward it—"that spot was to have been my white brother's grave."

"What!" exclaimed Hernando, recoiling; "what you say can not be true—who could make that spot my grave? Is this a time for trifling with me, chief?"

"It is not, my white brother! I did not bring you here to play with your feelings, but to save your life; you look at me,—you would inquire what interest I have in saving your life. Listen: It was a great many summers ago, when a Carib chief went out to shoot deer; he walked all day—no deer—he sat on a log, tired and hungry; while he sat there, weak and tired, almost asleep, a crouching panther sprang upon him and bore him to the earth; the Carib fought hard, for he was fighting for his life, but he was weak and hungry, and the panther seized him and was bearing him off, when a white man, who heard the noise, came running to the spot. He, drawing his knife like a true warrior, jumped upon the enraged animal's back, and stabbed him to the heart. The Indian was saved. The white man had a warrior's heart—he took from his wallet some provisions, which he gave to his starving brother, and bade him eat, then he walked off. The Carib's heart swelled, and when the pale man had disappeared, he fell upon one knee, and called the Great Spirit to witness, and he swore an oath; he swore in the presence of that mighty Spirit to protect all in whom that pale man's blood flowed."

"That man was my father," interrupted Hernando; "I have heard him tell that story many times; and what became of the Carib?"

"He stands before you! Now will my pale brother suspect me of playing with his feelings? But stay. The Carib became a great chief in his nation, and sat in the councils of Caonabo. He still hunted in these woods, and as he hunted three suns ago, sounds came to his ears, more terrific than the swamp owl's, for it was not the sound of defiance, but of cowardly murder. Two men advanced; your brother, who did not wish to be seen, stepped behind a tree. It was a big Captain of the fort, and a man whom I have seen taking care of the horses at the fort—a slim-faced Spaniard, with eyes like a snake's; their looks were black, and they talked of murder; your brother understood, for he had learned their language in trading with them; they struck upon the track that we have just passed—what would they in this track, for no game can live here? Your brother followed them cautiously, and the slim one cursed my white brother, because he loved a

daughter of the Spaniard whose mother was a Carib princess, and he swore he should be killed, and hid from his comrades in the black heart of the cypress swamp. I left them, and hunted you—here we are!"

Hernando was thunderstruck at what he heard; a feeling of horror pervaded his frame, as he looked around on that dismal spot. The tall trees above them bore no other verdure than the rank Spanish moss, which swept the swamp far and wide, and the dark green water, with its thousand loathsome reptiles, was horrible to look upon.

"My brother must keep a sharp eye about him—he must play the fox, and if the Spaniards are too strong, send this belt to Orazimbo, and he will find your brother, who will come to your help though he must bring as many warriors as there are leaves on the trees."

Hernando took the belt, which glittered richly even in that murky light; for it was a girdle of virgin gold, flexible, from its own purity, with a rivulet of burning opal stones, rough emeralds, and rude gems running through it like a rainbow.

Transcriber's Notes:

The text of this electronic book is derived from the original American edition. The source copy was missing its cover, so the cover image used here comes from a later British reprint.

Added table of contents.

Frontispiece may be clicked to view a larger version.

Retained some unusual (presumed archaic) spellings (e.g. "musquitoes").

Page 10, added missing quote after "no older."

Page 13, added missing quote after "new clo'es."

Page 15, changed "a a watchin'" to "a watchin'" and added missing period after "right away."

Page 32, the line "The sun went down in a clear sky; there were no clouds to" appeared several lines above its intended position; it has been moved down.

Page 51, changed "your love-cracked" to "you're love-cracked."

Page 54, added missing period after "her fears."

Page 63, changed "of of thrashing" to "of thrashing."

Page 65, changed "somethimg" to "something."

Page 88, added missing period after "dis worl'."

Page 91, removed extra quote after "sure 'nuff."

Page 96, changed period to question mark in "May I pray for you, Ben?"

Page 104, changed comma to period after "groomsman with Virginia." Added missing period after "rag-carpeting."

Page 105, changed period to question mark after "upon my trips?"

Page 113, changed comma to period after "in de wood."

Page 124, changed "begining" to "beginning."

End of the Project Gutenberg EBook of Alice Wilde: The Raftman's Daughter, by Metta V. Victor

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ALICE WILDE ***

***** This file should be named 46586-h.htm or 46586-h.zip *****
This and all associated files of various formats will be found in:
http://www.gutenberg.org/4/6/5/8/46586/

Produced by David Edwards, Demian Katz and the Online
Distributed Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net (This
file was produced from images generously made available
by The Internet Archive)

Updated editions will replace the previous one--the old editions
will be renamed.

1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg-tm License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg-tm License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg-tm.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg-tm License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg-tm work in a format other than "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg-tm web site (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg-tm License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg-tm works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works provided that

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg-tm works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg-tm License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from both the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and Michael Hart, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread public domain works in creating the Project Gutenberg-tm collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS' WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg-tm work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg-tm work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg-tm

Project Gutenberg-tm is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need, are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg-tm's goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg-tm collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg-tm and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation web page at http://www.pglaf.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Its 501(c)(3) letter is posted at http://pglaf.org/fundraising. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's principal office is located at 4557 Melan Dr. S. Fairbanks, AK, 99712., but its volunteers and employees are scattered throughout numerous locations. Its business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887, email business@pglaf.org. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's web site and official page at http://pglaf.org

For additional contact information:

Dr. Gregory B. Newby
Chief Executive and Director
gbnewby@pglaf.org

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg-tm depends upon and cannot survive without wide spread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine readable form accessible by the widest

array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit http://pglaf.org

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg Web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: http://pglaf.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works.

Professor Michael S. Hart is the originator of the Project Gutenberg-tm concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For thirty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as Public Domain in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our Web site which has the main PG search facility:

http://www.gutenberg.org

This Web site includes information about Project Gutenberg-tm, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.

linked image
back