



BLACK RALPH,

THE FOREST FIEND!

OR

THE WANDERERS OF THE WEST.

A TALE OF WOOD AND WILD.

BY DR. J. H. ROBINSON. 1851.

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PREFACE.

IN the following romance, the writer has attempted to shadow forth scenes in the life of the Western hunter, trapper, and adventurer. How far he has succeeded, the reader must judge. It is easier to find fault with a book, than to write one; although in this respect the author has no reason to complain, inasmuch as his 'SILVER KNIFE,' and many other tales, have been received with much more favor than he had presumed to expect. The hero of the following pages may not be without his faults, and Gilmore and Buston may possibly be overdrawn; but if the writer has succeeded in his design in any degree, and the indulgent reader finds a pleasant hour over the pages of 'BLACK RALPH,' he will feel himself sufficiently rewarded for his labor.

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BLACK RALPH.

CHAPTER I.

THE OSAGE.

I STOOD leaning thoughtfully upon my rifle. The night was clear and beautiful. The fleecy clouds that occasionally floated across the disc of the moon, obscured it for a moment only. The stars had a soft, silvery glow.

From the eminence upon which I stood, I could gaze over a vast extent of country. Before me flowed the Red Fork of the Arkansas River. Upon my left, the distant peaks of the Rocky Mountains were visible. Upon my right, were prairies, stretching far away, and lost to view in the dim distance.

Not far from me the smoke of a cheerful fire went curling upward. Near it were too apparently sleeping persons, wrapped in blankets, and stretched upon the earth. They were the companions of my journeyings through the West.

I had laid down to sleep in the first part of the evening, but sleep did not visit my eyelids, and I had arisen silently from the earth without disturbing them, in order to contemplate the quiet beauty of the night, until I could slumber better.

I was soon lost in contemplation. The placid skies; the dreamy moonlight; the sighing of the

running river; the gentle murmur of the wind amid the trees, all conspired to make me reflective.

As I stood in the indolent attitude I have named, my attention was arrested by a moving object upon the opposite bank. At first I was at a loss to determine to what class of animated creatures it belonged; but as it drew nearer, all doubts on that subject were dispelled; for, from a stooping, it arose suddenly to an erect posture, and revealed the figure of an athletic Osage warrior. There was no time to lose; in an instant my rifle was at my shoulder. I pulled; the lock fell upon the cap, but there was no report; my rifle had missed fire; and as I threw it from me in despair, I heard a triumphant laugh from the grim lips of the Osage. A sickness came over me; I gasped for breath, and felt that my last hour had come. I saw the savage level his piece; I saw the moonbeams glisten upon the long, dark barrel; and knew his eyes were glancing along the 'sights'—that his finger was upon the trigger.

How rapidly the thoughts fly through the brain in moments of deadly peril; the events of a whole lifetime seem to pass over the field of the mental vision in a moment. All our misdeeds stand out before us in bold relief—all

our hours misspent come and stare us in the face; all the good we might have done, but have not, is realized with a bitterness previously unknown; we exist an age in a single flash of time. I was not angry; the evil demon that sometimes rises within me was silent.

The muzzle of the warrior's rifle covered my heart; but he did not fire. Like the cat that toys with its victim before rending it, he doubtless experienced a savage delight in holding me a moment in suspense so terrible. The suddenness of the whole transaction had in a measure paralyzed me. I knew full well that it was too late to attempt to evade the vengeance of the Osage, and giving myself up for a lost man, I awaited my fate.

But the painted savage never fired; he fell suddenly forward with the rifle still in his hands, and never moved again.

Wiping the perspiration from my brow, I wondered at what I had seen, and could with difficulty credit my senses. When I had recovered sufficiently to do so, I took my rifle from the earth, and with a heart full of gratitude, staggered towards the fire where my companions were sleeping, not knowing how to account for what I had witnessed.

As I approached, one of the sleepers was awakened by my footsteps, and seizing his rifle leaped quickly to his feet.

'It is I, Gilmore, be not alarmed,' I managed to articulate, as he was in the act of leveling his piece.

'I thought it was one of the *varmints*,' replied Gilmore, restoring his rifle to its place. 'What's the trouble? you look kind of white. like round the mouth.'

I explained, as well as I was able, what had just transpired.

'Did you hear any report when the onregenerate critter went down?' asked the trapper.

'Not a sound. He fell as if the Hand that formed him had stricken him down.'

'Then he'll not be likely to git up agin 'till the last trumpet shall be *blowed*,' said Gilmore, lowering his voice, and shaking his head mysteriously. And then he added in a still lower tone:

'*Black Ralph* is doin' his work of death.'

'And who is '*Black Ralph*'?' I asked, my curiosity much excited.

'That's what I can't say exactly;' replied the trapper, almost in a whisper, 'but he's one that deals out *death* in *silence*; one as can't be tracked, nor found out; one as you can't keep the run on; one as is seldom seen, but often felt; one as is sure death to the red *varmints*; one as is *allers* near, and *allers* a great way off; one as none on us can perfectly comprehend; one as it isn't best to talk on a great deal. The *Ingin* critters call him the '*Forest Fiend*;' but I can't call him nothin' better than *Black Ralph*. No sound gives notice of his comin' or goin', and nobody's any wiser than afore.'

'Is it a man you are talking of?' I asked.

'I havn't never been illuminated on that subject,' replied Gilmore. 'I suppose it must be some kind of a man, but what sort I don't know.'

'Why is he called *Black Ralph*'?

'It's a sort of nickname that he's got by common consent like; but the *Ingin*s say he's black all over, and uncommon ugly in his parsonal appearance, lookin' like nothin' airthly.'

'Then you really believe that this personage, by some strange agency, killed the Osage warrior?'

'It's a sure thing. Turn that *varmint* over, and you'll find a small wound right in the region of the heart. It's *allers* there when *Black Ralph* is about.'

I shook my head doubtfully.

'You dont *seacely* credit it,' added Gilmore, 'but nothin' can't be no truer. We'll cross the Red Fork, and you shall see for yourself; for seein' is believin'.'

'It is true,' I replied, 'that I can't account for the strange manner in which the savage fell forward, apparently dead; and after all it may be some *ruse* of which we shall know more anon; but it does not seem to me probable that he has felt the power of the dread personage you have been describing. I accept your offer. We will cross the Fork, and I can judge for myself.'



[SEE CHAPTER I.]

CHAPTER II.

BLACK RALPH.

IT is now fitting that I should speak more particularly of myself. A roving disposition had prompted me to become a denizen of the forest.

For some months I had roamed through the wilds of the West, meeting with many startling adventures, and by some good fortune making numerous hair-breadth escapes from the natural lords of the wilderness—the savages.

Gilmore, the trapper, alluded to in the foregoing chapter, and a young man by the name of Arthur Dale, had been companions of my wanderings.

I sojourned in the wilderness merely from a love of adventure; but it was not so with Arthur Dale.

Six months previously, his nearest relatives had emigrated to the far West, with the hope of bettering their condition in a worldly point of view. Among these friends were a father, sister, and brother. Their intention had been to settle far up upon the Red Fork of the Arkansas River.

Arthur had tarried behind for the purpose of collecting monies due his father and others of the emigrants. This business had delayed him longer than he had anticipated, and it was some months before he was ready to follow in the trail of his friends. I had fallen in with him at Fort Gibson, and since the period of our first meeting we had been the firmest of friends.

Gilmore was an old trapper whom I had also accidentally met during my peregrinations. A strange kind of friendship had been the result of our companionship. He seemed to entertain for me the love of a father, while I, in truth, felt for him the respect of a son. My *hasty* and *impulsive* disposition had not yet given him cause of offence.

Many misgivings had filled the mind of Arthur Dale as we neared the source of the Red Fork. He had confidently expected to find his friends some two days before, but had been disappointed. No signs of a new settlement had yet been found.

By lashing together the trunks of trees, we formed a rude raft, upon which we crossed the river. In a short time we reached the spot where the Osage had fallen. He lay upon his face, and his hands still grasped the rifle.

Gilmore turned him over, and there was no sign of life within him. The moonlight streamed down upon his swarthy chest. Directly over the region of the heart was a small and scarcely perceptible wound, from which the dark coagulated blood was slowly oozing.

'I thought so,' said the trapper, in a subdued tone. 'That's his mark.'

'That resembles the wound of a rifle shot,' I remarked, as I attentively examined the body. 'But it's very strange that I heard no report. It is a quiet night; the running of the river makes little sound, and the leaves scarcely stir.'

'It's *allers* so when Black Ralph is abroad. The red *critters* fall down and die when they ain't expectin' no harm. No matter what they're doin', whether they're walkin', sittin', or standin', it's all the same; they jump of a sudden into the air, and fall down without a pulse of life in 'em. It isn't one tribe, or two, or three, for that matter, but the whole red race that suffers. The silent tread of this unknown critter is arter 'em by day and by night, in fair and in foul. This ain't the first *varmint* I've looked on in the course of my nateral life that didn't know how he cum to his eend, and couldn't give no satisfactory account on't.

'Very singular,' I mused.

'It aint nothin more nor less than singular,' added the trapper.

'What shall be done with the body? Some of his friends may find it, and suspicion may be fastened on us as authors of his death.'

'We'll throw it into the water, and let it float towards the wigwams of his people,' said Gilmore.

The trapper drew the inanimate form of the Osage warrior to the edge of the water, and threw it in. It sank, arose again, and went hurrying down the river.

Thus ended the history of a red son of the forest.

'What prompted your friends to leave a place of security, ease and plenty, for a wild country like this?' I asked, one day, of young Dale.

'Might I not propound the same question to you with equal propriety?' he replied.

'Quite the reverse,' I answered. 'I have no family; I endanger no person but myself.'

'Very true. My father endangers a young and beautiful girl,' rejoined Arthur.

'Flora is fair, then?'

'None fairer or better,' added Dale, earnestly. 'You cannot appreciate her until you know her. She is too precious a treasure to be exposed to the blood-thirsty cruelty of the red denizens of these wilds. I am proud of her. I am willing to own. And why am I proud of her, Seward?'—it is not because she is fair and comely to look upon, but because she is good.'

'It is a just and praiseworthy pride,' I rejoined, 'and does honor to your head and heart. Fortunate is the young man who has a sister like her you have so eloquently praised. I know I shall dream to-night of Flora Dale.'

'Sweet be your dreams then,' said Arthur, with a pleasant smile.

Having digressed thus far by way of introducing remarks, I shall begin where I left off at the close of the first chapter.

When the body of the wretched Indian had been swept from sight by the flowing waters, we regressed the Fork. We found Arthur still sleeping. Wrapping myself in my war blanket, I was soon in a profound slumber.

In the dim visions of sleep I stood face to face with the brawny savage; the muzzle of his piece once more covered my heart; his ominous laugh came once more to my ears; and then he fell lifeless in all his members, and the deadly peril was past.

Other shadowy night-visions came; and among them the figure of one I had never seen; and I knew it was none other than Flora Dale. How this knowledge came, I knew not, but it was present with me; and the vision grew brighter and pleasanter until I was sorry to part with it.

But why should the face and figure of one I had never looked upon, come and stand before me and give me so much pleasure.

The vision passed; and I was sad, and endeavored to recall it; but it came not. Other phantasies followed, and when I awoke I was pursuing Black Ralph—a most forbidding creature, with an aspect sinister, and darker than the children of Ind.

Gilmore was sitting beside me smoking his pipe, while Arthur was busily employed in washing his rifle and wiping it dry.

'A very fine piece of workmanship is that,' said the former, rather contemptuously, 'but it hasn't seen much service, I reckon. I wouldn't give old *Two Shooter* for it arter all's said and done, nothwithstanding the silver fixins on the stock, and all such kind of fancy work.'

I would here remark that '*Two Shooter*' was the trapper's double-barrelled rifle, and, in his estimation, the best in the whole world.

'Perhaps I shall have an opportunity to prove it yet,' said Arthur, good humoredly, who happened to hear what was not intended for his ears.

'It wouldn't be strange if you should,' retorted Gilmore, drily. 'A man don't expect to live a great while among the Ingin *varmint*s without some brushes with 'em, accordin' to my notion, and I've seen some forty-five winters in the course of my nateral life.'

'I don't think you'll find me craven-hearted in the hour of danger,' replied Dale, still unruffled by the trapper's sarcasm.

'It's rayther hard tellin' what a youngster'll do when he hears the red critters yellin' like mad,' replied Gilmore. 'I knowed a chap once as was about your size: that thought it would be uncommon pleasant work to fight the *varmint*s; but the fust howl the critters set a goin' made him crawl under a baggage wagon for protection.'

'Perhaps I shall,' returned Dale, laughing.

'What do you think about the emigrants?' I asked, being desirous to turn the subject of the conversation.

'It's my opinion that they'd better stayed at St. Louis, where they were safe and sound, and had enough to eat, drink, and to wear, instead of undertakin' to penetrate into an unknown country, to encounter unknown dangers and hardships. That, I reckon, is putty near what I think about the matter. I know the nateral sile is good, and game is plenty, but 'tain't no place for females. It's different with men; they can fight, and endure hardship, but women as were reared in idleness and luxury, can't scacely bear the heat of the sun, and are ready to faint at the sound of a hunter's rifle,' answered Gilmore, puffing industriously at his pipe between each period.

'But do you seriously think that anything unfortunate has befallen my friends?' asked Dale, eagerly.

'The Ingins may have killed 'em, or they may not, accordin' to carcumstances,' added the trapper. 'They may have concluded to go farther up than they intended in the onset; or the critters may have driven 'em away; it's hard tellin', but we must hope for the best.'

'Perhaps you never had a daughter?' said Dale.

'Perhaps not; and perhaps she wasn't carried away by the *varmint*s when she was five years old; and perhaps I've never seen her since; and perhaps I didn't mourn for her, and travel all over the wide West to find her; I say *perhaps*.'

The old trapper paused, looked serious, and then resumed:

'Perhaps I didn't love that girl; and perhaps it didn't almost break my heart to lose her in such a way.'

Gilmore paused again, took his pipe from his mouth, and wiped his eye with the back of his hand.

'I never heard you shude to the subject before,' I remarked.

'I seldom speak on't,' he replied, 'because as how it ain't very pleasant to my feelin'. She'll be eighteen this day week, if she's alive—but that's a hard thing for a father to think on, and I keep it out of mind as much as possible.'

I did not think it expedient to continue a conversation evidently so painful to the trapper, and he smoked out his pipe in silence.

After our stomachs were suitably cared for, we mounted our horses and continued our journey upon the river.

'We're gettin' pretty well toward the source of the Red Fork,' said Gilmore. 'We've left Fort Mann in our rear, and Bent's Fort is away off in that direction. I reckon if there's any settlement on the Red Fork, we shall find it before a great while, for the Upper Spring can't be more nor a half day's travel from here. Rather a dangerous country this, for a small party of emigrants to settle in. The Cherokees and other tribes are often met with hereabouts, and they ain't over and above peaceable in their habits. They ain't to be trusted under no carcumstances whatsomever. A red-skin will be a red-skin, and you can't change him if you try ever so hard.'

'Be kind enough to tell me something more about Black Ralph,' I asked, as we picked our way along over the rough and broken country.

'Sartain, if it will be any pleasure to you; but I wasn't never good at story-telling. I remember a little incident that happened about a year ago.'

I was trapping on a small tributary of the Yellow Stone, and had been pretty successful. I had with me a half-breed *critter* that had made himself useful on many occasions. I hired him by the month, and he had no other interest in the business. Well, he used to help me set the traps, and sometimes used to go out and look at 'em alone. At length he got kind o' unsteady, and would be gone a day or two at a time, and couldn't give no satisfactory account of himself. This I didn't like very well, but it didn't give me no great uneasiness, because I didn't mistrust no treachery. One arternoon, long towards night, we were settin' at the door of our camp smokin', as we were in the habit of doin'. All at once we see a curious sight. Not a hundred yards from us a hoss and rider went gallopin' by; but such a hoss and rider it isn't the fartin of many livin' men to see. It wasn't

a common hoss—that it wasn't, by no means. It was about twice the size of common animals of that kind, and black as jet. This tremendous critter shot past us like an arrow, with his ears laid back, and his nose thrust forward like a regular pinter. When I assert that it was an ugly lookin' beast, I don't express half that I really mean. But one thing you mustn't forget; the critters feet didn't make no noise, and he passed clean by without any sound. That was uncommon; for the feet of such a mighty animal ought to make considerable clatterin', if not more.

Now I'm a comin' to the toughest part o' the story—the half human varmint that rode him. He was near about as large for a man as the hoss was for a hoss. His dress I couldn't very well describe, for he went by, as I was sayin', as if the old Nick had kicked him in the end, and I ain't by no means sure but he had. He might have been dressed in bear skins, for that matter, for he was black and shaggy as a natural wild beast. Away they swept, hoss and rider, and I didn't see 'em no more, and didn't wish to. But didn't that half-breed Ingin indervidoal turn white about the gills, though? I expected to see him sink into the natural bosom of the sile.

'It's Black Ralph,' said he, and went right into the camp, and didn't show his head agin 'till the next day, and I couldn't git a word out o' him.

The fact is, that when an Ingin sees Black Ralph, he thinks it a warnin' to him that death ain't a great way off, and will soon be upon him. Ten to one if he don't set right down and sing his death song, and git ready for the happy huntin' grounds. The half-breed went mopin' about all day, hardly stirrin' from camp. The followin' day, however, he began to drink whiskey; for I usually kept some o' the stuff by me in case o' sickness, though the half-breed seldom got any of it. I left him in better spirits than usual, and went to look arter my traps. When I got back, the French Ingin indervidoal warn't no where to be found. The idee seemed to strike me raythur forcibly that it wouldn't be on proper to go and look at my pile of peltries.

I went directly to the spot where I kept 'em concealed. The cache was tore open, and not a single skin was to be found. I must confess that my onregenerate natur begun to rile up, and I vowed to foller the critter 'till I could bring old Two Shooter to bear upon him.

I'm used to follerin' a trail, and it warn't long afore I was arter him.

Well, what do you think? I hadn't gone three hundred yards afore I found the varmint, flat on his back, and the peltries layin' beside him. I examined him, and found a small hole in the left breast. He was wounded in the heart, and it was the handy-work of Black Ralph. I took up my peltries, and left him there, as I had found him, wonderin' how strangely people would die sometimes when death seemed a long way off.

CHAPTER III.

PRAIRIE WOLF.

GILMORE had scarcely ceased speaking, when a large buffalo made his appearance, about two hundred yards before us. The trapper motioned us to stop, and we reined up instantly.

His horse understanding what was required of him, stood motionless, while 'Two Shooter' was levelled upon the shaggy front of the untamed forest rover. The whip-like crack went echoing through the woods, and the buffalo, with a faint bellow of pain, fell down where he had stood.

'A capital shot!' exclaimed Dale.

'I don't call that shootin', replied Gilmore, rather contemptuously. 'Snuffin' a candle at four hundred yards might perhaps be styled decent kind of doin', but bringin' down a critter like that at two hundred yards ain't nothin' to brag on. It's a pretty large mark.'

'It's not sometimes fail?' asked Arthur.

'Two Shooter' is brought to bear upon an object, it never speaks for nothin'. It sends out a stream of death as can't be withstood or remonstrated against. I never fail. For the last ten years, I can say as I have missed my mark, and that mark hap-

pened to be an Ingin indervidoal, or any kind of a quadruped whatsoever. A great many of the copper-colored varmints call me the 'Death Shot,' and allers think it prudent to keep a civil tongue in their heads, or to keep out of the way when I'm known to be about. They know what to depend on when they perceive Two Shooter a comin' to my shoulder, and nothin' wont set 'em a howlin' quicker.'

'I am tempted to call you *Never-fail* after this,' retorted Dale, smiling.

'It wouldn't be so bad a name as you might think,' replied the trapper; but my native modesty wont permit me to trumpet my own fame. The time may come when I can prove my good qualities by my works, and not be obliged to speak on 'em as I have in this instance.'

The buffalo was soon dressed, and we regaled ourselves upon the flesh; it was the first we had found during our journey up the river, and we did not eat sparingly. Those familiar with Western life know that the hump of a buffalo is a delicious morsel, highly esteemed by the hunter and trapper.

While we were roasting it, the delicious odor attracted several small wolves, resembling the prairie wolf, who looked at us most wistfully, occasionally entertaining us with a mournful howl.

'It's gettin' so near night,' said Gilmore, 'I reckon we'd better content ourselves to stay where we are 'till mornin'. There's nothin' gained by bein' in a great hurry.'

This proposal was very agreeable to me, but to Arthur Dale it was anything but welcome; he being desirous to move forward as fast as possible, in order to learn something in relation to his friends, on whose account he was hourly growing more uneasy.

We heaped up the logs, and when the night set in a cheerful blaze streamed up, and gave an air of rude comfort to our lonely camping ground. As we sat by the fire, listening to the tales of Gilmore, we were startled by the sudden appearance of a stranger.

He proved to be a Cherokee, whom we had met at Fort Gibson. He was called Prairie

Wolf, and among his people was a person of some consequence.

He and others had been sent to Fort Gibson by his tribe, in order to make some reparation, if possible, for sundry outrages they had committed at divers times, for which they had good cause to suppose they should be punished by the whites. How well he had sped on his mission, I knew not; but it was evident that his reception had not been just what he had hoped.

He hobbled and turned his horse loose, and seated himself by our fire, with all the assurance characteristic of the race. Gilmore received him in true Indian style—scarcely noticed him—said not a word.

Prairie Wolf helped himself to a liberal slice of buffalo meat, roasted it over the blazing fire, and truth forces me to say he did ample justice to his name.

When this interesting piece of business had been dispatched, Gilmore lighted his pipe, puffed a few mouthfulls of the fragrant weed, and passed it to his guest, who followed his example with Indian gravity, and then, in turn, passed it to me; and so it went around.

We felt not a little curious to know why he had followed us; whether he had come alone, or if more of his tribe were near. We were not kept long in doubt. Some of his friends had been slain by the mysterious being called Black Ralph. They were found at various times, a short distance from their lodges, with a single wound in the left breast. In some instances others had been near them at the time of their death; but no sound was heard to indicate that a death wound had been dealt. The victims were seen to leap upward, and then fall lifeless upon the earth.

Upon looking hurriedly round for the perpetrator of the deed, no living being could be discovered. They would see the hole in the region of the heart, and say in whispers, and with dismay upon their faces: 'It is the work of Black Ralph, the bad *Manito* of the forest.'

These deaths had been so frequent, that the bravest of the braves grew melancholy and dejected, and took council together in order to de-

vise some means of avenging the death of their warriors.

But all were at a loss. Their enemy was unseen and unknown. Many of them believed him to be of no mortal origin. All they knew of him was from hearsay, as those who averred they had seen him never lived long afterward to describe his appearance.

At last, a few of the most resolute of the tribe had volunteered to go in quest of the mysterious being so terrible to their race.

Prairie Wolf was of the number who had devoted themselves to this task. A feast was made, the war dance danced, and then the avengers bade adieu to their friends, took their muskets, mounted their steeds, and left the lodges of their people.

Gilmore heard this relation in silence, and shook his head gravely when it was concluded.

'Do you expect to find Black Ralph,' he asked, significantly.

'Prairie Wolf is called brave in war, he answered. 'He never turns his back upon the enemy. He never returns to his village without the scalps of his enemies to hang up at the door of his lodge.'

'You may be a great warrior, but I reckon as how Black Ralph will live longer nor you. The same sun as will shine upon your dead face, will shine upon that unaccountable critter a livin' man.'

A slight change passed over the features of the savage. Perhaps to him there was something prophetic in the words of the trapper.

'It strikes me, red-skin, that you wont see the smoke of your wigwam no more. Sunthin' seems to tell me that the silent steps o' death are arter ye. It's my impression the sun wont rise and set three times afore there'll be a hole in your left breast, jest over the heart.'

Prairie Wolf made no reply.

'It's a proper easy way of gettin' out o' the world,' added Gilmore. 'It's my belief that the critter as goes under in that way never knows what hurt him.'

'The heart of Prairie Wolf is very big,' said the Indian, gravely.

'Not big enough for him you're arter,' replied the trapper. 'You'd better pass the night in singin' your death song, or you may be obleeged to go to the celerbrated huntin' grounds without it.'

Wishing Prairie Wolf pleasant dreams, we stretched ourselves out by the fire, and were soon oblivious in sleep.

If I dreamed that night, by some strange inconsistency I dreamed of Flora Dale, so much had the glowing words of Arthur impressed me in her favor.

We arose with the sun, and pressed forward, momentarily expecting to find the new settlement. As we progressed, we found the way more difficult. The river, as we neared its source, grew narrower, and we were sometimes obliged to deviate from our course, making wide circuits around high hills, which seemed to rise in our pathway continually.

On account of these obstacles, we did not travel very fast, and were forced to halt before night; for both ourselves and beasts were weary.

We encamped on a tributary of the Red Fork, where we found excellent pasturage for the horses. They fell to cropping the soft grass with an earnestness that betokened they had lost nothing of their appetite by hard travelling.

As soon as a fire was kindled, I stretched myself beside it, and slept. I awoke in about an hour, and found my friends busily engaged preparing supper, which in the wilderness is a simple process.

The sun went down, and the moon came up.

My friends ate in silence, and then sought repose after the day's fatigues. But I did not feel inclined to slumber. The beauty of the night invited me forth to silent communion with nature.

Taking my rifle, I followed the devious windings of the stream. Its sloping banks were covered with tender verdure, and its waters had a musical murmur which wooed me on.

Sometimes it wound through an open woodland; sometimes through thickets of furze; and sometimes through delightful meadows.

'The emigrants should have settled upon this tributary stream!' I exclaimed, 'and not upon the Red Fork. Here is an excellent soil, rich meadow lands and uplands, to tempt the tillers of the earth.'

I had scarcely expressed myself in this manner, before I was sure that I heard the barking of a dog.

For the first time during my solitary walk, I thought of the adventures of the previous night. I paused, and felt that I had been imprudent in wandering so far from my companions.

The barking continued, and appeared at no great distance. At first I was undecided what to do, whether to go forward, remain perfectly still, or beat a cautious retreat. I might be in the vicinage of an Indian village or encampment, and consequently in a position of great danger.

But this feeling of indecision passed in a moment; I resolved to go forward. I waited until the dog had ceased barking, and then cautiously went forward in the direction whence the sound had proceeded.

Before I had advanced ten minutes in this manner, I reached a small clearing, and beheld, to my great amazement, some half a dozen cabins built of logs. Through the chinks of some of these primitive dwellings, a cheerful light was reflected, while the smoke went curling up fantastically from the roofs.

I was about to go forward to learn what kind of a settlement I had found, when a new object of interest diverted me from my purpose.

It was a female figure that had suddenly passed before my vision, and riveted my attention. She stood upon the bank of the stream whose graceful windings I had been following for the last three quarters of an hour.

Her attitude was one of perfect ease and repose—one which lends such unrivalled grace to a symmetrical figure. The moonbeams revealed enough of her person and features to assure me that she was young and exquisitely fair. When the memory of earthly things fades away, the emotions of that moment will be the last to linger. I felt myself the willing worshipper of a being so divinely moulded.

'Flora Dale!' I said, when I was sufficiently calm to do so, making a step forward.

The whole attitude of the maiden changed, and she was in the act of flying from me, when I added:

'I bring tidings from your brother.'

She turned toward me with surprise depicted upon every feature.

'Be not alarmed,' I continued, 'I am the bearer of good news. Your brother is well, and not an hour's walk from us.'

'You are a stranger,' she replied, timidly, 'but if you bring news from Arthur, you will certainly receive the welcome of a friend.'

'Had I not met your brother, I should not have known that I now stand in the presence of Flora Dale.'

The maiden blushed deeply.

'And do you recognize me only from the picture he has drawn of me?' she asked.

'Believe me, Miss Dale, I never gazed upon your face before; but I knew well it could be none other than Flora Dale; for Arthur has often described you with the eloquence of a lover; and he has not only described, but *praised*.'

'He's a partial brother,' replied Flora, with a smile, 'and I must reprove him for his exaggerated notions of my merits. But I have nearly forgotten to extend to you the hospitality of our rude home. Let us hasten to impart the good news to my father and brother.'

'Seek not to detain me, Miss Dale. The most acceptable service I can render, will be to return and relieve the anxiety of Arthur in regard to your safety.'

'It is not strange that he should have misgivings in relation to us. It is a rough and dangerous country we have traversed, and we do not by any means dwell in security. There is not an hour in the day when we can go forth in perfect safety. The red men are continually hovering about us, ready to pillage and to slay. Several of our numbers have already felt their power, and their faces will be seen no more among us. The hills, and woods, and streams, are pleasant to look upon, but we cannot possess them in safety.'

'I feared as much,' I replied. 'You are too near the Cherokees.'

'Much too near,' returned Flora. 'They say the country is all theirs, and we have no right to make settlements upon it. The consequences are what I have said—a continued fear of pillage and bloodshed, and in fact, of utter extermination.'

'Your father must forego his purpose of becoming a backwoodsman, and return to the habitations of civilized men.'

'That he says he will not do, while he has a weapon to wear, and an arm to wield it. Many are the sanguinary encounters he has had with the Indians. Nothing daunts him, and he regards the whole red race with the deepest hatred.'

'I cannot say that I differ from him in that respect. I never could breathe freely where there was an Indian. For the life of me I cannot help feeling that a savage is lawful game; as much so as the wild wolf, the bear, or the buffalo. It is no credit to the dictates of my heart, when I say that I never behold a red man without the desire to shoot him down as I would some hurtful beast. When I confess that I hate them, I do not express a tithe of the bitter enmity I feel for that race of painted fiends called Indians.'

I observed that Flora gazed intently into my face as I spoke, and instinctively shrank from me as she beheld its changed and fierce expression.

'Such a feeling is dreadful!' she exclaimed. 'You are but too much like my father. Oh why should man burn with such bitter hatred towards his fellow man.'

'Pardon me,' I said, with some asperity, 'I do not call Indians my fellow men. They are demons in human forms, knowing neither mercy, magnanimity, or one of the softer and better impulses that sway the bosom of a white man. I have not spared them, neither shall I when they cross my path.'

Again Flora shrank from me, and shuddered at the expression which my previously tranquil features had assumed.

'But,' I immediately added, with a smile, 'I must away to Arthur to be the bearer of welcome news.' Bowing respectfully, I turned and hurried away, with my heart full of Flora Dale.

I had walked over that same ground a few minutes before, with only a few indistinct and half remembered dreams of her; but now I saw nothing save her bright image.

It is time that the reader should know that I am, and ever was, a creature of impulse. My great fault is, and has been, that I go to extremes in all things, and know no middle course. My dislikes are not simply dislikes, but absolute hatreds. My resentments are not merely resentments, but perfect madness. My passions have never been conquered by wholesome self-restraint. I have from childhood known no master but myself, and only the two extremes of love and hatred. There are times when I regret this peculiarity most deeply; but I cannot conquer it—it was the fault of my youth and must be the fault of my manhood.

The reader will not be much surprised after this confession, that I left Flora as deeply in love as it was possible for a man to be at first sight. She was the same I had seen in my dreams; and it was by my dreams that I knew her, and not by Arthur's description, as I had said.

Yes, I loved Flora Dale—loved her as I believed no other living man could love. Every feature of her face; every intonation of her voice; every look; every gesture; all her divine symmetry of form, was indelibly impressed upon my soul; never to fade, never to grow less distinct; never to become less divine and glorious. I was an idolator—I worshipped—I adored, and asked for no fairer or better divinity.

You may call this madness; you may call it wronging my Maker; but I could not help it; it was so, and as it was, so I relate it, without shame or prevarication.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RIDE OF DEATH.

AS I walked on I heeded not whither I went. Unconsciously I wandered from the stream until its murmurs were heard no more. The true guide to my friends was lost; but I knew it not. I kept on, with my thoughts still clustering about the image of Flora Dale.

I traversed many acres of tangled wild-wood; of upland and lowland, until I was completely bewildered amid a labyrinth of hills. I rubbed my eyes like a person awaking from a dream, and looking at the moon, perceived that I had travelled an hour longer than would have sufficed to take me to my friends.

I listened to catch the sounds of the stream which I had wandered from, but its murmur was lost in the distance. I changed my course, and went forward, reproaching myself for my carelessness, and impatient of the delay thus occasioned.

As I urged my way through a thicket of low pines, I came suddenly into an open space where a small fire was blazing. The sound of my coming awakened one who slept beside it—it was an Indian. He sprang to his feet, presented his gun and fired before I had become fully conscious of my position. When he discharged his piece I felt a sharp pain in my left side, and recoiled a step, but recovered my presence of mind immediately.

Perceiving that I did not fall, he rushed upon me with uplifted hatchet to finish his bloody work.

All the dark passions of my soul arose within me on the instant, and nerved my arm with a giant's strength.

With my rifle I warded off the blow, and aimed another at his head, but with cat-like agility he leaped aside and baffled me.

I now pressed upon him, dealing him blow after blow, which he as often evaded, until I was half frantic with rage.

During this time the savage was uttering the most frightful yells to intimidate me, and his

hatchet was glancing about my head in all directions.

If I pressed suddenly upon him with the intention of crushing his skull at a blow, he as suddenly jumped aside or retreated, and I beat the air only.

Thus the contest lasted for three quarters of an hour, probably, and I had gained nothing. The blood was flowing freely from my side, while my face was bathed with perspiration, and my lips were covered with foam, like the mouth of an over-ridden horse.

I perceived with joy that the savage was growing weary of his motions, and began to breathe hard, and give other indications of exhaustion. While exulting in this thought, his hatchet fell upon the three last fingers of the left hand, and nearly severed them.

The pain of this infliction I did not heed, and indeed did not feel it; but it inflamed me to the highest possible pitch of fury. I gnashed my teeth with rage, and with a terrific cry and a sudden bound closed in with him despite his weapon, and all his activity.

He was a strong powerful Indian, and it cost me a fierce and bloody struggle to conquer him. At length I lifted him from the ground in my arms, and fell upon him with my whole weight.

The fall knocked the breath from his body, and for a time he lay wholly stunned and senseless. I placed my knees upon his broad chest, and with my knife cut my deer-skin hunting frock into strips. With these I bound his wrists firmly together, and then his feet; and those thongs were not drawn lightly, for they raised the veins like whip cords in a moment.

This done I arose from his chest, and respiration began to go on once more with difficulty, and slowly.

I paused to consider the best mode of vengeance. At a short distance I beheld the Indian's horse. A horrible idea flashed in upon my hot and excited brain.

I had read the poem of Mazeppa and his fearful ride, and I resolved with demon-like exultation that my conquered foe should share his fate.

I acted upon the idea as suddenly as it had been conceived. In a moment the horse stood ready for my purpose, and a large and smooth limbed beast he was. I raised the wretched savage, and with scarcely an effort placed him upon the back of the animal; then with the thongs I had cut, I lashed him there with hellish ingeniousness. That task completed not a limb could move, and there was not a remote possibility that he could by any means free himself from his horrible position.

Gradually the consciousness of the savage returned, and in mute despair he abandoned himself to his fate.

My work was not yet done. I saw a stick of pitch pine blazing upon the fire. With the Indian's hatchet I split it into small pieces, and fastened them upon the horse's mane, tail and sides, with a skill worthy of a better cause. Nor did my horrible cruelty stop here. I shudder while I tell, my heart sickens when I recall it. I thrust sundry splinters of the highly inflammable material into the flesh of the hopeless savage.

My next care was to set them all on fire, as the reader has already anticipated; and that was right speedily accomplished.

With a terrific snort, and with an eye as fiery as the blazing pitch-wood, the horse dashed madly away, bearing his death doomed burden. As he was borne from me like the wind, one cry of bitter hate, defiance and despair, was wafted to my ears from the track of his flight. I ran shouting to the top of the nearest eminence to see him go flaming upon his course, and the pitch-wood burned bravely, and marked the way of the Indian's last ride, with a red stream of fire.

I watched the meteor-like blaze, as it sped on like lightning, and yelled till I was hoarse; but in a moment or two the darkness closed in upon the track of the maddened horse and wretched rider.

Did you feel no relents—did not your heart shrink within you at that sight?

Not then, reader, I felt no remorse, no shrinkings, no relents of the heart until afterward, and then God knows how keenly I felt them, and cursed my perverted nature.

Do not despise me, reader; because I have told you of such a deed. If I go to extremes in cruelty, remember that my soul may also be easily swayed to acts of mercy. He who is more cruel than the grave in moments of anger, may be gentle as the lamb in moments of calmness and kindness.

Judge me not then, fellow mortal, till you know me better. If I confess to you my evil deeds, I will not scruple to relate also the redeeming acts of my life. Were I like most other men, I should have nothing to write, and these chapters would not be before you.

When the horse and the miserable victim of my rage which he bore, had swept from my view, I endeavored to retrace my way to Gilmore and Arthur Dale. I was more fortunate than I expected to be. A walk of three quarters of an hour took me to the stream I had wandered from, and the murmur of its waters sounded pleasantly in my ears. In a short time I reached the camping ground of my friends, the herald of good news to Arthur.

Awaking him from a sound sleep, I related all that had transpired connected with my meeting with Flora.

'Very singular that you should recognise her from such a meagre description as I gave you.'

'Not at all,' I replied. 'You described her as the loveliest of girls, and as the loveliest of girls I recognised her.'

Arthur smiled.

'Did you tarry long?'

'I did not see her more than fifteen minutes, not wishing to cheat you out of the good tidings a moment longer than necessary.'

'But you left us in the first of the evening, and now the night is far advanced.'

'I know it, I lost my way on my return,' I answered.

As I replied, I heaped more fuel upon the fire, and a bright blaze streamed up, revealing my features and person.

Arthur started with an exclamation of alarm.

'Good Heavens, Seward! what is the matter? Your face is haggard and frightful, and your person is covered with blood.'

'I have had an encounter with a red devil,' I replied.

'Your features are dreadfully pale and savage in their expression. One might believe that all the dark passions of our nature were struggling for utterance. My dear Seward strive to look more like a christian man.'

I attempted to laugh at his astonishment, but it sounded unnatural even to myself.

'You are wounded; sit down and let me examine your injuries. I have some skill in surgery,' added Arthur.

I obeyed him mechanically, and he dressed my hand first.

'There is a slight scratch upon my side, I believe,' I said when that part of his task was done.

He now noticed for the first time that my hunting shirt was gone.

'You have had a narrow escape,' he continued. 'See! the shot has carried away a portion of your vest, and passed close to the ribs, but fortunately there is nothing serious about the wound. Tell me all concerning the adventure.'

'No, Arthur, I cannot now. I beg you will excuse me. The subject is painful. The fact is I have been angry, mad, if you will; it may be that I have been cruel, more cruel than death itself. I begin to be myself again. Do not question me. There are things that had better be forgotten, than remembered, or if not known, had better remain hidden forever.'

'I have been blind,' returned Arthur. 'I have seen hitherto only half of your character—perhaps the better half. Your features when at rest, give no indication of your darker moods. I have beheld only the lamb, while the lion has slept.'

'True, Arthur,' I answered, you are right. You have not seen my whole nature convulsed with passion, and I devoutly hope you never may. But the storm passes quickly away, and leaves me as I feel that it will now, penitent, remorseful, and dejected. But do not condemn me; suspend your judgment until you know me still better, I ask no more.'

'I judge you not—I condemn you not—for what have I seen or known to condemn. Your face a moment ago told me that something frightful had transpired, more than that I do not comprehend, and at present I will not question you; but I warn you, Seward, and hope it will prove a timely warning, that if you would be happy in life, govern these terrible outbursts of passion that they may not lead to acts of savage cruelty.'

During this conversation, Gilmore and Prairie Wolf, lay sleeping by the fire. The latter for some reason unknown, had not left us for an hour since the moment of his first appearance. His deportment had been very grave, as though his mind was deeply occupied with important subjects. Of the mysterious personage known as Black Ralph, he had said nothing since the night of his advent among us.

We awoke Gilmore, and were accompanied and on our way, accompanied by an adventurer, towards whom my feelings had not been very friendly, as the reader may suppose.

We reached the new settlement after a short and silent ride, and I had the pleasure of gazing once more upon the fair face of Flora Dale.

The fierce excitement had passed away from my countenance, and given place to an expression of moody sadness. I saw Flora turn pale while Arthur recounted what he knew in relation to my rencontre with the savage.

'What would be the feelings of that young girl towards me, if she knew what a demon slept within me?' I asked of myself, with a heart full of misgivings. How would she regard me if the deeds of this night only were known.

I turned from her with a sigh of regret. I felt that I had forfeited all claims to the love of woman.

Had the wanton barbarity of this night been the only deed of wickedness I had committed, there might be a hope of pardon and amendment, I added, 'but alas, my whole life has been blotted with acts of madness.'

The more I gazed upon the features of Flora; the more I listened to her voice; the more I studied the graces of her mind; the more I dwelt

within the pleasant light of her eyes, the more deeply I became enamored. 'Happy Arthur,' I thought, 'to be loved by such a being.'

About ten o'clock the following day while I was visiting the different cabins composing the new settlement, I beheld Prairie Wolf sitting upon a log at a short distance, howling most dolefully.

'The critter has seen Black Ralph,' said Gilmore, who joined me at that moment, 'and he's singin' his death song. He's bound for the huntin' grounds of his people.'

'Has he really seen him?' I asked, eagerly, for my curiosity was getting strangely excited in relation to this unknown and dreaded being.

'It's my belief that that *Ingin individooal* has seen Black Ralph as much as any critter ever seen anything, replied Gilmore. 'He couldn't sing no better than sing his death song. There'll be a hole in his left breast afore the world is three days older. Mark what I say, and don't forget it.'

'It cannot be possible. You are superstitious, Gilmore. I cannot, for the life of me, believe much in this evil genius of the red men. No, no, old friend; people cannot fall down and die without a cause!

'Of course not, and I don't say they can. I say there *is* a cause of their fallin' down in sich a sudden way, and the critter I have mentioned is that *cause*, and nothin' else under the *canerpy* of the Heavens as shines over our heads. I've told you that that unhappy varmint sittin' on that log there, will be but a heap o' dust and ashes, afore the airth has been lighted by three more suns. I don't retract. I am willin' to repeat it any number of times.

I smiled incredulously, and passed on.

CHAPTER V.

THE DEATH DANCE.

ABOUT four o'clock of the same day I stood on the summit of a hill in the vicinity of the settlement. I had gone thither that I might be alone, for my heart was torn with remorse, and I felt unfit to be near

Flora. I feared she might read my thoughts, behold in me the monster that I really was, and despise me as I deserved to be despised. I thought to myself while I stood alone there that I would wander away into the wilderness and hide myself forever. Who would miss me, who would care if I should. My friends, what few I had, dwelt in another country. My mother slept with the sleepers that wake not. My father I had never seen; he had deserted me when a child—a helpless child, with no one to care for me—to rejoice if I lived, or to lament if I died. Grown to manhood full of evil passions, with no one to love me, no wonder I deemed the wilderness a fitting home.

I stretched forth my arms to the woods: 'My home shall be beneath the shade of your trees!' I exclaimed. 'The game that runs wild there shall be my food. I shall not want.'

I paused and looked upon the earth. You shall receive my ashes when I die. Wide shall be my grave, hollowed by no human hand.'

I stretched my hand to the skies, and turned my eyes thither: 'You shall receive my erring soul when I assume a new form of existence, and I will find rest among your stars.'

As I finished speaking I beheld a figure standing at the foot of the hill. It was Prairie Wolf. He stood in a thoughtful attitude; his left hand lay upon the bridle rein of his horse, while in the right he held his rifle.

He was gazing intently at the glorious West, as if wondering whether the happy hunting grounds were there.

Though a savage, and the victim of my dislike, I fancied I could observe something like humanity struggling up into his swarthy face as if to tell of a soul within. Yes, even through the dark cloud of prejudice that covered my sight, I saw as much as this, and could not help confessing it.

Prairie Wolf turned him from the West to the South, and lifting his left hand from the bridle, pointed with his finger. I approached him softly that I might hear his words. He spoke in the Cherokee language.

'They say that yonder is the path that leads to the land of souls; but the West looks more glorious when the sun is there, and methinks it might be easy to find the way. The soul must be a shadow, and the happy hunting grounds must be a world of shadows. They say there are trees and flowers there; and those are shadows also. They say there are broad rivers, and bright canoes to float upon them, and they are alike shadows. They say there are beautiful singing birds there, and they are shadows like the rest.

They say the men there are brave, and the women beautiful; but they are shadows all. Yet all these are as real as though they were not shadows; and they are eternal also. Strange that shadows should be real and eternal. Who knows all this? Hark! I hear a whisper; it is the whisper of my heart, and it tells me all this is true.

And what is death; is *that* a shadow also.—Yes, a very dark and dreadful shadow; dark even to the bravest warrior. But why do I think of these things. Why do I talk of the world of shadows, and the shadow of death.—Hark! once more I hear another whisper; this time it is not from my heart, it is not from my head; it seems like the voice of *Monedo* himself. It says the summers and the winters of thy life time are counted, and the path to the land of souls is open. The days of Prairie Wolf are fulfilled, and his shout shall be heard no more in battle—*Minno, Monedo!* The spirit of thy red child is ready.'

Prairie Wolf paused. He laid his hand once more upon the arching neck of his steed; he stroked his mane and looked into his eyes as if bidding him farewell.

'I am going to the hunting grounds, and I shall need a horse to ride,' he added; 'a horse fleet of foot, for the hunters there ride fast.'

The Indian turned suddenly from the noble animal, recoiled a step and fell. I ran to him, bent over him, raised him up; but he was dead. I drew his robe of skins from his chest and the mark of Black Ralph was indeed there—a hole

in the left breast; some deadly thing had entered his heart.

The horse bent his head over the body of his master, snuffed the air, and uttered low, mournful neighs, as of grief. I was touched in spite of myself. 'This poor Indian has made his horse his friend,' I said musingly. 'Poor wretch! you desired a horse to ride—I will send your faithful steed after you.'

I drew a pistol from my belt, and was about to shoot the animal through the head, when I heard the voice of Gilmore, saying:

'Hold! the horse is a good one, and yours is lame. Don't harm him, he may be serviceable.'

'As you will,' I answered, and replaced the weapon in my belt.

Gilmore looked thoughtfully at the body of Prairie Wolf.

'I told you it would be so,' he said. 'When the critter is once seen, they can't evade him.—They go out and don't return no more. There's a heap o' mystery about it. The varmint lays there on his back. The question is what laid him there. Nobody knows; he fell down all of a sudden. There is a hole in his breast; what made it? Nobody knows that either.—They say it is the work of Black Ralph; but who is he? that's the mystery of it; nobody knows. I've had my say and have done; now I am ready to go, for I don't like to look at that critter as he lays there so much like common airth.'

Gilmore took the horse of Prairie Wolf by the bridle, and we turned slowly and thoughtfully from the spot. I mused as I walked: Oh death, how suddenly thou comest.

When we reached the settlement, we found it the scene of the greatest excitement and alarm. Flora had gone forth as usual, and had not returned. Arthur was out in pursuit of her and the elder Dale was putting his long rifle in order, and making other preparations to go on the trail, providing his worst fears should be realized.

I strove to whisper a word of comfort; but it fell on ears dumb to all save the beloved name of Flora.

'They have carried her away,' he said sternly, 'and I shall not rest till I find her. I will follow them to the last—I will wash out the injury in blood. What can daunt me? What shall change my purpose? Who shall bid me turn back? Do not speak to me; do not seek to detain me a moment, for the moments are precious. They are bearing my child away; but I will dog them like the footsteps of death.'

I said no more, for I knew that all words were useless—that *action* was needed.

Of my own emotions I will say nothing. Suffice it that I felt rising within me all the indignation, mingled with alarm that I was capable of feeling.

Flora, the idol I had so recently set up in my heart to worship, was taken from us by a ruthless hand; and that was enough to inflame my blood, and make me eager for pursuit. I laid my hand gently upon the arm of Dale.

'Old man,' I said, 'your arm is getting feeble, but mine is strong. I will go with you. By all that is sacred, I will not leave you until Flora is restored to your arms, or her death be bitterly avenged! See! I am ready; let us away to the woods. I am yours for the rescue, more than yours for vengeance.'

Dale paused and looked steadily at me. 'Yes, you are my man,' he said, in a low determined voice. 'You are the one I should have chosen from a thousand men. There is something in your eye that suits me; it's devilish, but I like it.'

At that moment Arthur made his appearance breathless with exertion, and black with dismay.

'She's gone,' he articulated, with difficulty. 'The red hounds have dragged her away. Let us arm, and away in pursuit.'

'Be not too hasty,' said Gilmore. 'All must be done with caution, or there won't be nothin' good come of it. It won't do to pursue an Indian as you would a Buffalo. The minute they know you're on their trail, they begin to play the devil. *Strength* don't do; it want's *cunnin'*. It must be done by *stratagem*. We must follow them as the cunnin' catamount sometimes follows his prey; silently, cautiously, yet swiftly

I am used to the critters, and I don't advise you only for the best, because as I know the feelings of a father.'

'Your advice is good,' replied Dale. 'I am not without experience in these matters, for since our sojourn here, we have been continually beset by the savages, and have learned something of their ways. What would you recommend us to do?'

'Follow on foot, by all means, and push arter them night and day. When the trail is once discovered, I am the man as will go with you; and it's my opinion that Two Shooter 'll see some sarvice afore we get back agin to this sprinklin' of a settlement. Death to the critter that this bit of iron looks in the face; and there aint't nothin' surer. When you're ready, say the word, and I'm on the trail; and you can't say it too soon; for my *huntin'* blood is up, and I feel it fermentin' in me like somethin' hot and uncomfortable. I'm gettin' riled up clear from the bottom of my onregenerate natur'.'

'Lead the way,' said Dale, hoarsely; lead the way, and we follow; but for God's sake hurry. Don't delay; remember that it is Flora that we seek.'

'I could'n't forget arter seein' her once,' replied Gilmore, shouldering Two Shooter. 'She's the fairest gal the sun ever looked on, and the sight of her has done my old eyes good.'

By this time the whole settlement was gathered about us, men, women, and children. The men were eager for pursuit; but prudence required that they should stay at home to guard the helpless ones that looked to them for protection. Reuben Dale the youngest son, tarried with the others, for he was not practiced in Indian warfare, and could be more useful at the settlement in case of an attack.

'Four is enough,' said Gilmore, 'and perhaps one too many,' he added, in a lower voice.

All being ready, Arthur guided us to the spot where Flora was last seen.

'The critters have been here!' exclaimed Gilmore. 'There's where they trod down the grass; and there's the print of a moccassin in the



PORTRAIT OF FLORA DALE.

soft earth. Come on ; they have gone this way. Here is a limb broke off. She did it with her own fair fingers, I'll be bound. And see here's sunthin' more ; it's the band she tied up her glossy black hair with, she threw it down most likely that we might track her by it. I shant foller this trail long you may depend on't. I shall find out what the critters are drivin' at soon, or my name ain't Gilmore. When I can judge pretty well of the ginerall direction of the varmints, I shall go arter them in a straight line, and strike the trail, it may be many long miles from this. An hour's travel will tell me which way they mean to steer.'

It was now night, Gilmore strode on before us like a tall, dark spectre. Well acquainted with Indian wiles and Indian warfare, it cost him but little trouble to follow the trail. For an hour or more we followed his gliding movements, without uttering a word.

'I know what I'm about now,' said the trapper. 'Their course is towards Canadian River ; we'll take the shortest way, and may be able perhaps, to cut them off afore mornin'. It's the Cherokee's we're arter, or I dont know much about Ingins.'

We took the advice of Gilmore and pressed forward as fast as our limbs could bear us.

I felt no fatigue, no fear of danger ; I thought of Flora only ; and that thought gave me strength. Poor Arthur suffered much fear and anxiety, and was deeply impatient for the time to come, when he could strike a blow for his beloved sister.

There was not a heart among us that did not burn to avenge the wrongs of Flora. At break of day, much to our satisfaction, we came upon the trail once more ; after following it for a time, we found two trails diverging widely.

We made a short halt to determine what course to pursue. At length it was decided that Gilmore and myself should take the left, and each party press forward with all haste and caution.

We did so, and our companions were soon lost to view. We kept the trail until near noon when we reached Canadian River, where it seemed to terminate and baffle us.

'Shall we cross ?' I asked.

Gilmore shook his head dubiously.

'They cant be a long way off,' he said, 'and its hard to tell which will be the safest side of the river. It seems to me there's some deviltry afloat, and we can't be two cautious ; throw yourself down here in the bushes and I'll go for'ard and reconnoitre. If I dont return in an hour, you may set me down among the lost ones.'

Somewhat reluctantly I laid myself down upon the ground, and saw Gilmore glide swiftly yet softly away.

One may be impatient for the lingering steps of his sweetheart ; he may be impatient for his wedding night ; he may be impatient under the lash, or the surgeon's knife ; he may be impatient to meet his enemy, in deadly combat ; but not more impatient than was I as I lay prone upon the earth, awaiting the return of Gilmore.

In moments and under circumstances like those, how inaction preys upon the heart, and stings it into madness. How terrible it is for the bold, daring man to lie still, while the beloved of his soul is in danger.

To amuse myself I counted the birds as they flew over ; I watched the sun as it went on at a snail's pace, and wondered if some modern Joshua had not commanded it to stand still. I watched a limb, broken partly from the top of a sturdy sycamore, as it swayed to and fro with a mournful creaking sound, and asked my heart if it were not a requiem for Flora. I gazed at the clouds that floated across the skies, and thought that all human hopes were like them. I saw the branches moving softly in the gentle breezes, and wished that no ruder winds might blow upon Flora.

Had my life depended upon it, I could have lain there no longer. I sprang to my feet, hot and feverish, with impatience. I knew that an hour must have elapsed since Gilmore left me. The position of the sun assured me that it must be so ; although it appeared like three long hours to my anxious mind.

I felt loth to leave the spot at once, so I paced back and forth a quarter of an hour longer, as near as I could judge of time.

'I will follow him,' I said, mentally, if it be to death. I will never forsake a brave man.'

Though I felt uneasy at the stay of Gilmore, yet I did not really believe that any harm had befallen him. I knew him to be brave, cautious, intrepid, and more than a match for two Indians. I walked rapidly forward. When I had gone about a hundred and fifty yards, I found the river made an abrupt bend to the right. Instead of following upon the bank, I kept a straight onward course; I was soon made conscious that I was in a dangerous neighborhood; for I saw the imprint of Indian feet, and beheld at a short distance the smoke of many fires. My heart fluctuated between hope and fear—a hope that I was near Flora, a fear of the worst.

I advanced with more caution. With the power of a strong will, I hushed the tumultuous beatings of my pulse, grew cooler, and firmer as I neared the place of danger. I was soon near enough to hear the sound of savage merriment; and finally to look down upon the fires of a large body of Cherokees.

The cause of their fiendish exultation was soon apparent. I beheld Gilmore lashed firmly to a tree, stripped to the skin, while his captors were busily piling faggots about him.

My heart sank within me, and my brain grew dizzy with the sight. For a moment I leaned against a tree, for support, and fervently wished the earth might open at my feet and receive me.

To save Gilmore seemed impossible; to leave him seemed cruel; to stay and witness his tortures I could not. What then could I do? I could not go for assistance; for before my return the awful tragedy would be completed.

But the savages appeared in no great hurry to dispatch their prisoner. The faggots were not placed against him, but at the distance of two paces, in order that his death struggle might be lengthened out as much as possible.

The trapper bore himself bravely; as yet I had heard him utter no words of complaint or entreaties for mercy. I saw him look wistfully at Two Shooter, as it leaned against a tree.

Doubtless he thought of the many times it had proved his friend, and longed for another opportunity to face his foes with it.

At a short distance from the trapper, I saw another scene. Some savages were howling bitterly over the bodies of two of their warriors; that was the work of Gilmore. In vain I looked for some signs of Flora; I could see nothing of her.

The preparations for torture were now completed. A horribly bedeviled savage taught a burning torch from the fire, and deliberately placed it to the breast of Gilmore; a dark pitchy smoke curled upward.

My temper could bear no more. I felt every drop of blood boiling within me. Without a moment's hesitation I raised my rifle, took deliberate aim and fired. The exultant smile faded from the grim lips of the Cherokee; and his tongue never uttered war-whoop more. He fell across the pile of faggots, and the burning torch fell blazing upon his own lifeless breast.

A smile of triumph flitted across the lips of Gilmore, for he recognised the well known crack of my rifle; but that expression gave place to one of alarm, and he cried out at the top of his voice.

'Save yourself, Seward, for God's sake save yourself! Care not for me.'

The warning came too late, even had I been disposed to profit by it. Before a minute had elapsed, I was completely surrounded, and the hope of escape cut off. I placed my back against a tree and fought desperately with my clubbed rifle. I prostrated several, and shot two with my pistol before I was overpowered. I was at length knocked down by a blow upon the head; but I made resistance even after I was down, fighting with my hunting knife, and dealing some fatal wounds.

Human effort could do no more. I was firmly secured and soon stood beside Gilmore, a candidate for the same fate. While I stood there suffering the taunts and abuse of my captors, an Indian, who seemed to be wounded, slowly, and with much difficulty approached.

The moment my eyes fell upon him, I felt my heart sinking within me, for it was the very same I had lashed upon the horse, and sent flaming away, as I supposed, upon the long ride of death. The recognition was mutual. A yell of unearthly triumph burst from his lips, to shadow forth, if possible, some faint portion of the overpowering joy and triumph of the moment.

He advanced grinning, like a fiend, spat in my face, struck me upon the mouth and breast and expressed his malignity in various ways. He then turned to the others, talked a long time, pointing at me with frantic gestures. A long shout of approval followed his harangue, which was repeated, apparently by every squaw in the camp.

'He's tellin' them about sunthin' you've done,' said Gilmore, 'the critters are gettin' uncommon savage. Our wanderin's together are putty nigh ended, and we shall go on our last journey together to-day. But dont be down-hearted about it, my boy; they can't make it last more nor a few hours at the most; it's best to die game, and let the varmints know we've got some o' the *rale* stuff in us. You tipped the critter over handsum and no mistake; it did me good to see him go under in sich an unexpected manner; but I'm sorry for you, boy—sorry for you!'

'It can't be helped now, old friend,' I answered, 'As you say it will soon be all over; and our ashes will be given to the winds to toy with. Well, let it be so; it may be as well in the end, we can't die but once, and who knows but we may be better off.'

Gilmore turned his face inquiringly to mine. The light winds from the West played with the scattering grey hairs upon his temple; a tear stood in each eye, but a faint smile was discernable upon his lips.

'You talk like a brave man,' he said, and may God give you his blessin' as I do mine. We shall have a hard time on't for the next few hours; but I hope Heaven wont quite desert us, though we're but sinful men at the best. Dont look at the critters; they're preparin' their

worst tortures for you, and it will be terrible for nothin' but flesh and blood to bear.'

'I deserve it in some sort,' I replied, for I have meted it out to others, and now just Heaven returns it to me in full measure. I have been a hard, passionate man, Gilmore, and I am hardly fit to die; but I will strive to bear it. May God be more merciful than I have been.'

'Even so, and the old trapper's prayer goes with yours. But look, Seward, they're bringin' pitch-wood and splittin' it into small pieces; I told you the devil was in them. Perhaps you dont know what them are for; but you'll know soon enough.'

'They are to ornament our flesh with,' I replied.

'May lightnin' blast them!' exclaimed Gilmore, 'They a goin' to truss you up like a goose for a roast.'

I was divested of clothing and bound to the tree to which Gilmore was lashed. The faggots which were already heaped, were removed a pace farther from us, in order that our tortures might be protracted to the last moment.

The Indian who had escaped the horrible death to which I had doomed him in the hour of my frantic madness, was most busy of all. The task of putting us to death, seemed by common consent given into his hands.

He ordered everything—the arrangements of the dry sticks—the manner of securing us—the preparing of the inflammable wood, and in short the exact mode in which the infernal rites should proceed. He was careful that the pitch-pine should be properly split, of the best quality, and abundant in quantity. I observed with a shudder that several fires were to be lighted, before the ceremonies would be ended, and our sufferings cease.

The Indians now formed a circle around us, and the death dance commenced. Even now a horrible faintness creeps over me when I recall that scene.

The air was rent with yells, which found a thousand distant echoes amid the surrounding hills.

The women and children caught up the burden of that satanic song of triumph, and made it many times more dreadful.

Who can describe such orgies? No person living; it surpasses the power of human description. They leaped about like drunken devils; they threw themselves into all manner of uncouth shapes; they gnashed their teeth, and foamed at the mouth. Then a warrior would dance up to us, tell us what he *had* done, and what he *would* do, call us cowards, squaws, shake his hatchet in our faces, and retire greatly satisfied with what he had done; and so the rites proceeded.

At length all was ready for the torture. The same savage that I have before called attention to, approached me with his hunting knife.

'White men die like women,' he said, in his own tongue. 'They have no courage; but Indians die like men.'

Another Indian followed, bearing a bundle of inflammable wood. The savage grasped my left arm with his thumb and fingers and raised the skin; looking steadily into my eyes to see if I flinched, he thrust his knife slowly through that portion which he held. The pain of the infliction was considerable, but I uttered no cry. Through the opening which he had made in my flesh, with no gentle hand, he forced one of the pieces of pitch-wood.

The savage spectators shouted in concert, and the operator proceeded with his work.

I shut my eyes and commended myself to God.

While he was inserting the knife for the third time into my arm, I heard a yell of consternation from the Indians, and opening my eyes in surprise, beheld them flying in all directions, while one of their number lay dead, apparently, within the area of the circle.

I have alluded casually to an abrupt bend in the river; at it swept back again to resume its general direction, it passed between two mighty ledges, some fifty feet high, which arched over until they nearly spanned it like a bridge, forming a frightful chasm about fifteen feet wide at the top, and the width of the stream below.

Directly over this abyss, through which the waters went roaring and tumbling and casting up foam, I beheld in mid-air, a horse and rider of gigantic size. It was but a moment that I beheld them, for the twain flew over the chasm and landed safely upon the other side, before my lips could utter an exclamation of astonishment. It was right gallantly achieved, and when my tongue found its use; I shouted madly in the excess of my admiration; and Gilmore's stentorian voice arose in concert with mine. [SEE FRONTISPIECE].

The Indians were seized with a sudden panic; when I turned my eyes to where I had last seen them, not one was in sight, save him who had fallen.

'Tis Black Ralph,' said Gilmore, 'and he rides as though God had sent him express. Did you observe how the varmints run, crying *Machinito, Machinito!*'

Before he had time to answer, the mighty steed and rider alighted at my feet as though shot down from the clouds, from the bow of an invisible archer.

I felt that my bands were severed, and that I was free; I knew no more at that time, for I fell fainting to the earth. When I recovered, I looked wildly about me for the mysterious horse and rider; but they were no where to be seen. I beheld only Gilmore who was holding my head upon his knees.

'The critter has vanished,' he said, with a solemn shake of the head. 'He went jest as he come, and we don't know no more of Black Ralph than afore. There's a heap of mystery about it, and I hav'nt got no philosophy to account for it.'

'Did he say nothing?' I asked.

'Not so much as a word. He *pointed* with his hand off in that direction, and I saw him no more.'

I arose like one awaking from a horrible dream.

'I've taken the liberty to take the ornaments from your arms,' added Gilmore, pointing to the splinters which he had withdrawn during my unconsciousness.

'Hurry on your clothes, my boy; don't delay, for there's no safety here. It won't be long afore some o' the varmints will be creepin' back to see what has become of their things.'

I was not long in doing the bidding of Gilmore, as the reader may suppose. My rifle was fortunately left by the Indians in their hurried flight; so was Two Shooter; and the trapper possessed himself of it once more with an expression of pleasure I shall not forget.

'It's been a good friend to me,' he said, 'and I could 'nt learn to do without it. I've been in many a straight place during my pilgrimage in this great wilderness, and the critters have thirsted for my nateral blood more nor once; but Two Shooter was by my side, and when it opened its iron mouth and vomited its fire at them they give back and could 'nt stand it. But let us take a hasty look into them lodges as the varmints have deserted, and see if we can find Flora Dale—bless her sweet face.'

We were not long in examining the lodges. Flora was not there, and we turned away with heavy hearts, though thankful to God for deliverance from a cruel death.

We had gone but a few paces when a thought suggested itself to me. I seized a burning brand from a fire, hurried back and applied it to all the lodges successively.

'Good,' said Gilmore. 'We'll do the critters all the mischief we can.'

Saying this, he gathered up all the guns, rifles, and other things of value which the savages had left, and threw them far out into the river.

The last we saw of the encampment, the lodges were burning splendidly, sending up long columns of red flame.

'Now,' said Gilmore, 'we must away in that direction, and cross the other trail. One terrible danger has passed; and God is merciful, but there's more jest afore us. Black Ralph has proved our friend this time, but I should a leetle rather not give him a chance to save us agin.'

As I followed the swift footsteps of the trapper, I half forgot the danger that environed us,

in thinking of the strange events of the last hour. I had been captured by those knowing no mercy; I had been made ready for the sacrifice; the fires were prepared to light, the work of torture had commenced, when a horse and rider shot suddenly before my vision like a bolt from the archer of God. The gigantic steed had spanned a chasm, which seemingly no mortal horse could master; a savage fell down dead at the moment of his appearance; my captors disappeared as if by enchantment; my bands were severed like burning flax, and I was free.

But where was my deliver? He had vanished with his leviathan horse. Had he sunk down into the earth? or had he risen into the clouds? I knew not; and Gilmore could give no account of it.

But I was *saved*. How much that word expresses; *saved*—saved from torture, fire, a hell upon earth.

Was I thankful—did my heart run over—did my eyes fill with the warm tears of gratitude?

Yes, for a period of time; and then my darker nature arose within to goad me to acts of retaliation and vengeance.

The pain of my arm added not a little to my savage mood. I vowed death to every red man who should come within my reach. Such was the resolution I formed as I went forward.

CHAPTER VI.

A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR.

It was night when we found the trail referred to; and we followed it with unabated vigor until midnight.

'We need rest,' said the trapper. 'We will lay down, somewhere hereabouts, and try to sleep until mornin'.'

'I feel no weariness,' I replied. 'I think not of myself. It is Flora only that is first in my thoughts.'

'You won't feel tired while your young blood is hot, of course, but you set down a minute and get cool, and see if you don't feel stiff in the joints. Rest to-night, and you'll be able to hold out the longer; besides we need day-

light to follow the trail, for I perceive that it grows more difficult at every step. Let us walk away in this direction, and we'll soon find a spot for our purpose.'

'Do you intend to kindle a fire? I have always heard it was not safe to do so in the neighborhood of Indians.'

'It isn't allers safe; but human critters must eat and drink and git their nateral warmth restored. Perhaps you dont remember that no food has passed our lips since mornin'. The fact is we dont know what is afore us. We may have to follow the critters several days, and shall need all our strength and courage; and a hungry man hasn't much strength and courage. Come on, Seward, here's our chance. We'll build a fire right under the shelter of this great rock. Bring on your dry sticks, and we'll have it blazing in no time. That's your sort—now it smokes—now it leaps up into a cheerful blaze. Fire is a useful sarvant, boy; but it's a hard master. Jest think of being burned alive! Merciful God! what an escape we've had. It a'most brings the tears into my old eyes to think on't. I'd given up all airthly things as was dear to me when I heard the crack of your rifle. You can't never know what a thrill of joy it sent through me when I heard it, and knew it, and saw the red varmint fall. But afore the smoke had cleared away, I'd a given worlds if I'd had 'em, to have had you a dozen miles away. Misery likes company; but that case was an exception; I didn't want none of your company in sich a scrape as that.'

'Knowing as I do your kind heart, I can well believe it,' I answered; 'and that brings us to Black Ralph again.'

'Yes, and there we're obleeged to stop, because we can't get no further,' added Gilmore.

'You spoke of eating,' I said after a short pause. 'Our fire burns brightly, but what have we to cook?'

'You youngsters are not so thoughtful as old fellers like me, as have lived in the bush all their lifetime. When we left the Ingin encampment to-day, you observed that I took a couple of blankets; in them blankets I rolled

up a piece of the choicest venison that I've seen for many a day; and here it is.'

The venison was cooked, and a portion of it eaten; but I cannot say that I enjoyed it very much, though I had fasted long.

This done Gilmore gave me one of the blankets he had taken; I wrapped myself in it and was soon asleep, forgetful of all the dangers that environed me.

I slept perhaps three hours before I awoke. Upon opening my eyes I perceived the figure of a man sitting thoughtfully by the fire. At first I thought it was Gilmore; but a second glance assured me that it was not, for he lay sleeping beside me.

Though much astonished at what I saw, my presonce of mind did not forsake me; I observed the intruder attentively. I perceived that he was a white man, though his face was tanned by exposure nearly to the complexion of an Indian. I judged him a man of uncommon size and inured to all kinds of hardship. Before I had time to scan him more minutely, he spoke.

'You should have extinguished your fire, young man, before you laid down to sleep so soundly,' he said, in a calm, clear voice. 'An enemy might have surprised you as easily as I have done. He who finds his bread in the wilderness, must be cunning as a serpent. Always be on the alert. Never give an enemy a chance to strike while you slumber.'

I made no answer. Astonishment kept me dumb.

'One of those red hounds of hell might have scalped you here, and carried your scalp to hold up to the eyes of her you love, before the sun had kissed the east with his beams of light. Brave men are you to seek for captive maiden, or to follow the trail of the copper faced fiends! You and that old man there would sleep while your throats were being cut,' added the stranger, in tones of withering sarcasm.

'Who spoke?' said Gilmore, rubbing his eyes between sleeping and waking.

'One who might have scalped you while you slept,' retorted the unknown contemptuously.

'What do you say?' exclaimed the trapper, springing nimbly to his feet.

'I might have said a thousand things for the last hour and you would have been no wiser,' he added, in the same tone.

'Don't provoke me,' returned Gilmore, seating himself. 'I ain't in exactly the right mood to be trifled with.'

The intruder laughed scornfully.

'Trifled with indeed?' he said derisively.—

'Your head is sprinkled with the grey hairs of some fifty winterr, but you are a fool.'

'The hand of divine providence as is stretched out over all of us, has within a few hours saved me from death, and been merciful to me; but if it were not so I would shoot you through the head,' replied the trapper solemnly.

'Bah! do you think that I do not know my man?' he rejoined. 'Yes, you do think so; but you are mistaken. What is a man good for who lays down and sleeps under the very nose of an enemy. I pronounce you ignorant of woodcraft; and furthermore, I pronounce you a coward.'

'I will face you with a rifle at twenty yards,' said Gilmore angrily.

'That sounds like Indian bravado,' replied the intruder, with the same provoking sarcasm.

'I can't stand this no longer,' exclaimed Gilmore, enraged beyond endurance. 'I've lived in the wilderness some twenty-five years, off and on, and no man ever dared call me what you have called me this night; and there's not a man between St. Louis and the Rocky Mountains as would think it safe to say half what you've said within the last five minutes. I don't know you, and don't know your business; and what's more, I don't want to; but my advice is mend your manners, and keep a civil tongue in your head, and it may be you'll live the longer for it.'

'You speak as if there were things I dare not do, but you do not know me. There is nothing on the wide earth that I fear; I bear a charmed life. The steel is not hammered that shall wound me; the bullet has not been mould-

ed that shall pass through my body; the hemp is not sown that shall hang me; the fire has not been kindled that shall consume my flesh. But if it were not thus, I should not feel what men call fear; 'tis not a part of my nature. I am constitutionally bold; and circumstances have rendered me reckless. Dare me to call you a coward, or what you will, and I will repeat it any number of times, and suffer no harm in body or limb.'

'You're a madman,' retorted the trapper.

'And you are what I have said,' returned the stranger.

Quicker than thought Gilmore snatched his rifle from the ground beside him, pointed it at the stranger's head, and pulled the trigger.—The lock fell, but there was no report.

The trapper flung it from him, muttering as he did so—

'It is the first time Two Shooter ever sarved me such a trick.'

'Had you been a skilful backwoodsman, you would have examined your rifle as soon as you arose from the ground; then you would have learned that the caps were taken from the tubes of both barrels. I did it while you slept like all the seven sleepers put together. It wont do you any harm; perhaps it may learn you a lesson of prudence and wisdom.'

Gilmore looked disconcerted.

'And who are you that would teach a man of nearly fifty winters?' he asked.

'One who has never harmed you or yours, and perhaps never will,' replied the intruder.—'Who I am, or what my business is, does not matter; but my advice to you is, be more on your guard when you're on the trail. I called you a coward; I don't think you are really a coward, but I wished to show you that you were wholly unprepared for an enemy. You grew angry, caught your rifle and attempted to shoot me; but attracted by the light of your fire, I had found you sleeping, taken the caps from your rifles, sat down, and watched beside you for more than an hour. You have only to imagine me a Cherokee or Blackfoot to know the imprudence you have been guilty of.'

'You are not exactly right, stranger; nor yet exactly wrong. I knew well what I was about when I kindled a fire agin that rock, because I know the habits of the Ingins. The critters at present feel more like gettin' out of our way than follerin' arter us.

While the trapper was speaking, the stranger arose, stood beside me, and said in a low voice:

'Flora shall be rescued. Be bold; show no mercy to the red men. Slay them without remorse. They are wild beasts, hell-hounds, devils; spare them not. When you are in danger think of me, and perhaps I shall be near.'

The unknown ceased. Before I had time to reply, he was gone, I knew not whither.

'A strange visitor,' I said, turning to Gilmore.

'One as I shouldnt want much to do with,' he answered with a significant movement of the head.

'Did you ever meet him before?'

'Never to my knowledge, and dont care to be acquainted with him.

'He seemed to wish us no evil, whoever or whatever he may be.'

'I cant say that I'm pleased with him,' added the trapper, with the same mysterious air. 'It strikes me that the critter would find it unpossorable to repeat the Lord's prayer without mistake.'

'He's human enough,' I replied, laughing.

'He may be human, but its my opinion he's a leetle too intermate with a certain old gentleman as has a cloven foot.'

'Nonsense! You have too much good sense to entertain such absurd notions,' I answered.

For a time each of us was busy with his own thoughts. The parting words of the stranger still rung in my ear; and I felt that they would have an influence upon me. He had said that Flora should be rescued, but what knew he of Flora?

Yet I liked him better because he had spoken her name, and promised her deliverance from captivity.

He had bidden me slay the red men without remorse, and that advice was but too congenial

to my nature. I knew full well that I should destroy them without mercy when circumstances gave me the power of doing so.

While I sat there musing, the deep darkness that precedes the dawn gave place to the first faint blush of day. The sun lifted itself slowly from behind the distant hill; his bright, red beams came creeping through the umbrage of the trees. The vast forests and mountains smiled once more in sunlight. Birds, whose notes were pleasant in song, sang upon the branches. The murmur of the waters, and the murmur of winds came softly to the ear. Happy would have been the heart within me had Flora Dale been beside me there.

Alas! she was with those whose tender mercies were cruel.

Gilmore supplied the waning fire with fresh fuel. My eyes followed him mechanically in his movements. He cut slices of venison and roasted them as a hunter only can. To gratify him I ate; but heaven knows I felt not like eating.

While thus employed we were not a little startled by hearing the sound of approaching feet close behind us.

Our eyes were instantly turned in that direction, and rested upon the figure of a man clad in true hunter style. He bestrode a dark grey horse of excellent proportions, powerful and spirited.

When he perceived he had our attention, he reined up his steed, caused him to rear and plunge, jump sidewise, and perform sundry evolutions.

While executing these feats he held a rifle in his left hand, guiding and directing themotions of the animal with the right.

'The top of the morning to ye,' he said, leaping lightly from his horse.

'The same to yourself,' answered Gilmore, shaking the proffered hand. 'A fine spirited critter you've got.'

'Two forty's a game beast, stranger. There's nothin' in the shape of a hoss that can beat him,' replied the new comer, with a satisfied air.

'Two forty's the critter's name, I suppose,' added the trapper.

You may set that down, as the critter's proper name, Mister Greaser,' said the stranger.

I took Flora's hand.

'My name is'nt Greaser, by no means,' retorted Gilmore, with some asperity.

'Perhaps you never saw a hoss afore?' continued the other.

'Perhaps not!' said Gilmore.

'Taint by no means likely that you ever did, either of ye, jest look at that cretur! There, now you see a hoss as is nothin' shorter than a hoss. Two Forty come here.'

The animal walked quickly to his master's side.

'Rare up behind,' said the hunter.

The animal immediately fell to kicking vigorously with both hinder feet, throwing them high in the air.

'Kick up for'ard,' added the hunter.

Forthwith, the half human beast commenced rearing in an extraordinary manner.

'He stands as straight as a man,' observed Gilmore.

'A great deal straighter than some men; 'old Deer-Killer,' rejoined the hunter, slapping the trapper on the shoulder.

'My name is'nt Deer-Killer, in the least,' said the trapper, with a scowl.

'Show us how this old feller's hoss moves over the ground,' continued the stranger.

Two Forty laid back his ears, dropped his head until his nose nearly touched the ground, and moved off in that particular and indescribable way peculiar to lazy horses.

'That's slander, Leviathan ain't no sich varmint,' said Gilmore, smiling in spite of himself at the comical appearance of the beast.

'Show us how old Ramrod here, 'll do when he sees an Ingins?' continued our new friend.

'My name ain't Ramrod nor never was,' said the trapper, angrily.

Two Forty instantly turned tail towards us, and ran away with all possible speed, looking behind, like an animal really frightened.

'It is a noble beast,' I remarked.

'It's a hoss!' replied the hunter emphatically.

'Will you eat?' I asked, pointing to the last piece of venison in our possession.

'No occasion, though I took but a slight breakfast. Where are you bound, and what's your business?'

We made known to him what had happened, and the nature of our business.

'I'm bound to go with you,' he exclaimed, when we had finished our relation. 'There's nothin' suits my disposition better nor huntin' Ingins. Somehow it comes natural; and it's a priverlege I could'nt be deprived on at no rate. What say you old Fire-Eater?'

'Stranger, you've got a disergreeable habit of callin' me names as I was'nt christened by, and you'd obleege me by leavin' it off. In regard to your goin' with us, I ain't no objection; as your hoss seems to have considerable discretion if you hav'nt got none to spare,' answered the trapper, in rather bad humor.

'I'm grateful for any complerment paid to Two Forty; and it's the same as though you paid it to me, I'm called Buston, and often answer to it.'

'We are wasting time,' I remarked emphatically, 'Let us be off.'

'Agreed,' said Gilmore, 'Come Buster,' he added, turning to the hunter.

'Comin' replied Buston. 'Go it old Cartridge Box.'

And we shouldered our rifles and moved swiftly away upon the trail.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO FORTY.

IMPATIENT to atone for what seemed to me unnecessary delay, I pressed forward as fast as possible and soon found myself in advance of my companions. Hearing the murmur of a small stream on my right, and feeling thirsty, I left the trail in order to taste its waters.

I found I had been deceived somewhat, in regard to its nearness; as it was about a hundred yards out of our course. I hurried towards it in order to return to the trail before

Gilmore and Buston passed; in doing so I did not observe due caution, for the way was extremely rough, and seamed with wide, rocky chasms. Making an unlucky step, I fell. I knew no more, for some time. Upon opening my eyes, I found myself lying at the bottom of one of the chasms I have named. My temples were bleeding and so was my wounded arm and hand. Still somewhat bewildered, I arose, and with some exertion reached the stream for which I had started.

Sitting down on its sloping bank, I bathed my hand and arm in its cooling waters. I then drank freely of the same and felt much revived.

'What's the matter?' said a voice near me. I turned to see who the speaker might be. It was a tall, lean fellow, whose face was not familiar.

'I have got an unfortunate fall,' I replied, not a little astonished at such an unexpected meeting.

'Falls are common in this region, young man; and he is lucky who falls to rise again. But what for Heaven's sake are you doing here alone?'

I briefly explained the nature of my present business. He listened very attentively, and when I mentioned the name of Flora Dale, it seemed to affect him not a little.

'Captured by the Indians, did you say?'

'And carried I know not whither,' I answered.

For a few seconds the stranger looked earnestly into my face as if to read my thoughts.

'And you are resolved to rescue her,' he said, at length.

'Or die in the attempt,' I added.

An expression that did not please me passed over the face of the man before me.

'You love this Flora Dale, perhaps?' he rejoined.

'I said not that I loved the maiden,' I returned, drily.

'It is not necessary that you should say so; I can read it upon your face every time you speak her name.'

Well, take it for granted, that I love her, or do not love her, just as seems good to you. It makes little difference.'

'On the contrary it makes all the difference in the world. Look at me a moment.'

'I see you.'

'Do I not look like a match for you in your present wounded and bruised condition?' he asked, curling his nether lip contemptuously.

'I fear no man, large or small,' I answered, wondering what all this could tend to.

'You perceive that I am a man in stature, I presume?'

'Tall enough to trim the Northern Lights, I should think,' I replied.

'You take it pleasantly, but it will be serious enough by-and-by. Look at my face.'

The stranger paused, and a most forbidding scowl appeared upon his brows, while the whole expression of his face was sinister in the extreme.

'Not a very prepossessing visage certainly; it will probably hang you one of these days.'

'Very good; according to your own showing I am one not to be trifled with, and so you will find it. I love Flora Dale.'

'You!' I exclaimed contemptuously.

'Yes, I!'

'I must say there's but a poor chance for you, if I have seen the best side of your face,' I replied, laughing. 'No christian woman will ever fancy such a figure as yours.'

'I have made a solemn vow that Flora Dale shall be no wife unless she be wife of mine, and it is registered in ———'

'Hell,' I added.

'I was going to say Heaven, but if it will please you better, I will alter it and say that my vow is registered in hell. Little difference will it make to me where it is registered.'

'You are an arrant scoundrel!' I retorted, growing hot with passion.

'Fool!'

'Boasting, miserable coward! How dare you speak the name of Flora.'

'Do not tempt me to slay you on the spot,' he cried, in a voice of thunder. 'It needs but a

word more to make me trample the breath from your body, and give your carcase to the wolves.'

'Cease your prating!' I exclaimed, in a voice as terrible as his own. 'Cease, or I shall forget that it is wicked to do murder. You speak of not *knowing* you; God in Heaven! if you knew but half of what I am capable of doing, your six feet and a half of bone and muscle would shake like the leaves of yonder aspen.'

In the anger of the moment I had forgotten my wounds, my bruises, my weakness, and felt within me all the strength which my fiercest mood always inspires.

'Listen to the conditions I offer,' said the stranger, after a short pause, in which he appeared to be struggling with himself for something like composure. 'Mount your horse, if you have one, lash your rifle upon your back, and leave this country forever; do this, and I swear I will not harm a hair of your head.'

'Well, what if I do not choose to comply?'

'If you are fool enough to stay, I will not promise you a week's probation upon the face of the earth; I swear it.'

'Damnable villain! get out of my path, or I shall not be able to control myself. To my other crimes will be added the crime of murder. Begone I say! *begone!*'

These words fell from my white lips in tones of thunder. The ruffian recoiled a step in surprise.

'Mistaken idiot; do you suppose for an instant that I can be daunted. A thousand wretches like you could not shake my soul with terror. Ask the winds to pause in their flight and listen to you, and they will do your will as soon.'

'Hold!' shouted the stranger, in a voice thick with passion, 'or by my soul's salvation, I will beat you with rods as a man beats his dog; and afterwards I will tell Flora Dale what I have done.'

I made no reply; I waited no longer; the evil demon of my nature was in the ascendant. I leaped upon the boasting ruffian with more ferocity than ever famishing tiger pounced up-

on its prey. He was borne to the earth in an instant of time—quicker, if that were possible.

With the fingers of my right hand I clutched his throat like a vice. Tighter grew my grasp. His eyes started from their sockets; his tongue protruded from his purple lips, while his whole system was shaken by convulsive throes. Gradually the struggle ceased. The chest ceased its motions; the limbs grew passive.

I dragged the body to the stream and threw it in. The water was not deep enough to cover it; and it lay with its face upward, unmoved.

'Vain boaster!' I exclaimed, 'where now is your six feet of flesh and bone?'

I gazed at it for a brief moment, as it lay there in the waters; then, taking up my rifle, turned hastily away.

The sun kept shining, and the birds sang on, as though no murder had been done. The winds and the waters murmured together; but their pleasant sound was gone. The wilderness seemed to smile in sunlight, as an hour ago; but it smiled not for me.

I thought of Flora; but now her name was linked to the remembrance of a crime. I walked on faster and faster; but I could not walk away from that which seemed like a heavy burden, growing heavier and heavier.

My eyes caught glimpses of an object that flitted from tree to tree, like a spectre. What could it be? Was it the ghost of the murdered man? Was it an optical delusion? I strode boldly toward the spot to see if my imagination was indeed playing tricks with me. I saw it again, and it moved away like a frightened creature; it was the figure of a female.

Always ready to obey the dictates of the moment, I followed the form; but as it saw itself the object of pursuit, it quickened its flight and flew over the ground like a wounded bird urging itself forward by the assistance of its injured wings. I ran as fast as I was able. Like the timid hare; like the light footed deer; like every wild thing that flies from horse and rider and hound, so fled the figure.

The distance shortened between us. The flying one heard my footsteps, and without cast-

ing a glance behind, fell senseless to the ground.

I bent over her—raised her—looked into her face; it was *Flora*!

I lifted her softly from the earth, laid her carefully, gently, upon my bosom, and bore her towards the running water.

Though I held in my arms all that I loved in the world, I gazed upon her with no unhallowed eye. I feared to touch her too rudely—I did not desecrate with my lips the pale cheek so near my own—for my hands were stained with a new crime.

Though I had left the brook some distance behind, I was not long in regaining it, and my burden did not weary me.

Her swoon was long and death-like; but I had the pleasure of seeing her open her eyes at last. She looked timidly in my face, shuddered, and closed them again.

'*Flora*!' I said, softly.

The full, dark orbs were again fixed upon me, but this time with an exclamation of joyful surprise.

'*Flora*, you are safe. One is with you who would give his life to save yours,' I added.

A sweet smile flitted over the pale lips of *Flora Dale*.

'O, sir, say again that I am safe,' she said, with an effort.

'A thousand times, *Flora*, if it will please you,' I answered.

She made no reply, but covering her face with her hands, wept freely.

'Let your heart be strong, *Flora*. By the good assistance of Heaven, you shall soon be restored to the arms of your friends,' I added.

She now seemed to be conscious for the first time, that she was lying in my arms. She gently disengaged herself, blushing as she did so.

'Where have you been? What is your history? Have you suffered?' I asked.

'You ask many questions at once,' she answered, with a smile. 'I have been with those I liked not; my history is short; and I have suffered. But you see that I have escaped, and I thank God.'

'Go it, Catridge-Box!' said a voice, and before I had time to turn, *Two Forty* leaped the brook, and stood panting before us, with his master sitting in the saddle.

'You're a mighty queer chap,' said *Buston*. 'You're settin' here as contented as a saint, while we've been racing arter you for the last hour. Mother of the pilgrims! but it's a gal you've picked up! It's possibly one o' the 'babes in the woods' grown to womanhood. My eye! She's not a bad lookin' piece o' human flesh. She looks about as nice for a gal as *Two Forty* does for a hoss.'

Flora reddened to the eyes. I was about to reprove the hunter for the liberty he had taken, when she stopped me by a motion of the hand, saying:

'He means well. Suffer him to have his way.'

'This is *Miss Dale*, the young woman we were seeking,' I said, turning to *Buston*.

'And you've rescued her all alone! That warn't fair, by no means.'

'No, I can't take to myself such credit. By some means she escaped from her captors without my help.'

'And you mean to say that you found her here in the woods arter she had got away from the Ingins?'

'Exactly.'

'There must be some magnetism about *that*. It's mighty strange that two young creturs should find each other in this great country without chart or compass. But it can't be helped now, though I should a liked to have had a brush with the varmints. I believe I could fight like a regerier hound for sich a nice, young female.'

'There may be a chance for you yet,' said *Flora*, smiling pleasantly upon the trapper.

'Yes, very true, marin: the creturs may catch you again. But I can be of service to you yet; you shall ride *Two Forty*, and he's the best hoss livin'.'

'I thank you, I am sure,' replied *Flora*.

'*Two Forty*, you scoundrel! make your manners to the uncommon cretur.'

The animal obeyed as well as he was able to do.

'Now kneel to her jest as I would if I was a young man like that chap.'

Two Forty kneeled very gracefully, and *Flora*, laughing, patted him upon the neck.

'I've e'enamost forgot the signal I was to give if I found you,' said *Buston*, and putting his hand to his mouth, he gave a shrill kind of whistle, which was instantly answered.

Gilmore was soon seen approaching us.

'Stir your stumps, old *Two-Shooter*! this young chap has taken a prisoner!'

'*Two-Shooter*, I'd thank you to remember is the name of my shootin'-iron; but where's the prisoner?' returned the trapper.

'*That's her*!' replied *Buston*, with a comical leer.

'*Flora Dale*, as I'm an old sinner! How in the name o' natur did it happen?'

What the reader already knows in relation to the subject, was soon related.

Flora then mounted *Two Forty*, and we moved away as fast as we could. It was a relief to me to leave the spot, and I was truly glad when I could hear no longer the murmur of the brook where the body of my rival lay.

It was a little past noon when we halted in a pleasant ravine. *Gilmore* and myself kindled a fire, while *Buston* went forth to kill a deer.

When this task was completed, I seated myself by the side of *Flora*.

'This is a quiet, secluded spot,' she remarked.

'I could almost wish to live here,' I replied.

'What! and turn hermit?'

'O no; I should want a companion. *Flora Dale* would suit me best,' I answered, gaily.

'See how rank the wild sage grows on yonder hill-side,' she said, without heeding my last remark.

'How should you like living here, *Flora*?'

'O very well, if the Indians would keep away.'

'You would prefer to be alone, probably?'

'By no means. I should want all my friends with me, and *Two Forty* to ride.'

'You have not told me your adventures yet, *Miss Dale*?'

'That is the first time you have called me *Miss Dale* to-day.'

'I beg your pardon.'

'Granted, of course! for I prefer *Flora* to all other names.'

'So do I.'

'Something dies! I heard the crack of the hunter's rifle.'

'You have not yet told me how you were taken by the savages?'

'There is but little to relate; I will tell you now. Previous to your arrival with *Arthur*, we had been so much harrassed by the Indians that I had not walked as much as usual in the open air. After your coming—the next day—I felt inclined to take the fresh air that breathes through the forest, near the settlement. The idea of danger did not occur to me. The joy I experienced in seeing *Arthur* once more banished such thoughts. The woods had never looked so green; the brook had never murmured so merrily; the wild flowers never looked half so inviting; the birds never sang more sweetly; the breezes never sighed so softly in my ear.

My heart beat in unison with all things about me as I walked slowly on. I sang and gathered flowers as I went. I was thinking about *Arthur*, and what a fine looking youth he had grown to be, when a hand was laid rudely upon my arm, and another upon my mouth. I would have cried out for help; but no sound passed my lips. I was in the power of savages. My terror, it is impossible to describe; for the thought of an Indian was always terrible to me. I could make but feeble resistance. I was lifted upon the back of a horse whose feet were covered with buffalo skin, that his steps might leave no track to indicate the way I had gone.

My captors were six in number. One took the horse by the bridle, while another ran along by my side, the others coming after in single file. The smoothest and best ways were chosen, and I was conducted rapidly away from the settlement. My captors pressed forward all night without stopping. Dreadful night! weary and painful hours! A short stop was made in the morning. Food was offered

me, but you may readily suppose I refused it. I was again placed upon the horse, and we went on as before.

We had gone but a short distance, when, greatly to my surprise, as you may imagine, we were joined by a white man. I recognized him at once as one of our settlers, supposed to have been killed by the Indians some weeks previously. My heart grew heavier still; for I had reason to remember him.

'Was he a tall man?' I asked, eagerly.

'He was of uncommon stature,' she replied.

'Excuse the interruption. Please go on, Flora,' I added, quickly.

'He had been one not greatly beloved by the other emigrants, and his reputation as an honest man was far from enviable. He was usually called Osborne; what other name he might have passed by while among us, I know not. Whatever faintly lingering hope of escape I might hitherto have cherished, left me when I saw him approaching.

Cease to tremble,' he said. 'Your life is not in danger. A word from me sets you at liberty.'

'Then speak that word, that I may return to my father,' I answered.

'Not so fast, it takes two to make a bargain. There are certain conditions to be observed before I give you your freedom.'

'Those creatures are employed by you then,' I answered.

'I shall deny nothing,' he replied. 'But I will come to the point at once.

Flora paused, overcome by her emotions.

'Spare yourself the pain of telling me the nature of the conditions he imposed,' I said.

'Thank you!' she answered, recovering her self-possession. 'Suffice it that I rejected his offers with scorn and indignation. I was tortured with his presence during the long hours of that day. He menaced and entreated by turns; but the wife of such a man, who could be? At night we encamped. An Indian lodge was prepared for me to sleep in; while Osborne watched at the door, and the savages slept near it. I laid down upon the rude couch prepared for me and feigned sleep.

I knew but too well that I could not long be safe in the power of such a man, and resolved to attempt an escape. The lodge was built partly of skins, arranged as you have often seen. I succeeded in detaching one of these from its fastenings; I stood in the open air without the lodge, and saw no one to oppose my flight.

Like one who flies from despair and death; like one who flies from all that is dreadful on earth; like one whose only hope is in flight, I ran from the scene of my thralldom.

But I glided away cautiously at first, and my footsteps sent back no sound to betray me.

What joy filled my heart as I threaded the dark and lonely wilderness. I had escaped dishonor—I had baffled a bad man. Yet dreary was the prospect before me; for I might wander many days without meeting a human being to aid me; and I might perish for want of food. But thoughts like these did not trouble me at that time. I thought of, and only dreaded pursuit. I kept on and on; the dreary night rolled away, and the light of another morning shone upon me. More than once I imagined I heard footsteps and was pursued. When I ran from you, I supposed I was flying from Osborne; hence my terror. What followed is known better to you than to myself; for terror had nearly driven me mad. I most earnestly pray that I may never see the face of Osborne again.'

'Your prayer is answered,' I replied. 'You need not fear him more—he is but dust and ashes.'

'What do I hear,' she exclaimed, struck by the solemn manner in which I had spoken.

'The man you have called Osborne will never harm so much as a hair of your head, Flora,' I answered.

'Is he dead—have you slain him?'

'Do not question me. Suffer me to forget; or to remember that justice only has been done.'

'Your words inspire me with the consciousness of something terrible. God preserve us all.'

'Pray often, Flora,' I answered. 'The prayers of the innocent are acceptable to God; and when you address the Throne of Mercy, if you

should remember my name, and say 'God keep him,' it might be better for me in the last day.'

'Go it, old Catridge-Box!' said a voice near us. Looking up, we perceived the eccentric hunter approaching, leading Two Forty by the bridle, bringing a good supply of venison. Nor was this all; near him were Arthur Dale and his father, accompanied by an Indian.

With an exclamation of delight, Flora ran to meet her dearest earthly friends.

'I thank the protecting hand of God for this deliverance!' said the old man, in a tremulous voice, as he embraced Flora and kissed her.

'To have lost thee would have brought my grey hairs in sorrow to the grave, even as said one of old. But He tempers the wind to the shorn lamb. He breaketh not the bruised reed. A sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice.'

How I envied Arthur the pleasure of pressing her so lovingly to his heart; but it was the dear right of a brother.

The father of Flora took my hand in his.

'I would thank you if I could, young man, for the assistance you have rendered; but I feel myself incapable of doing so. Imagine that I have said much, and receive an old man's blessing. There is Flora; she must say to you what I feel, but cannot express.'

'Go it, old feller!' said Buston, in a low voice, 'That's reasonable and just.'

'The consciousness of having served Flora Dale, renders me sufficiently happy, and you owe me no gratitude,' I answered.

Arthur shook me warmly by the hand.

'Two Forty is every inch a hoss!' added Buston, slipping the bridle from the head of the animal in question.

'I like him,' said Flora.

'He's the only hoss this side the Rocky Mountains, fit to carry sich an uncommon creature.'

The hunter paused, and then turning to Gilmore, slapped him good naturedly on the shoulder, saying:

'Don't you wish you was younger, Old Ramrod?'

'Ramrod isn't no part of my name,' replied the trapper drily.

'Two Forty's a hoss, and Flory's an uncommon creature! them's my sentiments, and if anybody wants to fight on that pertickerlar subject, I'm ready.'

But no person seemed disposed to take up the gauntlet.

During this time the Indian referred to had stood at a short distance in dignified silence.—He was truly a noble looking savage, and I could not help observing him closely.

'Well, Bust-your-Biler, what kind of a specimen of red human natar have you got there?' asked Gilmore, pointing toward the Indian.

'That's a creature I fell in with while I was gone,' he replied, and approaching the stranger Indian, he struck him upon the shoulder in his own familiar style.

The red man turned upon Buston with an indignant curl of the nether lip.

But the rattle-brained hunter was not abashed; nothing could abash him for a moment.

'How fare ye, Redskin? Can you repeat the catechism! do you know the Lord's Prayer? are you in a state of grace? Do you know whiskey from bad rum?'

The Indian shook his head and made no reply.

'Deaf as a gate-post, and in a complete state o' natur!'

The stately savage remained silent.

'Perhaps you're Chenango, the last of the Big-Reds, and don't like to speak to common people?'

Still there was no reply.

'Come here, old Brass Eyes, and see if you can make him understand!' continued Buston, turning to Gilmore.

'My name doesn't begin with Brass Eyes, in any degree,' said the trapper.

Buston now addressed the Indian in a tongue which I could not understand a word of, and the latter replied in the same language.

'He tells me he lives near the Great Salt Lake,' said Buston.

'The Pah-Utahs are found up in that region,' Gilmore remarked.

'And they're a dangerous set o' Red skins, take 'em together,' replied the hunter. 'But this cretur is an exception, for he come to me in a very civil sort of way while I was cuttin' up the deer I had killed. Two Forty snuffed the air, and grew restless, and I knew there was sunthin' about that he did'nt fancy. I looked up and saw this varmint comin' towards me.'

'Mind what you're about, Copper Face!' said I, catchin' up my rifle; but the cretur laid his hand upon his heart to signify that no hurt was intended. I spoke to him in several kinds of Ingin, and we soon come to an understandin'. He said he was a great friend to the pale faces, and had been to Westport all alone to see 'em.'

'He's a noble looking fellow,' said Dale.

'There's one deadly sin recorded against him, I answered.

'What is it?' asked Dale.

'It is the unpardonable sin of a Red skin,' I replied.

'Are you really in earnest?'

'I never was more in earnest!'

'What is the cause of your antipathy?'

'I cannot tell you; I think it must be constitutional.'

'It's very singular,' said Dale, 'but I confess that I have the same aversion, and cannot conquer it.'

'Gentlemen, permit me to introduce to your partickeler attention, Brass Eyes, the last of the Long Reds,' said Buston, with that peculiarly comic expression which characterized all he did.

'Don't be a foolin' with the critter,' said Gilmore. 'The varmint's proud, and don't like to be talked about too freely.'

The trapper now addressed a few words to him in the Indian tongue; he then informed us that he was a Utah Chief, with a long name, which, being interpreted into our language, means 'War Path.'

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DECLARATION.

I WILL not dwell upon the details of our return to the settlement. It will be sufficient to say that we reached it without accident. In the society of Flora, the days passed pleasantly. The more intimately I became acquainted with her, the more I saw to admire in her character.

On the subject of love, my lips had been silent. I feared to tell her my passion. I wished that the sweet illusion, if illusion it indeed were, might last, nor be dispelled too soon.

Since our return, the Indians had been guilty of no inroads upon the settlers. All had been quiet. Gilmore and Buston vied with each other in story telling, and we listened to them many evenings. Very many things were related which I am sadly afraid never happened.

'Perhaps you never saw a dog?' said Buston, on one occasion, 'though I am happy to say you've seen a hoss. A number of years ago, I had the good luck to own a generwine dog.—None o' your low bred common curs was Lion. He come of a good family, and his airly eddication warn't neglected. He was'nt very large; on the contrary, he was quite small. To look at him, you would'nt think him no more nor a common dog, because you could'nt see none o' his good qualities.'

'What could he do?' asked Gilmore, rather contemptuously.

'He could *run*,' replied Buston.

'When he happened to see anythin' bigger nor himself! I s'pose,' added the trapper, in a low tone of voice.

'There was nothin' could beat him at a dead run. He could catch a deer, or a buffalo, or antelope, afore they had run fifty rods.'

'An antelope!' said Gilmore, with a shrug of the shoulders.

'There was'nt nothin' that he *could'nt* catch,' continued Buston. 'I've known him to outrun the wind, on a prairie, many a time. He

travelled on one occasion from Fort Walla Walla to Westport, and back agin in two days, and carried a letter, waited for an answer, and brought it to me. I used to grease him to prevent the friction of the air from pullin' his hair out. He used frequently to git up and run in his sleep; and I was often obleeged to tie him over night to keep him still; for I feared the cretur would run himself into a gallopin' consumption. Every body that knew him said he run to extremes. When there was nothin' in pertickerler for him to do, I allers tied up one leg; but that did'nt make much difference arter all; he'd go out o' sight like a streak o' chalk.'

'Did he die a nateral death in his kennel?' enquired the trapper.

'I hain't got to that yet, Brass Eyes,' returned Buston.

'Don't call me that name no more,' said Gilmore, sharply.

'One day a curious accident happened to Towser.'

'You called him Lion just now.'

'He had *two* names—one for Sunday, and one for week days. As I was obsarving, a curious accident happened to him. There was an awful thunder shower one day, and the cretur, out o' mischief, was a chasin' the chain lightnin'; I say out o' mischief, because he was a well informed anermal, and knew very well it would be no sarvice to him if he should catch it. Well, as he was a runnin' with his head kinder up, he did'nt mind exactly where he was goin', and run right square agin a small beach saplin'. I run to him as quick as I could, and found him layin' in two pieces—cut clean in two, from the tip of his nose to the extreme end of his tail.'

'What did you do then?' asked Gilmore.

'I picked up the two pieces as quick as possible, and clapped 'em together; but unfortunately, in the hurry and excitement of the moment, I put the poor dog together wrong—two legs up and two legs down!'

'Did it hurt his speed any?' queried the trapper.

'Not in the least; it was a great benefit to

him; for when he got tired o' runnin' on one side, he could turn over and run on the other.

'What become of him at last?'

'He got a runnin' one day and could'nt stop, and I hav'nt set eyes on him since. I've no doubt but he's a runnin' yet.'

'He was a wonderful critter.'

'Yes, Bose was as wonderful for a dog as Two Forty is for a hoss.'

'You said his name was Towser.'

'He had three names, said Buston, after a momentary pause; 'two for week days and one for Sundays.'

The hunter smoked a few whiffs, and then went on.

'I once killed seven Blackfeet, who attacked me at one time.'

'How was it done?' I asked.

'Why you must know I am mighty powerful in the *magnetic* line; and when I see the varmints a comin' at me, I throwed down my weapons and commenced makin' *passes* at 'em like all natur. I had'nt made at the rate of one apiece afore they was all asleep—completely paralyzed. I took out their eyes, put 'em in my pocket, willed 'em to stand there forever, and left 'em, terrible monuments o' my power. Two years arterwards I passed that way, and the bones were still standin'. Their friends had tried to get 'em away but could'nt; a yoke of oxen can't start 'em as long as my will's on 'em.'

'You're an uncommon critter!' said the trapper.

'I never pertend to hobble Two Forty as other people do,' continued Buston; 'when I want him to stay in one place, I jest shet up one eye, paralyze his legs, and there he stands like a pillar o' salt. It's all done by the fluid you see; and I've got a mighty heap o' the stuff about my clothes; but I can't stop to explain to you how the will and the fluid are the same thing, and I allers charge a little sunthin' for sich information.'

Tired of listening to the stories of the back-woodsmen, I arose and left them. I stepped into the open air, and found the night quiet and

beautiful. A gentle west wind was breathing softly over the trees and flowers. The settlers' cabins looked pleasantly in the moonlight.

In the rear of the clearing was a range of low hills, covered with cotton woods, beach and maple; upon the left, at a short distance, flowed the Red Fork of the Arkansas river; upon the right were the green meadows I have before referred to; in front of the cabins the small brook, also mentioned in another chapter went murmuring.

I felt attracted towards the same meadow which had delighted me so much on a previous occasion.

With sauntering, yet thoughtful steps, I approached it. As I passed on, I could not help looking at the range of hills where I had witnessed the death of Prairie Wolf. The whole scene was recalled with a distinctness I could not well account for. I saw him standing again by his horse; saw him raise his hand, point to the south; heard him speak of the land of souls; saw him fall down dead.

'Who is Black Ralph?' I asked for the thousandth time.

Who could answer me? No one, and so the mystery must remain a mystery still.

How rational it was that I should think of my escape also, and other events following it; the strange visitor; the fatal meeting with Osborne.

I felt sorry that I had slain him, notwithstanding that I knew he deserved his fate. No man, when he is calm and rational, wants the crime of murder on his hands. He may wish a person dead, but the consciousness of being his murderer would hang like an incubus upon his soul.

I paused in my walk to view the scenery.—The meadow lay like a smooth, green carpet before me, and the light of the moon fell upon it like beams of silver. On every side the woods and hills shut it in, and it was indeed an oasis in the wilderness. It was the same I had passed through before I met Flora for the first time; and it seemed dearer for that remembrance. I paced slowly along its margin, stop-

ping a moment to contemplate the skies, and the quiet scene at my feet.

I had gone about half the circumference of the meadow. I was passing a very dense growth of sycamores, when a man sprang from their concealment, presented a pistol to my head, and fired. The ball grazed my cheek, and the weapon was so near that the blaze burned my hair. In a moment my cocked rifle was at his breast.

'Stir not, on your peril!' I cried.

The man recoiled a step; the moonlight streamed down upon his face; Osborne was before me.

'I thought you were in hell!' I exclaimed.

'It is by no favor of yours that I am not there,' he answered, fiercely.

'I thought I had left you a heap of dust and ashes; but I am glad that the breath of life remained in you; that I have not cheated the hangman. No doubt but you have merited death many times; yet I thank God that I am not your murderer.'

'Canting hypocrite! devil's own! it is easy to talk thus while you hold a loaded rifle to my breast!' exclaimed Osborne. 'Oh yes! you can play the saint as well as the devil. Fire, if you are going to, and don't let me hear your lying words; they torture me.'

'You sprang upon me like an assassin,' I replied, 'and would have laid me bleeding at your feet. There is no good reason why I should show you mercy. How can you imagine for a moment that I shall spare you. Come, man, many crimes, prepare for death. Look up at the moon, and stars, and quiet skies, for the last time. Say your adieus to all on earth—wood, stream and prairie. Send up a prayer to Heaven, and be quick; for I would have it over.'

'That is mercy indeed! give a man like me two minutes in which to make his first and last prayer! Fool! do you suppose an old sinner like me to make peace with offended Heaven in so short space? A year would not suffice.'

'Time is flying. Remember that in a few minutes those very moonbeams at your feet will

shine upon your dead face. Try to imagine yourself lying down here at my feet, with your dead, ashy face, turned towards Heaven—the place you have thought of least in life.

'Taunt on, devil's bantling! you have the advantage; I cannot defend myself; but were we in a fair field, armed alike, and face to face, it would be different.'

'If I will yield up my present advantage, and spare your life, will you meet me in the field, armed as I am? Speak!'

'Try me; but that you fear to do.'

'Swear that you will meet me in this meadow to-morrow morning at sunrise, armed with a rifle at fifty yards, and I will forego my present advantage.'

Surprise for a moment kept Osborne dumb.

'I swear it!' he said, in a lower tone, 'and bright and early will I be on the spot.'

'And you may bring one friend with you to see fair play,' I added.

'I agree to it,' replied Osborne, with a grim smile. 'It suits me well.'

'Go, then, unharmed, and remember if you fall to-morrow, that I shall not be your murderer—only the means Heaven makes use of to mete out justice.'

'Please yourself with such folly, if you will; I care not, if you keep your appointment. I will not oblige you to wait for me a second.'

I dropped the muzzle of my rifle. Osborne turned slowly away.

'At sunrise,' I added.

'Aye! at sunrise; and don't forget that I have often killed my man,' and the tall figure of Osborne was soon lost to view.

As I retraced my steps, I could not help thinking that it might be I was taking my last walk by moonlight.

I found Flora standing near the door of the cabin.

'You have been walking; you are very imprudent,' she remarked.

'It matters little what becomes of me,' I answered. 'I have no father or mother to weep for me.'

'But you have friends.'

'Perhaps I have a few,' I returned, sadly: for at that moment I felt my loneliness and friendlessness most bitterly.

'You are sad to-night,' she replied.

'Yes, I am sad; I have been thinking of the past. It is a dark subject to dwell upon; but such reflections are natural. Imagine a helpless child, that never received a mother's kiss, or a father's blessing. Imagine him fighting his way up to manhood, with no one to love and care for him. What can you hope from such a being—what redeeming influence can save him?'

'The God that rules the universe, has said that He will be a father to the fatherless. Trust to His guidance, and all may be well. Perhaps you have a mother in Heaven who throws around you the soft influence of her presence.'

'Not so, Miss Dale,' I answered, 'It is seldom that my perverted nature confesses the presence of an angel mother. My heart is too hard and unrelenting to be receptive of such influences.'

'I believe the human heart is always susceptible of spiritual impressions. Bad indeed must be he who is forsaken by an angel mother, or sister.'

'It is a pleasant doctrine to believe in, Flora, and to one who is young and pure, it may not seem unreasonable. Were you to assure me that you had felt the presence of your sainted mother, I would not quarrel with your credulity. There are periods in my own existence when I firmly believe in the immortality of the soul.'

'You should believe it ever. There is a voice within you that speaks continually of eternal life. Seek first the Kingdom of God, and you will cease to complain of the want of kindred; you will be able to stretch forth your hands to the whole human family, and say, 'behold my father and my mother, and my brethren.' Nought but the christian religion can satisfy the desires of the human soul, and fraternize mankind.'

I made no answer, for I wished to express no doubts to shake the trusting faith, or distress the heart of one so young and innocent.

We remained silent for a short space of time. 'You spoke to me once,' said Flora, at length, 'of Osborne, in a manner so strange that it has been a source of pain to me since. I could have wished that some other hand had—had—'

'Slain him,' I added.

'Then you *did* slay him!' she exclaimed, clasping her hands as if terrified.

'Do you regret his fate, Flora?'

'It is not that! Oh it is not *that*; but the *crime* is yours.'

'And that pains you?'

'It does—it *does*! I would that some other hand had wrought the deed!' and Flora covered her face with her hands to hide her tears.

'Flora, dearest Flora! the sin of murder is not mine. I have learned within the hour that he still lives.'

Flora gasped for breath like a drowning person.

'Have you met him?' she asked, in trembling accents.

'Nay, Flora, question me not. Suffice it that he lives, and has the power to injure you.'

'But I am glad for your sake, that it is so.'

'Think of yourself, Flora. Be careful not to venture from the cabin alone. If aught should happen—if I should leave you sooner than you expect—I beg that you will think of me occasionally as one who was your friend, however unworthy of that honor I may have been. In a particular manner do I request that you will beware of the machinations of Osborne. I will not trust myself to give utterance to all that rises up in my heart; there is one secret I will keep, perhaps it will die with me. I cannot say; it is hard to tell what the future may bring forth.'

Flora blushed.

'Something tells me that you have met Osborne; I hope nothing unfortunate will come of it.'

'You believe that God orders all things, Flora; perhaps He will direct all for the best in this case.'

'Trust in Him, Seward; your faith will not be lost. You will think me a strange girl, but I feel sure that we all owe a duty to Heaven; and that the trusting heart will be strengthened and made better.'

'Speak on, Flora, your words are kindly and true; they fall upon my heart as rain upon the parched earth, or as the dew upon the grass. I only wish that I could be ever near you—ever listen to your gentle tones—ever be blessed with such a monitress.'

'You give me too much credit for goodness. You will shame me into silence by your flattery.'

'I meant not to flatter you; God forgive me if I did—it was the thought farthest from my heart. I would that I could speak to you, Flora; but it is the vast difference in our moral condition, that makes me dumb.'

'I dare not trust myself to say more now; but whatever may happen before another sunset, do not forget that Edward Seward was your friend—more than friend, if that be possible.'

I stopped and pressed my lips to her hand, and as I did so, I was conscious that a tear fell upon it.

'These are strange words,' she said, 'but I will not forget.'

I was ready to depart; but I still lingered. I knew not why. I still held her hand, and it laid trembling in mine. I sank softly upon my knees beside her.

'Dear Flora, I can keep the secret no longer. Do not frown—do not despise me—I love you!'

'Arise,' said Flora, in gentle accents; 'such a posture does not become you.'

'Dearest, best of girls, say that my boldness has not offended you!'

'Do I appear angry, Seward?'

I waited to hear no more. I caught Flora to my heart, and experienced the happiest moment of my life.

I had found one heart to care for and love me, and was no longer alone in the world. The memory of that hour lingers yet. Sweet hour! blessed remembrance.

The moon rode on in the skies and the stars looked down and smiled. Never was night so



GILMORE, THE TRAPPER.

serene and beautiful. The stream murmured dreamily along, and the flowers nodded in the lightly whispering breezes. Flora was never so sweet and fair; her lips never smiled so pleasantly; her hair never curled so gracefully about her face; her voice was never so musical.

With a kiss, and whispered words of fondness, I tore myself from Flora.

'You're a brick—a perfect brick,' said a well known voice, as I walked away.

'How long have you been here?' I asked, somewhat annoyed.

'Long enough to see what I *have* seen,' he replied, with provoking coolness. 'Courtin' by moonlight! courtin' that uncommon cretur!'

'No harm in it, I hope?'

'That is as it may be; hard to tell! You're a sly one, youngster.'

'Where's Gilmore?'

'He's comin'.'

The trapper made his appearance.

'I wish to speak to you both,' I said.

'Go ahead; we're ready,' replied Buston.

'Well, come this way. It's what gentlemen call an affair of honor.'

'A fight?' said the hunter.

'A duel?' added Gilmore.

'You are both right.'

'What weapons?'

'Rifles!'

'Rifles, of course,' said Buston. 'Pistols aint fashionable here. They might do among your fine gentlemen, but they're of no account with us.'

'What's it all about?' asked the trapper, anxiously.

I gave them an account of what had taken place between myself and Osborne. I had not mentioned his name to them before.

'Then you must fight the critter?' said Gilmore thoughtfully.

'It cannot be avoided,' I answered.

'There's but one way to get you out of the scrape,' he added.

'How is that?'

'Let me take your place.'

'Ah, my friend, that will not do.'

'You see you're a young man, Seward, and if anything unfortunate should happen, somebody—I wont say *who*, might feel bad, and never know no happiness arterwards. Not so with me, by any means. The best days of my nateral life are over. If I should go under, there wouldn't be nobody to weep for me; and you see it wouldn't make a great deal o' difference in the long run. I'm as willin' to die by a rifle ball as any way, pervidin' my hour has come.'

'Brass Eyes!' exclaimed Buston, grasping the hand of the old trapper, 'you're a brick! a brick, and nothin' shorter.'

I took the other hand of the well meaning old man.

'If to be a brick, as our eccentric friend has called you, means to be all that is kind and generous and noble, then do I agree with him perfectly. Not for a world would I expose you to danger. No, no; your grey hairs are sacred; they shall never come between me and Osborne to save me, or to slay him, or both. I were indeed unworthy the name of a man to permit it.'

'Good! youngster; you're a screamer! I'll back you agin any critter as is at large at this present time. But let us come to some kind of an understandin'. Gilmore wants to fight for you, and you wont listen to it on no account, whatsoever; that's jest as it ought to be. Now I can prove to you in two minits that I am the individooal as ought to have the priverlege of doin' the fightin'. Sich things come kind o' nateral to me, you know, and I like 'em. I can't say that it aint morally out o' *jint* to stand up and fire at your feller cretur, and run the risk of losin' your own wind at the same time. I wont stop to decide that question. I want to fight this infernal Osborne, myself. Florry Dale is an uncommon cretur, and I should'nt want her to meet with no disappointment. I'll take my rifle on my shoulder airly in the mornin', or jest at sunset, or jest as it happens to be, and go whistlin' to the place o' meetin'. If I should'nt come back agin, let Florry keep Two Forty, and use him well for his master's sake. That's about all I've got to say.'

For a moment surprise chained my tongue. I had not looked for so much real goodness of heart. I had undervalued those rough spoken, yet well meaning men.

'I thank you for these offers of friendship, most earnestly and sincerely, but I cannot accept them. I have agreed to fight Osborne. I feel bound to keep my word. I shall meet him at sunrise to-morrow morning. All I ask is that you will go with me to the spot and see that all is conducted fairly. If I fail, tell Flora. I did not cease to think of her while I had life.'

'If I don't tell her that, and twice as much more, may I be eaten up by catamounts,' answered Buston.

'Buston you're quite a critter,' said Gilmore.

'Now my friends, I shall lie down and try to sleep. Before the sun is up I shall be ready.'

'We won't fail,' replied the trapper. 'Before the sun rises we shall be beside you.'

'And remember *secrecy* is the word,' I added.

'All understood, boy,' answered Gilmore.

Thus we parted for the night.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DUEL.

WHEN I returned to Dale's cabin, Arthur had not yet retired. He was sitting by the fire, waiting for me.

'I have been anxious on your account,' he said. 'I feared your love of star-gazing had carried you too far from the cabin, and into danger. You must leave off wandering away alone so often. You are well aware that such moonlight excursions are not safe.'

'Probably the boundaries of my life were set long ago,' I answered. 'I must live until my time comes, and die when it has arrived.'

'A very comforting belief, certainly,' replied Arthur.

'It is time to lie down to our dreams,' said I.

We stretched ourselves before the blazing fire. Arthur was soon in a profound sleep; but not so with me; my mind was never so busy

in the world; and the object of its thoughts was Flora and Osborne.

How heartily I wished the latter at the verge of the Rocky Mountains, and even to a darker abode. The moment that the cup of happiness had been placed to my lips, it was likely to be dashed away; for I might fall on the morrow, and leave all my new-born happiness behind.

I knew that it was hard to die under any circumstances, but I felt that it was still harder to die and leave Flora—much harder than to have fallen before I had spoken to her of love.

I said in my heart:

'Man is born to affliction. He is blown to and fro like a leaf upon the winds. His life is a thing of chance and change. That which seems in his grasp evades him. When he seeks for happiness, he finds it not; he is pursuing a shadow.'

My thoughts grew confused and incoherent, at length.

But sleep came not like a friend to set its seal upon my heavy lids: it came as an oppressive nightmare—to make me more miserable.

I arose and sat by the fire. I asked myself where I might be to-morrow night at that hour? Is man an immortal being, destined to survive the destruction of the body?

At that moment my eyes fell upon a pocket Bible lying upon a shelf. I was impelled to stretch forth my hand and take it. I opened the book, and these words met my gaze—

'There is hope of a tree if it be cut down that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. But man dieth, and wasteth; yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up; so man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.'

I laid the book aside with a sigh.

Death then is a sleep. Well, that is better

than the fire that dieth not. Better to sleep eternally, than to suffer eternal condemnation.

The reader may perhaps deem me weak and cowardly, to indulge in such thoughts; but weak and cowardly I am not. It is natural for man to think of such subjects, when death seems near.

To say that I feared to meet Osborne, would do me great injustice; for there is nothing craven in my nature. You may call this avowed egotistical; but I affirm that it is not; my own heart acquits me of the charge. Hard would it fare with him to-day, who should call me a coward, although my nature has lost something of its fire, and the hot quick blood of youth has cooled into the sober currents of manhood.

Where is the person who can lay down to die in the possession of his senses, without asking if he has within him the germs of an immortal life? This is not all. He will ask if there is a God to whom he is accountable for the deeds done in the body?

I do not speak of a man as having these peculiarities when he is convulsed with anger; for then he gives such thoughts to the winds, and rusheth to death as the horse to battle.

I heard a gentle tap upon the door. I stepped to it, 'Who is there?'

'Gilmore,' said a voice.

'Is it time?' I asked, as I opened the door.

'By no means; I thought I'd come to see you once more, and perhaps you'd think better on't. The fact is I've been talkin' with some o' the settlers about this critter you call Osborne. They say he's a dead shot. He can snuff a candle at two hundred yards, or split a ball on the edge of a knife, and think nothin' of it.'

'It can't be helped,' said I.

'They say he's a quarrelsome, unprincipled critter, and his death would'n't be no loss to nobody. He has fought duels afore; and rifles are terrible things to stand up afore, and be perfectly steady. It requires *narve*, man. Now you know I'm a good shot. Two Shooter never refuses fire, and I never miss my mark;

the consequence is, nothin' can stand afore me and live. Don't you take, my boy?'

'My excellent, disinterested, self-sacrificing friend! if I knew that Osborne would send two balls through my heart, I would not forfeit my word, or suffer you to take my place,' I answered, earnestly and with feeling.

'Are you a pretty good shot?'

'Tolerable. You have seen some of my shooting.'

'Yes, I saw the Ingin fall down dead all of a sudden; and I've seen you blaze away at wild critters with good success.'

'I will show you what I can do if you think best,' I replied.

'Get a candle, if you can find such a luxury in these diggins.'

I stepped into the cabin and had the good fortune to find one without awaking Arthur. I then followed the trapper. We walked about three quarters of a mile from the settlement before we stopped. Gilmore then lighted the candle and fastened it upon a maple limb. He then paced off two hundred yards.

'Now, youngster, see if you can snuff that candle?'

'That's rather too nice shooting,' I replied.

'Nothin' like tryin'! Straighten up and let fly!'

Resolving to do the best I could, I took deliberate aim and fired.

'You've missed it!' said Gilmore.

We hastened to examine the tree in front of which the candle was burning.

'It went about two inches wide of the mark. Not bad. Let sliver again.'

I reloaded and fired again with better success—the ball passing within an inch of the blaze.

'I'm not used to shooting by moonlight; I do better by daylight.'

'Never mind, you're gainin' upon it.'

'I've tried twice; now it's your turn.'

'My narves are not over and above steady to-night, but I don't care if I try my hand at it once. Come, Two Shooter, look at that blaze. The old trapper brought the breach of his

rifle to his shoulder, with the muzzle depressed. He raised it steadily; the instant it was upon the mark, he fired. The candle flared, flickered a moment, and burned up again.

'I might have snuffed it a sixteenth of an inch closer,' said the trapper, coolly, as he proceeded to charge his empty barrel.

The candle which burned faintly at first, streamed up brightly. Gilmore stood perhaps four feet from me. While I was preparing to fire again, a ball went whistling between us, and the light of the candle disappeared. Every person who has heard a ball go hissing by them, know what a peculiar ringing it makes.

I said that a rifle ball went whistling between the trapper and myself; such I believed it to be at that moment, but what was very singular, I heard no sound to indicate that a gun had been discharged.

Full of surprise and curiosity, we hastened to examine our target. About half its diameter below Gilmore's shot, was another, which in its passage had severed the blazing wick close down.

The trapper grew pale as he laid his finger upon the spot where the ball had struck.

'If the devil ain't at large this year, it's my humble opinion he'll never visit the airth. You observe that two balls have gone into this tree; but they havn't made but one hole, though it has gone half its thickness below the other. The question is how did it get there? Do you know? Do I know? Does anybody know? It was fired from a rifle! But whose rifle was it? Who fired it? I'm dumb-founded and used up! Say sunthin'! Put your finger in my eye! Prick me with your huntin' knife, and see if I'm awake.'

'It's certainly very mysterious,' I replied.
'It's Black Ralph, or the devil!' said Gilmore.

'Or both.'

'When rifle balls git to flyin' about without any powder, it's time to give up the business of huntin' and trappin'. It's hard to tell where balls will hit when they git to be their own masters. I guess we'd better be a travellin' towards the settlement.'

'By no means. I am not at all disturbed or alarmed, although I frankly own that I am astonished beyond measure. Light the candle, and I will try my luck for the third time.'

The trial proved successful. The wick was severed, although not in so perfect a manner as Gilmore had performed the feat.

'Capital!' he exclaimed. 'Do as well as that to-morrow mornin', and there'll be one scoundrel the less.'

We shouldered our rifles and returned to the settlement. I was silent and thoughtful, and the friendly trapper was oppressed with gloomy forebodings.

The hours of darkness rolled away. Before the sun had reddened the east, we were on the way to the meadow. Gilmore and I walked along together, while Buston followed, leading Two Forty.

'I thought I would take the cretur along, as he might be wanted if you should take any blue pills for breakfast,' said Buston. 'I never got into but two or three sich scrapes myself. I kept perfectly cool, and let fly as soon as the word was given, for dinner was waitin'. I shan't forgit it very soon for I had a tearin' apertite.'

'What became of your antagonist?'

'He died of a broken heart!'

The sun was rising when we reached the appointed spot; and the dew was yet upon the grass.

Osborne was no where in sight; but in an instant he stepped from the thicket near us. He was not alone. A large, powerful man was with him. I recognized in him the stranger who visited us at night. I could not disguise my surprise at seeing him.

'It is the same as caught us napping,' said the trapper. 'I'm sorry to see the critter here. He wont do us no good.'

The parties approached. I saw the stranger's eye fastened upon me for a moment; after that he appeared to notice me no more.

He and Gilmore now stepped aside and conversed together confidentially for a moment. During the time they were thus engaged, Osborne

lighted his pipe and began to smoke. I turned my back upon him and looked toward the spot where I had left Flora. At that very moment she might be dreaming of me. I looked toward the east. The sun was fairly above the lowest range of hills, and glowed fiery red. The dew upon the branches of the trees glistened like diamonds. The lark was up already, and the robin was singing his morning song.

Pleasant sounds from flowing waters and sighing winds saluted my ear.

How joyous and smiling were all things that fell beneath my vision.

How delightful it would be to meet Flora there on such a morn. I might never meet her in this quiet meadow.

'Have you said your prayers?' asked Osborne, ironically.

'Save your own soul!' retorted Buston. 'The youngster ain't got no sins of any consequence to repent on. He worked out his salvation last night, while you was sleepin'.'

'There's enough of the devil in him to damn a dozen men,' replied Osborne, contemptuously.

'There's enough o' the stuff in him to shake you out of your moccasins, or to strangle you like a dog,' returned Buston.

'Or to snuff the candle of your life,' said Gilmore, who now approached.

'It's arranged at fifty yards,' he added.

'That's a long distance,' answered Osborne.

'You'll find it near enough,' replied the trapper significantly.

The ground was measured off.

'The principals will take their places,' said Buston.

'I can't stand there,' said Osborne, 'the sun will shine directly into my face. I'm not going to be shot in that way.'

The ground was measured off in another direction. We took our places. The rifles were loaded and placed in our hands.

'Be perfectly cool,' said Gilmore, as he gave me the deadly weapon. 'Dont be in too much of a hurry about firin'. Be steady, and your shot will tell when you do fire.'

'If I should fall, tell Flora that I blessed her with my dying breath.'

I glanced towards my antagonist.

He had thrown away his pipe and stood there straight as an arrow, and calm as a statue.

'Are you ready?' said Buston.

'All ready.'

'I will count three, and when I say three, fire.'

'One.'

I thought of Flora.

'Two.'

I raised my rifle slowly.

'Three.'

Both of our rifles cracked at the same time. Osborne over-shot, and I heard the ball whistle over my head. I looked quickly towards him to see if he was hit. He stood for the space of half a minute without moving or speaking. He then staggered a step and fell.

The danger was past.

'He's got it!' said Buston.

'Good!' exclaimed Gilmore.

The stranger raised him up, and searched for the wound. It was in the left side, near the heart.

'Leave us,' said the stranger. 'I will take care of him. He wont want care a great while, probably.'

I returned thoughtfully to the settlement; but my companions were in high glee.

I met Flora, and her smiles dispelled a portion of the gloom the adventures of the morning had left upon my mind.

'I have discovered your secret,' said Arthur, before the day had expired. 'Gilmore has betrayed you. Why did you not confide the whole to me?'

'From motives of kindness,' I replied. 'If I had fallen, you would have reproached yourself, and made yourself unhappy, because you were concerned in it.'

'But I would have insisted on taking your place.'

'It would have been of no avail; I should have remained firm.'

Flora overheard this conversation, and I was

compelled to relate all that had happened in relation to the meeting with Osborne. She gave me a look of gentle reproach, and said in a low voice:

'What if you had been killed!'

'Leaving Flora would have been the bitterest ingredient in the cup of death,' I answered in the same tone.

CHAPTER X.

AN ADVENTURE.

THOUGH the events of the morning still hung like a dark cloud over my mind's horizon, the evening that followed passed away very pleasantly.

Story-telling was again resorted to. Dale related the following:

'I was the first man who felled a tree in this part of the country,' said the old man. 'It has been my fortune to experience some hardship in trying to make a home here in the wilderness. It was rather a bold push for a man of my age, to venture so far into the backwoods, I know; but I am constitutionally bold. Nothing can daunt me. As for bears, Indians and panthers, I care but little about them. But I ought to think of Flora, I suppose. The poor girl isn't used to such a life. I wish it was a place of greater security on her account, heaven knows. If I ever leave here, and it is not at all unlikely, it will be to get her out of harm's way. They say there are excellent lands near Salt Lake, up there where the Mormon settlement is. If one was once there with them, he would be comparatively safe. But I am getting away from my story. You all know, or ought to, in order to understand what I am telling, that I am passionately fond of hunting; and it is not always safe to be out alone. Things haven't changed much for the better since we have been here. On the whole they rather grow worse. Excellent hunting grounds are these. There are a great many inconveniences, it is true, but one gets in a measure accustomed to them. There is one thing about it; we are not troubled with any neighbors; that is except the Indians.

Well, being fond of hunting, I used to take

my rifle and dog, and pass the whole day in the woods, and nothing suited me better. Boxer, you know, is a fine large dog, and about as knowing as a man. He has been the constant companion of my peregrinations in the wilderness. There are few animals that he fears, and he has been very useful to me, first and last. He can scent an Indian as far as he can a black bear or a panther. Now I cannot say that I am afraid of a red man, but I give them plenty of room when I can. But there are wild animals about as much to be dreaded as the Indians. The panther, for instance, is an ugly customer, full of cunning and malignity. I had an adventure with one of those animals I never shall forget. I had been hunting all day, and began to feel tired and somewhat discouraged withal, for I had not been very successful. I stood on the margin of a small lake, which lies about south-west from here. It had been a fine day. The sun was just bidding the western wilderness good night. While I leaned upon my rifle, musing, the beams of the sinking sun ceased to gild the peaks of the far distant mountains. The night was fairly upon me. Old Boxer lay quietly at my feet.

I started from my reverie, for I was some miles from here.

'Come, Boxer, it's time to be going towards the settlement.'

Boxer sprang up and wagged his tail, as much as to say:

'I'm ready if you are.'

I shouldered my rifle, and walked swiftly along the margin of the lake. I had gone about twenty yards when a shriek so loud and piercing that it made me shudder, was borne to my ears. It came from the other side of the lake, and resembled the shrill, startling cry of a woman in distress; but more piteous and horrible far.

Boxer uttered a low, discontented whine, and pressed as close to me as possible. This was uncommon conduct for him; for he was not easily frightened. I am willing to own that I was not perfectly unmoved myself. That shriek sent the blood tingling to the ends of my fingers. I knew very well what kind a throat that un-

earthly sound came from. I had heard it before, but not often, and never when alone; and I had heard old hunters affirm that they could successfully imitate the screams of a woman.

Not knowing what else to do, I quickened my pace, hoping, the distance between me and the animal being so great, that I could reach the settlement in safety. But I had gone only a few steps when I heard the panther set up a frightful yelling, exactly opposite me, as before.

'I made a full stop,' as the school master used to say, to consider what to do next.

'We'll try it once more, Boxer,' I said to my canine companion, and then pushed forward again. This time perhaps I went twenty rods before I heard the savage beast cry out again; and he seemed to be a little ahead of me.

'This would'nt, of course, answer, because it could'nt be a great while before we should meet at that rate.

I turned again and walked faster than ever, but with no better success, and with hardly so good; for the creature was obviously impatient, and was resolved to make the circuit of the lake. I thought at first that I would now walk away from the lake as rapidly as possible; but a moment's reflection made me abandon this idea; for when the panther had once gotten upon the side of the lake where I then was, he could easily overtake me; hence my only chance of escape seemed to be in keeping the water between us.

'There was no time to lose; so I changed my direction once more. The lake is about three miles long, and there was a pretty good chance for a run; so I started and ran about a mile or more in a way that showed that I was in a hurry, I assure you. During this time I heard not a single sound; and that silence was more ominous than any thing else, because I could not tell where my enemy was, and I feared he might come upon me of a sudden. But when I had gone the distance I have named—and I wasn't long about it—I heard the blood-thirsty animal cry out again, and on this occasion it came from the extreme end of the pond;

he had not changed his course when I did, and the truth that he was gaining on me could not be concealed or lost sight of.

When the water was no longer between us, how long would it take him to overtake me?—Not long certainly. What was to be done now? I knew not what to do, and so I kept on as fast as my limbs would carry me.

My particular sensations it will not be necessary to attempt to describe; if any of you have been in a similar situation, you know something about it; otherwise you do not. A man may be brave, and a good hunter, and all that, yet not feel exactly comfortable with a catamount after him. Such a state of things gives one an unpleasant sensation of being torn in pieces and eaten alive. If you imagine for the shortest possible space of time that I didn't run, you labor under a mistake; for Two Forty could'nt have done much better.

On I went, and on came the panther, of course. All at once he shrieked again; but that wasn't all; his terrible cry was answered by another of his species in the opposite direction, which was directly before me. So there was danger behind me and danger before me. Well, what did I do then? I stood still for the space of four minutes. During that time a dreadful horror of being eaten by panthers seized me. I fancied I heard the cracking of the dry sticks and leaves; their low angry growls; the gnashing of their terrific teeth; that I felt their hot breath in my face; that they were tearing my flesh; that the bones were being crushed.

I shuddered with unmitigated horror. A happy thought darted through my brain. I would climb a tree! Yes, I could climb a tree! and be comparatively safe.

But there was Boxer, my old friend and companion; what was to become of him? Should I desert him who had never deserted me? One who would fight for me to the last gasp of life? Would that not be a base and cowardly action? Poor Boxer! It seemed to me selfish and cruel to leave him. His fighting blood now seemed to be getting aroused.

He began to walk around me, making the

hair stand straight upon his back, and emitting low, threatening growls.

'Are they coming, old Boxer?' asked I.

Boxer wagged his tail, and looked anxiously into my face as though he understood me; and I know he did.

'Are they near?' I asked again.

He put his large nose upon the earth, and snuffed as if to find out.

A very tall sycamore stood close behind me; but at a little distance, were others quite as elevated.

'Take to the water, Boxer,' I said, pointing to the lake; 'into the drink with you, old friend, and I'll look out for myself.'

The creature seemed to comprehend me in a moment. He walked round and round the tree until I had got up some distance, and didn't appear to take it hard that I was leaving him.

Hark! what was that? Boxer heard it; it was the sound of an animal in rapid motion. I heard it distinctly; and on it came, bound after bound, clearing a goodly space at a leap. The dog continued to walk round the tree, occasionally looking up to see how it fared with me, and how fast I ascended. He wagged his tail as if to encourage me to persevere; and seemed anxious on my account more than on his own.

'Into the water, Boxer, good fellow!' I cried, 'I'm safe enough now.'

Boxer made the circumference of the tree once more, then sprang out into the lake, and swam several rods from the shore, taking a position where he could see me and watch my movements, keeping his shaggy head just above water, which he did with little or no effort.

All was silent again; I heard no bounding sounds; no cracking of the sticks; no rustling of the leaves. There was something dreadful to me in that silence. I don't know why it was dreadful to me unless I was impressed by way of presentiment; for I believe when danger is really impending, the person in jeopardy is often made sensible of it in a way he cannot account for. Man is a curious creature, I assure you; and I have found it so. Just at that

moment the moon came up in full orb'd splendor and looked mildly down upon the lake and the great forest. I was glad to see it; for I needed light on the subject, sorely.

But where were my enemies? I will tell you where one of them was; he came down with a tremendous bound, within two rods of the sycamore among whose branches I was lodged. He snuffed the air a moment, and then crouched down like a cat. He was a monstrous beast, and ugly enough he looked as he lay there lashing the ground with his long tail. Saint Peter, what an enormous paw he stretched out; and what a tongue he displayed. And that was not all; he exhibited two rows of terrible teeth. Did I have a peculiar tingling sensation in my flesh about that time of night, or did I not, or what was it?

I knew there was strength enough in one of those paws to rend a dozen men in an instant of time; and how easily those large jaws could crush the bones.

'I will fix you, my lad,' said I to myself, for I felt quite secure up there. Before I had commenced climbing, I had been careful to lash my trusty rifle to my back, as you will readily suppose. After I had located myself firmly between two large branches, I disengaged it, examined the priming, and satisfied myself that it was in first rate order.

About in the centre of the animal's breast, there was a small round white spot. I rested my rifle upon a limb, and took beautiful aim at that spot; and a nice mark it was, but my nerves shook a little, despite all my self control. I did not pull the trigger; something seemed to tell me not to, and to restrain me.

Boxer who had hitherto been perfectly quiet now howled furiously, of a sudden. I looked at him and perceived that he was gazing intently and anxiously upward into another tree, a few yards from that which I had climbed. I turned my eyes in that direction also. Good Heavens! what a sensation I experienced! what a shiver of horror ran through my frame. Crouched upon a short, stout limb, that extended out towards my place of fancied security,

was the other panther! a more ugly looking monster, if possible, than the first. His fiery eyes were fixed upon me with a peculiar longing, savage expression; and his paws were placed in the attitude of springing. It was a critical moment. I felt for the first time the full sense of the imminent peril of my position.

I had hitherto lost sight of the fact that a panther is the most agile and cat-like of all animals, capable of climbing a tree, and of leaping from one tree to another.

But the horror of my position did not have the effect to unman me; it acted like a powerful tonic, although if you could have seen me at that instant, with the moonbeams shining down upon my face, a pale visage you would have beheld. Strange what a habit the blood has of receding from the face in a moment of danger; where does it go, I wonder? But it's about the panther I'm talking.

'Go it, Bricks,' said Buston, somewhat emphatically.

'If you never saw a panther's tongue, you ought to, especially when he is excited; it reminds me of the deadly fangs of a serpent; such venomous creatures as I have read about, and sometimes seen. Seeing an Indian coming at you full of fight and fury, is nothing to that.'

'Please don't keep this cretur springin' so long, old Gunpowder,' interrupted the hunter.

'I will not dwell upon it longer, for I feel myself incapable of describing the scene, and my own sensations at the time. At the crisis, when all appeared lost, with a wonderful self-possession (which I cannot account for) I pulled trigger, upon the panther. The very second that I fired, and I may say simultaneous with the act, he made a mighty bound straight towards me. His long body struck upon the limb upon which I stood, broke it short off close to my feet, and then went crashing downward to the earth.'

'Did he stop when he got down?' asked Buston.

'When he reached the ground, there wasn't life enough in him to shake his great body with a single convulsion.'

'You might put it all in your eye, and not have it hurt you, I spose,' added the hunter. 'What next? Explode, Gunpowder!'

'I took a long breath!' resumed Dale.

'From your heels up'ards, probably,' continued Buston.

'I took a long breath, thanked God—'

'Stop, old feller! you'd ought a waited a bit 'till you'd disposed o' the other varmint. My father used to tell me never to crow 'till I got out o' the woods. What difference would it a made to you which o' the varmints had you for his supper?'

'Not much, certainly,' replied Dale, good humoredly, 'but I always think it best to be grateful when the Father of mercies seems to befriend us in a particular manner.'

'If havin' two catamounts arter you is bein' befriended, I should'nt care about bein' befriended; that's a mercy I should'nt want to be the father on,' said Buston, seriously.

'The other panther,' when he saw the fate of his companion, uttered frightful yells, and tore up the ground with his long claws, and old Boxer made a triumphant splashing in the water, and barked gloriously to celebrate my success.

'All understood; Boxer was takin' a bath while you was takin' an airin' above. Probably he never had his feet soaked so well since he was a pup. Wasn't his general health better arter it?'

'I should'nt wonder if my hand shook a little when I poured the powder into it for the next charge, put the ball—'

'Would'nt it do jest as well to load it up all at once, and not keep the other cretur waitin' at the root of the tree? If it will be any help to you, we'll imagine you've got the ball drove home, and are all primed and cocked; but I'd advise you to take a short aim.'

'Yes, I was all ready to fire and—'

'Let sliver!'

'No, I did'nt! you are wrong there. All at once the creature leaped all of fifteen feet into the air—a few mighty spasms shook his frame, and to all appearances he was dead.'

'You did'nt say whether he come down out o' the air again,' added Buston.

'That was an oversight he *did* come down and never leaped again. I looked earnestly about me for the cause of what I had seen. Once I imagined, through a vista in the trees, I saw what seemed to my astonished eyes like a horse and rider; but that could not have been; it was more like some dark and swiftly moving shadow, than real horse or real rider. It melted away like a phantom or a dream, upon the margin of the lake; and I saw it no more.'

'Had you ever heard of Black Ralph then?' added Gilmore, earnestly.

'I had heard that there was such a being; that he had been seen, man or devil, or whatever he is or was, riding like the wild huntsman over mountain and plain, through wood and through wild. I could not believe the animal was really dead until old Boxer springing from the water, flew at him and commenced tearing out his hair by mouthfuls.'

'It was the work of Black Ralph,' added Gilmore; 'and when we have all said that, we can't say no more.'

'I agree with you,' replied Dale. 'Of course I was perplexed and confounded. I examined the beast as he lay upon his side, and found a small wound—'

'In the left breast?' added the trapper.

Exactly. It was like the wound of a rifle ball; but the animal had received its death in silence, for there had been no sound that I could hear to indicate that a rifle or any kind of fire arms had been used.'

'That's rather an onreasonable story, beggin' your pardon for the liberty I take in sayin' so,' said Buston, with a comical leer.

'Perhaps he never owned a dog with three names,' retorted Gilmore.

The hunter knocked the ashes from his pipe, and commenced filling it again in silence.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WARNING.

THE following conversation, between Flora and myself, occurred a few days after the events related in the last chapter.

'Your father has informed me, that the set-

tlers have resolved to abandon this part of the country, and proceed towards the Great Salt Lake.'

'It is so. What think you of the enterprise?'

'That it will be attended with some danger; that you will improve your condition but little. Does he think to join the Mormons?'

'Why do you ask; you know he does not.—They think of forming a settlement on, or near, Utah Lake.'

'That's close by the Mormon settlement. It's a long way there, Flora.'

'Ah yes! it is a long way; but I am willing to go with my father.'

'And leave me?'

'You can go with us. Why should you stay?'

'Sure enough, why should I stay? I must go to protect my girl; to die in her defence, if need require. But it is a long and weary pilgrimage, as I just said, and my heart fears for the result. Since I have known you and loved you—and Flora, I have loved you from the first—I have felt that there was something that might be worth living for. When upon that bright, clear night I became so bold, and said so many strange things, and among others that I loved you, I felt more than ever that there was something that might render life pleasant and happy. I am selfish; I do not wish you to be exposed to danger, for fear I may lose you, when life would become a burden. Reflect upon the many evils that may befall you in journeying to Utah Lake.'

'I have thought of it; but the same hand that keeps me here can preserve me there. The settlers believe we shall dwell in comparative safety there.'

'I do not. But there is a spot that I should like to find, somewhere in the wide world.'

'Describe it, Seward.'

'Well, listen. The spot that I refer to would be something like this. It should be in the deep tangled wild-wood, far from all habitations. There should be great hills on all sides

but one, and on that side there should be a narrow and delightful entrance. The hills that embosom this spot should be covered with trees of noble growth. I will not name the different kinds, but they should all be green and comely. You perceive that the place would be a deep valley. A small crystal stream should pass through it, and find its way out somewhere, I don't know how; but its banks should be luxuriantly verdant. All kinds of flowers, herbs and grasses should bud, bloom, and grow upon its banks; and the clear, sparkling waters should make a dreamy, murmuring sound, as they went onward. Fish should be there also; nice, speckled trouts, perch, and shiners. The valley should be beautifully clad in green, for I should want no winter there, and birds whose songs are sweetest should sing without getting weary.

'Not far from the stream there should be a cottage, and the graceful willow and the sweet scented thyme, and the wild sage should luxuriate in the genial soil around it. Creeping vines should run over the roof, and insinuate themselves into every nook and cranny, and hang upon every projecting corner. This same spot should be a garden of Eden. I would be the Adam—and—*Flora Dale* should—should be my *Eve*.'

Kind reader, would it not be well for you to believe that I spoke the last words in a very soft voice? Would it not be proper to suppose also, that a certain young person blushed?

'Go it, Cattridge Box!'

I dropped *Flora's* hand and turned toward the intruder with a scowl of displeasure. My eyes fell upon Buston and Two Forty.

'I beg the oncommon cretur's pardon,' he said; 'I didn't expect to find you here; but there's no tellin' where folks 'll be found now-a-days. No harm done I hope?'

'None at all,' replied *Flora*, laughing.

'If young Gun Flint here, aint no objections I'm going to make you an offer, marm.'

'No objections in the world. Go on.'

'Well, I was goin' to say to oncommon *Florry*, here, that I would let her ride Two Forty

clean to the Great Lake, or to the end of the world, if she wants to.'

'A kind and generous offer, truly. I thank you and will consider the subject. I should not like to deprive you of your horse, so good a one too.'

'That's the very reason why I want you to have him; he's the only horse livin' as is fit to carry you on his back. He'll make nothin' o' your light figure, and I *raly* believe the cretur likes to have you ride him. Two Forty, you see, is an oncommon hoss, and you're an oncommon *Florry*; now you understand my meanin'.'

'You flatter me, and I am pleased with it,' answered the maiden, and she forthwith stretched out her hand to the hunter, who seemed almost afraid to touch it with his hard, rough fingers; he did manage, at length to just touch the fair little hand; but he did it so respectfully, and appeared to feel it such an honor, that I could not help forgiving his intrusion, and showing that I took his offers kindly as well as *Flora*.

I will now pass over a period of time. The reader will imagine that we have left the settlement upon the Red Fork, and are *en route* for the Great Salt Lake. There were about twenty of us, children and females included. The baggage wagons are drawn by mules and horses, and make quite a picturesque appearance as they wind along on their devious way. *Flora* rides Two Forty, and Buston is never a great way off, mounted upon the animal which formerly belonged to *Prairie Wolf*.

I shall not enter into the details of travelling in the West. They are well known to those who have read Irving's works, and followed *Bonneville* and *Fremont* in their wanderings.

Long is the way, slow and toilsome our movements.

But I am writing my adventures and the adventures of those most intimately connected with me; therefore I shall not relate the history of our journeyings from day to day.

We have passed *Mt. Rabon*, the *Spanish Peaks*, *Bent's Fort*; we have gone through the

South Park, the Old Park, and the kind reader will now find us comfortably encamped upon White River; at its junction with the Rio Colorado.

If you look for me you will find me seated on the bank of the last mentioned river. At no great distance from me you will perceive the smoke of our fires curling up through the trees; you will observe also that the sun is just setting and his last beams are seen upon the tops of the mountains.

I am thinking of Flora; how could I live without her, and how dear she grows to me every day. And it happened as I sat musing, that I heard footsteps. I looked up to see who came, and the strange visitor at night—Osborne's second—stood before me.

I gazed at him with profound astonishment.

'Again we meet,' he said, slowly.

'So it seems.'

'What do you here?'

'Whatever pleases me. What do *you* do?'

'What you would not dare do.'

'That cannot be true.'

'Why not?'

'Because I fear not to do what other men dare.'

'You have an excellent opinion of yourself, young man.'

'That concerns nobody but myself. What is your business with me?'

'I have come to warn you of approaching danger.'

'Judging from the position you occupied when I last met you, I should suppose you would not be the man to warn me of danger.'

'Judge not from appearances, in all cases, young man.'

'Is Osborne dead?'

'Osborne is living.'

'Is it possible?'

'I have said it.'

'What is your name?'

'You are inquisitive, young man.'

'What is your name?'

'You may call me Forrester, for want of a better.'

'I think you said you had come to warn me of approaching danger. I am ready to hear you.'

'You dont seem to be in the best of humor.'

'As good as usual. I doubt your good faith.'

'That is natural. Ingratitude is the most common of sins.'

'Why do you speak of ingratitude? What do I owe you in the way of gratitude?'

'More than you are aware of, perhaps. You should be grateful that I have sought you to tell you to be on your guard—that danger is lurking near you.'

'Convince me that such is your object, and I will not cease to be grateful; but as I have said, I doubt you.'

'Well, doubt on; I like your frankness.'

'I wish I could say that I like you, or anything about you.'

'No matter whether you like or not. I can live without you better than you can without me.'

'I have got along thus far very well without any of your help, and I dare say I shall continue to.'

'Very good; be as independent as you like; it is all the same to me. What I wish to say to you is this: Before the sun is twenty four hours older, you will be in great danger; perhaps death will be the result; perhaps not; it depends much on yourself. If you heed what I say to you, it is very probable that you will escape; if you disregard my counsel, there are two chances of death to one of escape.'

'Is that all?'

'No; Flora is also in peril.'

'Flora?'

'Yes, *Flora*! That name seems to dispel your apathy.'

'Forrester—if that indeed be your name—I beg of you to speak to me more plainly, if you really mean what you say, and have the remotest wish to befriend me.'

I uttered these words with great earnestness, and looked searchingly at the tall, powerful man before me.

'I have touched the right chord at last,'

said he, with a smile. 'There is magic in the name of Flora.'

'For me there is, stranger, I confess.'

'Well, I think no worse of you for that. There is magic in her eyes also, as well as in her name, and a dangerous kind of magic it is.'

'You wander from the subject, I replied, pleased in spite of myself, at the tribute he had paid to Flora's beauty.'

'The nature of the impending peril, I may not divulge. It is sufficient for you to know, that it is near, and imminent; and that by observing due caution you can meet it, and overcome it.'

'Let your speech be less ambiguous. Speak frankly, if you would be believed. Mystery I like not, and I have always remarked that where there is much mystery there is much deceit. A stranger comes to me and says, 'There is danger near you,' but refuses to make known the nature of that danger; now how much importance ought to be attached to his words?'

'Your reasoning is false—your inferences are wrong. If you love your own life—if you love Flora Dale, during the next twenty-four hours, be continually on your guard. Let the whole party keep together. Do not leave them for a moment, nor suffer Flora to.'

'Tell me one thing. How do you know Flora Dale? Where have you met her?'

'You have asked two questions instead of one, young man; suffice it that I have seen her, and know her; that is enough for your purpose and mine. Will you do as I have directed?'

'I dont know; I will see.'

'You are self willed and obstinate. I have a mind to leave you to your fate,—let you die as the fool dieth.'

'I came into the world like a fool, and to be consistent, should go out like one. What do you say to that?'

The stranger changed color and bit his lip.

'Was your father like you?' he asked abruptly.

'I dont know. My father and I were strangers. I never had the honor of his acquaintance. What more would you say?'

'He died when you were an infant, probably.'

'You say so.'

'No; I asked a question.'

'You'll have to answer it.'

'Then you dont know your own father?'

'Cease to question me. My father was a villain whoever he was,' I replied, with much bitterness. 'You were speaking of some great danger. Have you more to add?'

'No; you scorn my friendly counsels.'

'Give me some proof that you speak truly, and I will follow your directions implicitly, and will henceforth class you among my friends.'

'Listen, you number twenty in all; before to-morrow night there will be but nineteen of you.'

'Where will the other one be?'

'No matter; I have said. Twenty *now*, nineteen to-morrow. Think of it young man.'

And the man who called himself Forrester, turned abruptly from me, and walked away. Once he paused as if he would turn back, then he quickened his pace and was soon lost to my view.

I sat still and mused on. I was not in the best of humor, I acknowledge. Who was Forrester? What did he want? Had he spoken in good faith? Dont know! Can't tell. I shall see. But I have but little faith in this stranger, though I have often thought of him since the night of our first meeting.

I recalled his words, and repeated them in my mind; yet they gave me but little uneasiness.

I walked leisurely towards the encampment. War-Path, the Utah Indian, met me. This friendly savage had not left us since we first fell in with him, near the settlement; and he had acted in the capacity of guide during our journey.

He had learned a few words of English, and seemed much pleased with his new friends, the pale faces. I had also applied myself to the Pah-Outah language, and conquered a portion of its hard words; so we could now get along to-

gether very well, in the way of conversation. War-Path was accompanied on this occasion by an Indian who had joined us a few days before, and of whom I knew but little. They were talking earnestly together.

'How is my white brother?' said War-Path.

'Very well. How is my red brother; and what is he talking about so earnestly?'

'I am well, and I was talking of the bad *Manito* of the woods.'

'And what of the bad *Manito* of the woods, red brother?'

'All my brethren fear him. I was thinking what a great honor it would be to kill him.'

'You cannot kill him, brother. He rides upon the winds. He comes and goes, and deals out death to the red man, and you cannot see him. How then can you slay him?'

War-Path looked at me seriously, then at his companion.

'He thinks he can kill him, white brother,' he replied, pointing his finger at his red friend.

'Let him try,' I answered. 'It will be the hardest day's work he ever attempted.'

War-Path smiled, shook his head doubtfully, and passed on.

'How are you, stranger?' said a voice.

I paused, wondering what new adventure was before me. The figure of a man leaning upon a long rifle, was the first object that met my sight. At first I thought it was Osborne, for the figure was about his height.

'Did you speak?'

'I reckon as how I did,' was the rejoinder.

'I am happy to see you.'

'Them's my feelin's,' was the reply. 'And here's my hand for you to shake; and though its rough and hard, its an honest one.'

The frankness of the stranger pleased me, and I shook the proffered hand with right good will.

'This is a strange wild country,' he added.

'Do you like it?'

'Do I like it, stranger? as I loved my mother's milk, when a babe. It's a glorious country, and I could live in no other. Have you seen any of the *heathen creturs* in your wanderin's?'

'I have met them often. I dare say you have had many adventures with them.'

'My name is Baptiste La Roy, and when I've said that you'd ought to have known sunthin' about it.'

'It gives me pleasure to say that I have often heard of you. Gilmore has mentioned the name of La Roy, more than once.'

'Is Gilmore near these diggins, stranger?'

'He is where you see the smoke curling up through the trees yonder.'

'It can't be possible! I've known him ever since he's been in the wilderness. I've often been in at the death with him; though he has no particelular system o' finishin'. I go in for the eye.'

'So Gilmore has told me.'

'There aint nothin' like death in the eye; though there is some very clever chaps who go in for the bridge o' the nose system, and don't like no other style o' finishin'.'

'Do you invariably shoot them in the eye?'

'Allers, when I can see the heathen creturs' eyes; if I can see 'em, why then, I do the best I can, though it goes rayther agin the grain to finish 'em in any other style.'

'There is one thing I wish to ask you,' I said, with considerable earnestness. 'Have you ever heard of a being called Black Ralph, during your long pilgrimage in the woods?'

La Roy approached me and laid his hand on my arm.

'Have I heard of Black Ralph! Can any human cretur wander up and down this great wilderness for years, and not hear of that onaccountable cretur?'

'What do you think of him?'

'That's a hard question, stranger; I'd rather you'd ask me sunthin' else.'

'Would you like to bring old Ironsides to bear upon him once?'

'Hush! stranger, I wouldn't no more level this shootin' stick at Black Ralph, than I'd put my hand into the fire that's blazin' out yonder where your friends are. And why should I wish to harm him? Has he done me any hurt? No! Am I any the worse off for him?'

Not I! He kills Injins, its true, and I dont blame him much; for they dont do but little good upon the face of the earth. With your leave I'll go and smoke a pipe with Gilmore.'

Sleeping and waking; waking and sleeping; dreaming of Flora and Osborne, Forrester and Black Ralph; so the night wore away.

CHAPTER XII.

OSBORNE.

I was up in the morning before my companions. The first rays of the rising sun blushed faintly in the east. The birds were singing merrily. Thinking I was the only person stirring about the encampment, I stepped forth to inhale the refreshing air of morning. I was much surprised at beholding Flora at a short distance from the encampment. I hastened to join her, and the next moment stood by her side.

'You are abroad early, Flora,' I remarked.

'Yes, I thought it too fine a morning to be lost in sleep.'

But you are imprudent. It is not safe to move so far from the encampment. Let me hope you will be cautious in future.'

'Are you given to presentiments?'

'Not often, but there are moments when I seem to feel the approach of danger. No longer ago than last night I experienced one of those mysterious influences that warn us of the approach of an evil hour.'

'To be frank with you, Seward, I experienced the same undefinable feeling of impending evil. I wonder what it can be?'

'I wish I could tell you,' I replied, but that I cannot do. Let us walk upon this bank. What a romantic spot!'

'You are violating your own maxims,' said Flora, with a smile. 'We are going from the encampment.'

'We will be careful not to wander far. With thee, Flora, it seems to me that the whole journey of life would be but a pleasant stroll through delightful groves, and a land of perpetual flowers. How much real happiness can

I perceive in the storehouse of the future. I shall call you mine, and you will be near me ever. There is only one thought that chills my happiness—the life on earth is too brief a period for the enjoyment of love like mine. Would that time could be lengthened into eternity. But death steps in like a grim and fell destroyer; and so my Flora, and I, must pass away.'

'You are wrong, Seward. There are low, sweet voices that whisper unceasingly into my ear of a life to come. Call not death a destroyer; he comes like a friend to emancipate the soul from its earthly slavery. Our loves shall not pass away with the fleeting breath; they shall be renewed in a world of eternal blessedness. The voices that I hear hourly and daily, tell me this. Did you never hear the voices, Seward? They are best heard in the calm hour of early morning, in the quiet noon of night, in the still, whispering twilight. It is glorious to listen to them, for they seem to be the voices of my guardian angels. Speak not thou of the shortness of time. If we have loved truly here, we shall love truly where the sun never sets, and where the trees and flowers, bloom eternally.'

'The voices have told you so?' I said, with a smile, pressing the fair little hand of Flora, in my own.

'A thousand times, Seward.'

'You cannot talk of the voices too much, Flora. I like to hear you. I have heard few preachers that I liked better.'

'Look!' said Flora, suddenly changing the subject, 'yonder is the Indian that joined us a few days since. He seems thoughtful.'

I followed the direction of Flora's eyes, and beheld the Indian, to whom I have before alluded, standing on the bank of the river.

We both paused and contemplated him sometime in silence.

'A curious race of beings are these same savages,' I observed, thoughtfully.

'Have you conquered your dislike to them yet?'

'Not in the least. I do not. I never shall.'

'They are not to blame for having a red skin, Seward.'

'I don't know about that,' I replied. 'Just look at that creature! What can you see about him that looks *human*?'

'He does not look like us, it is true, yet there is something human about him, notwithstanding. But he is not like War-Path.'

'Very true he is not so noble.'

'Then you will allow that there is something noble about War-Path.'

'But very little, however.'

'I see you are resolved not to give the poor red man any credit for his goodness.'

'Never mind; let us rest ourselves upon the bank. Here is a moss covered stone, that invites us to sit.'

We both sat down upon the moss covered stone, and in a short time the thought of Indians, and danger, were effectually dispelled from our minds, or at least from mine.

Perhaps we had remained there half an hour, perhaps twice that time, for we gave little heed to the footsteps of the old man with the grey locks and the scythe.

Flora's smiles were pleasant to look upon; her voice was sweet to listen to; the river made a dreamy sound, the birds thrilled it merrily; so time went on. How long we should have sat there and talked, and smiled upon each other, I know not; a scream, shrill and startling, from Flora, caused me to spring suddenly to my feet, and as I did so, I perceived the Indian of whom I have just spoken, in the act of falling, and he was not three feet from us.

He had approached us it would seem unheard. In his right hand he grasped his hunting knife, and the fingers retained it after he had fallen to the earth. Before I noticed him farther, I was obliged to turn my attention to Flora, for she was fainting with terror.

I strove to reassure her, but it was some moments ere she grew calm enough to explain what she had seen.

It appears, as she sat upon the bank, and gazed down into the water, she had seen the shadow of the Indian reflected there with great

distinctness, and he was in the act of striking with the deadly weapon, which his lifeless hand still grasped, when she uttered the cry which caused me to spring to my feet.

'Fear nothing, Flora,' I said, as calmly as I could. 'The savage is past doing you an injury. Justice is even now meted out to him. *Black Ralph is abroad!*'

Flora turned and looked at the body. I pointed to a small wound in his left breast.

'Behold where the life oozed out,' I said.

'I perceive only a large drop of blood there,' replied Flora.

'Yet death found an entrance there. That dark drop of blood flows from a wound that no leech on earth can heal.'

'I cannot realize that he is dead,' returned Flora. 'It is but a moment since I saw that strong, tawny arm upraised to strike. What a strange thing is death! how suddenly it comes.'

'Strange enough is death; but a death like this is passing strange.'

'There is much that is wonderful about this whole transaction, Seward. Why did he wish to aim a blow at my life? What cause had he for such an act? I know him not; and to my knowledge have rendered him no evil.'

'What have I always told you, Flora? have I not assured you many times that red men are a treacherous and faithless set! I have always hated them—I hate them still—and with a hatred more bitter and unrelenting will I regard them in the future. Look at him as he lies there. A moment or two since he was a living creature, with a heart full of hate, cunning, and malignity. He would have slain you without cause. But God in his justice sent an unknown and unheard messenger to lay him low, and I thank Him for it. He is merciful; henceforth the name of Black Ralph shall be dear to me. I will picture him a good angel, ever hovering near those in danger, to shield them from harm. No longer will I clothe his name with terror and dread; but to me it shall be a pleasant sound; for he has saved an existence dearer far than my own.'

Flora looked trustingly into my face, and tears of gratitude bedewed her cheeks.

'This seemed incredible,' she murmured at length. 'It surpasses belief. What hand sped the soul of this poor savage to its long home. Touch him—raise him up—dash water upon his face—see if he be really dead?'

'Nothing can shake him back to life; all the water in the sea would not revive him. That dust will never live again.'

'And this you say is the work of Black Ralph?'

'Yes, Flora.'

'And who is he?'

'That I cannot tell you. He is one that comes and goes with the silence of a shadow. He dispenses death, and the stillness of the forest is not broken. He speeds a soul—if an Indian has one—and mystery still covers him like a mantle. This is all I know of the 'Forest Fiend.'

'He seems a fiend indeed,' added Flora.

'Not a fiend, Flora.'

'And why not?'

'Because he saved your life.'

'Very true, and yet I know not how it was done; I will try to be grateful to him nevertheless.'

'To-day you number *twenty*; to-morrow you will number but *nineteen*,' I said musingly, as I gazed at the stiffening body; and I repeated it again and again, until Flora asked what it meant.

'I was thinking of something that has passed,' I answered, quickly, not wishing to excite her fears by a recital of yesterday's adventures.

The stranger had spoken sooth; the sign had been given.

'Go it, Catridge Box!' said one whom the reader will know by this time.

'Go it yourself, and see how you like it,' I answered.

'Allers at it,' added Buston. 'Allers courtin', the oncommon cretur. If you was both travelling from sunrise to sunset, I s'pose you'd allers find sunthin' to talk about. But what in the name o' natur is this? Git up, you red Injin! What on airth are ye layin' here for?'

'I don't much think that he will rise at your bidding,' I said.

'Sure enough, youngster. He's got it in the left breast. Its my opinion the devil lives somewhere hereabouts. It's dangerous to be safe anywhere in these parts.'

At that moment Gilmore, Dale, Arthur and La Roy made their appearance.

'Brass Eyes, what do you think of this?'

'In the heart,' said Gilmore, looking attentively at the body, 'right in the heart. The silent and onheard cretur is doin' his work.'

'That heathen cretur has been called to stick his toes up in a sudden and onexpected manner, prepared or onprepared,' said La Roy. 'He has lost his hold on all things of a *sublimar* natur. I hope his mind had been properly exercised in regard to the futur state.'

'He never had no mind to brag on,' added Buston. 'He's got sunthin' now that he can't get up nor down—sunthin' as he's sure on.'

'Poor fellow!' said Arthur, 'I wish him a happy journey to the land of souls.'

'I don't wish the Injin *indervidoal* no worse nor that,' added Gilmore.

'I wish all the creturs were there, and if there's any hurt in it, I'm willin' to be forgiven,' rejoined Buston. 'Them's the natur of my sentiments, Brass-Eyes.'

'I can't account for this,' said Arthur to me, in a low voice, after I had stated what had taken place. 'There is something strange and awful about it. Just think of arresting the course of life so suddenly as a death like this indicates.—Alive and well one moment, a lump of clay the next.'

As we all moved from the spot I again said to myself, 'Twenty to-day, *nineteen* to-morrow.' The stranger had not spoken falsely. As he had predicted, so had it happened.

As we walked towards the fires of our encampment, I glanced backward to the scene of the strange tragedy; War-Path was committing the body to the waters of the Rio Colorado.

During that day's journey not one of us, I believe, could help thinking of the extraordinary being called Black Ralph.

'I wish to talk with you,' said Arthur, after all had become quiet in the encampment.

Taking my rifle I followed the brother of Flora.

'Don't go far,' said La Roy, 'I've seen signs of the heathen creturs to-day.'

'This way,' added Arthur, 'The moon will be up soon, and it will shine pleasantly upon yonder hill-side.'

We strolled on and conversed upon the many strange things we had seen and known in the wilderness. After we had gone some distance we sat down and talked a long time upon various interesting subjects.

We were upon the point of rising and leaving the spot, when I was conscious of receiving a stunning blow upon my head.

I knew no more at that time. Dark, dreamy, confused images went swimming and whirling before my eyes. I must have remained unconscious for a long time.

When, with a painful effort, I opened my eyes, Arthur was no where to be seen. Spots of blood were distinctly perceived upon the ground. Two figures stood beside me.—I looked at the taller of the twain; it was Osborne! I glanced at the other; he was the very same I had lashed upon the horse, and doomed to a cruel death. A grim smile of triumph flitted across the features of Osborne.

'Do you realize it?' he said sneeringly.

I made no answer. My tongue was parched and dry, and refused to utter a word.

'You do not speak. You are daunted then, at last.'

I laid my hand upon my head, for it ached horribly.

'I dealt that blow,' added Osborne. 'It was given with right good will. Three times have you baffled me, twice have you wounded me; but that is past and over.'

My hands were now firmly bound together. A horse was led forward, and I was lifted upon his back. Osborne and the Indian then mounted the animals which had been placed there for the purpose, and we all moved away at a brisk trot, the former leading the beast I was forced

to ride. The motions of the horse made my head ache more bitterly, and I was conscious that the blood was trickling down over my forehead.

'Caught at last,' muttered Osborne, and Black Ralph himself cannot save you. You had better be saying your prayers.'

'Poor Flora!' I said, mentally. 'Poor Flora!' and then my eyes felt as though they were hot and burning.

Occasionally the moonbeams revealed the features of the Indian, and I beheld the lines of hate and malignity pictured thereon. I was used to seeing ugly faces, but his made me shudder, notwithstanding.

We rode on without abating our speed, and my sufferings were most intense. A dozen fevers seemed to be running riot in my veins—No water was offered to cool my tongue. When the morning dawned, I was a long, weary way from my friends.

'You are most to your journey's end,' said Osborne. 'There remains but one more journey for you, now.'

'We now descended into a deep and dangerous ravine. Several times I was in danger of losing my seat, and being thrown upon the rocks. Upon one side of this ravine were high mountains, and towards those our course was directed.

When we reached them, I thought I could go no farther; but I was mistaken. Between the immense fragments of rocks that seemed to obstruct our way, there appeared a narrow opening.

A horse and rider could with difficulty pass through. The Indian entered this rocky defile, I followed him next in order, and Osborne came last.

'No human foot save mine has explored this passage before,' said Osborne significantly.

We emerged from this narrow way into an open space embosomed by the mountain ranges.

'The hand of the Almighty has flung a wall about us that is impregnable. Which of your friends will find you here?'

I would have spoken, but I could not.

'Sullen!' he cried, fiercely, 'sullen as hell!' The sun was now high in the heavens, and

streamed his light down among the mountains gloriously. I was taken from the horse and placed upon my feet, but my limbs refused to bear me up. I sank upon the grass, and cared but little what my fate might be, providing it were soon over, and I were released from pain.

The Indian took his hatchet and trimmed the lowest branches from a small cotton-wood.—When this was done, he produced several strong thongs of deer-skin. I was then stripped of my clothing—I submitted to all with the dogged apathy of despair.

Had I been in the full possession of my strength, and not been rendered deathly sick by that racking pain in my head, I would have resisted and fought to the last.

I was now dragged to the cotton-wood, and placed against it. My hands were carried backwards and lashed so firmly that there was danger of the hard thongs cutting through the flesh.—My other limbs were next tied to the cotton-wood with equal rigor.

While this was being done, Osborne looked on with a smile of satisfaction.

'If any person, by the merest chance should find their way to this spot, at the expiration of a few days, they will discover a skeleton lashed to a cotton-wood!' said Osborne; and mounting his horse, he rode away, followed by the Indian, leading the animal I had ridden.

They were soon out of sight, and I was alone—left to starve—to faint—to perish in the sun.

I was cut off from my friends; human aid could not reach me.

Indulgent reader, attempt, for a moment, to imagine yourself in my position. Endeavor to fancy yourself in the heart of an immense wilderness, doomed to the most cruel of all deaths. Strive to picture yourself exposed to the hot rays of the sun, and sighing for a drop of water, even as the rich man sighed when he beheld Lazarus afar off in Abraham's bosom. Imagine also that you feel a deadly sickness at the stomach, and that your brain is dreadfully racked and dizzy.

'A fearful situation, truly!' you will doubtless exclaim.

The hours went rolling heavily onward. My limbs began to swell and pain me horribly.—The sun shone fiercely upon me and burned my skin. I made frantic exertions to free myself, but I could not move an inch, so well had the work of my enemy been done.

I cast my aching eyes towards heaven; but the sun flashed into them as if to burn them dry. I looked down to the earth; and then the thought occurred to me that I should never have decent burial, but be eaten by birds and wolves before my poor body was cold perhaps.

What would Flora say when she learned that I had suddenly disappeared and could not be found. Perhaps she might, in an evil moment think I had basely deserted her. But no; that could not be; she knew me too well to do me so much injustice. She would doubtless conclude the worst had happened, and would mourn my untimely fate many a long year.

How my temples throb! My brain seems actually on fire! What a blessed boon one single drop of water would be. I shall taste water no more. Gracious Father of men! in thy infinite mercy proportion my strength to the emergencies of my day. I am weak; thou art strong. I am finite, everlasting years are thine. I shall go mad. This fierce sun is scorching my brain. My sufferings overpowered me at length, and insensibility put a temporary end to my sufferings.

I knew there was an interval in which a thousand incoherent thoughts and strange images went whirling before me. I have a faint remembrance that as I began to revive, I felt the horrible sickness and faintness again.

I knew I heard a friendly and well known voice exclaim:—

'Go it, Catridge-Box! Come on, Brass-Eyes. I've found the cretur tied to a tree, perfectly safe; won't it make the heart of ocommon Florry glad!'

How my heart leaped within me, when the tones of that voice fell upon my ear. How fervently I blessed the well meaning old hunter. Tears came to my aid—the first I had shed—and they moistened my burning eye-balls.

'Bring water, stir your stumps! Be lively, the poor boy is in an onhappy state. His tongue is as dry as a stick. The Lord be merciful to us all! What a trick to serve a human creature,' added Buston, while he severed the thongs that were imbedded in my flesh, with rapid and dexterous strokes of his hunting knife.

'The critters shall smell gunpowder for this,' said Gilmore. 'Open your mouth, my boy;—here's water, fresh, clear sparkling water. Hurry up Brass-eyes! turn the precious fluid down his throat; 'twill do him good. Now give him sunthin' out o' the bottle—a good dose of it. There, he opens his eyes.'

'How hot the boy's flesh is,' replied Gilmore. 'It makes me feel uncomfortable to look at him. It puts me all aback. You'll have to hold old Two Shooter, to keep it still, arter this. Yes, this hollow bit of steel will have work to do, and the critters will take blue pills. Can't some pious indervidoal give me a chance at the varmints, about this hour of the day.'

'Be calm, Brass-Eyes! govern your religious feelin's. The time 'll come when we'll stand up shoulder to shoulder, and send particular conviction among the Ingin indervidoals. The spirit o' prophecy has fell on me like a stick o' timber. We shall see what we *shall* see.'

Gilmore carried me in his arms to a shady spot. He put my clothes on me with the gentleness of one who cares for an infant. He bathed my head, face and hands in cool water, from which I experienced the most grateful sensations.

Buston placed the bottle again to my lips, and I managed to swallow a considerable quantity of whiskey.

While Gilmore was thus engaged with these kind offices, I relapsed into a deep and refreshing sleep. I faintly remember that something like a dream occurred to me. The form of my sainted mother stood beside me. Sweet sometimes, are the vagaries of sleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

BUSTON'S STORY.

I OPENED my eyes. A change had taken place in the appearance of things around me. A tent had been raised over me, softly, while I slept, and I found Gilmore's blanket wrapt about me. No person was in sight. The pain in my head had subsided, and I no longer felt the deadly sickness at the stomach. It was near the hour of sunset, or sunrise, I knew not which.

As I lay there, the entrance to the lodge was darkened by the figure of a man. Forrester was again before me. He hesitated a moment, cast a furtive glance behind him, and then entered.

'I find you sick and weak,' he said. 'When last I met you, you were well, strong, and bold. What are you now?'

'I am helpless to-day; but I may be bold and strong again to-morrow, I answered. 'What more have you to say?'

'You have doubtless forgotten what I said to you three days ago?'

'Forgotten your words!' I wish I *could* forget them.

'I warned you of danger; you scorned my counsel. Look at yourself in a vessel of water, and mark the result.'

'Yes; you *did* speak of danger near, and imminent; but could you not have done more?'

'You speak like all the rest of mankind—not grateful for a little—ever reaching for more—ever finding fault. Had you followed my counsel, you would not have been stretched upon this couch of pain.'

'But you were so ambiguous in your language!'

'If I told you one truth, and you believed it not, why should I have told you another. If you would not heed my advice in one thing, why should I suppose that you would in another?'

'Very true; but I like not mystery, as I told you then.'

'Go on.'

'There is one question I would ask.'

'Ask it.'

'If you knew what would happen, why did you not save me?'

'Let the future answer that.'

'I do not comprehend you. Who are you? Why do you seek me? Why do you wander up and down these woods? What am I to you, or what are you to me?'

'Do not trouble your head about those matters. Try to get well. Seek out your enemy and slay him; hate Indians, be bold, and strong of heart.'

'That's singular advice to give a sick man.'

'It's the best I have; receive it, or not, just as you please. I am not particular about such matters. I take care of number one; you must do the same. I would give you advice to direct your course in future; but you would heed it not, and I forbear.'

'Speak the truth, and I care not,' I answered.

'I seldom speak falsely,' he said, proudly.

'There is something more I would ask?'

'Well?'

'Are you my friend?'

For a moment Forrester was silent, and gave me a searching and earnest look.

'Before God,' he replied, seriously, 'I know not whether I have been your friend or your greatest enemy!'

'That would seem singular,' I returned, interested in the stranger, in spite of myself. 'Shall I see you again?'

'If you live long enough, you will be likely to.'

'Indeed!'

'Adieu for the present.'

'You have no more to say, then?'

'It would be useless to say more. You are headstrong. We may meet again soon. Be careful of yourself,' and Forrester turned and left me as abruptly as he came.

He had been gone but a few minutes when Buston entered the lodge.

'Where is Arthur?' I asked.

'I hope he's in some safe place,' he replied, hesitatingly.

'Have you seen or heard from him?'

'I can't say I have.'

'You know nothing of his fate, then?'

'I'm sorry to say I'm perfectly ignorant on that subject. It won't be well for you to think much about him at present. Try to get up again as soon as you can; that'll be better nor anythin' you can do. You've had a long sleep.'

'How long have I slept?'

'You went to sleep at dark; it's mornin' now.'

'I feel much better. Where are the rest of our friends?'

'They are on the way here. You will be likely to see uncommon Florry afore the sun goes down.'

'How did you find me?'

'We stumbled upon a tall, mighty queer chap, who put us on the trail.'

'Is it possible?'

'It isn't more nor less than possible.'

'How did the stranger appear?'

'Jest as though he was in a great hurry, and had got to go in another direction, post haste.'

'Did he say much?'

'He *pinted* out the direction, and told us not to let the grass grow under our feet.' Just as he was turning away he said: 'if you don't find him there, I shall find him in another place, and you can tell the young gal so. With that he left us. We didn't have time to ask who he was, or where he came from. We followed his directions, and found our way into this curious place, where we discovered you tied safely to a cotton-wood.'

'Where is Two Forty?'

'That uncommon horse ain't a great way off, you may depend on't.'

At that moment Gilmore appeared. I felt truly glad to see his friendly face. He came and sat down beside me, felt my pulse, examined my tongue, &c., in a manner that evinced considerable knowledge of the healing art.

'You are a great deal better,' said he. 'You'll be able to give the varmints their due yet, my boy.'

'It is not the Indians I am indebted to for this last trick,' I answered, 'It is to Osborne.'

'Osborne!' exclaimed the trapper, with a start of astonishment. 'I thought you'd fixed the critter's final accounts?'

'He lives!'

'It was him, then, that left you to roast and starve in the sun?'

'It was; thanks to your timely aid.'

'The man you call Osborne won't never die a natural death,' returned Gilmore, earnestly. 'He'll step out of the world in some awful and unexpected manner. It ain't often I prophecy, but when I do, you may set it down as sunthin' sartain, and as will take place sooner or later.'

'Go it Isaiah!' said Buston.

'When I say that Osborne will die with his moccasin on, I don't exaggerate in any degree,' added the trapper.

'Speak your mind, Brass-Eyes. Don't restrain your natural piety.'

'I've often told you that my name wasn't Brass-Eyes, or any sich nonsense, and I'd thank you to bear it in mind,' returned Gilmore, in an offended tone. 'I've stood it as long as I could, and I can't stand it no longer.'

'Explode, Gunpowder!'

'If you want the priverlege of standin' up afore Two Shooter, you can have it.'

'It wouldn't be a very comfortable place to stand, I reckon; but in case of necessity I shouldnt be afear'd to stand there.'

'It isn't my natur to quarrel, by no means; but I know of a capital spot for anythin' of that kind.'

'I hope it isn't a great way from here, old Flareup.'

'I'm the man as is ready to go to it at any minnit,' replied Gilmore, considerably excited.

I now thought it time to interfere.

'My good friends,' I said, 'cease to cavil about trifles. You will probably have fighting enough to do before you reach Utah Lake.'

'Right,' said Buston. 'There's no good reason why I should fight old Brass-Eyes. As long's the heart's in the right place, why should we mind about names. One name's as good's another.'

In a short time good humor was restored.

Before night the rest of our party joined us. I need not say that I was glad to see Flora; and that she proved an excellent nurse.

The reader will understand this, and why Buston said that 'oncommon Florry was a Great Medicine.'

But the fate of Arthur still remained a mystery, and cast a gloom over us all.

'I shall go and seek him,' said the elder Dale. 'I will never return until I obtain some knowledge of him.'

'Did you find the spot where I was taken?' I asked.

'I have reason to suppose so. I found a spot wet with blood, and some signs of a struggle, but no more,' replied Dale.

'I think he must be living,' I answered. 'Had he been slain, you would have found his body. I wish I was well, that I might go with you and share the danger of the undertaking.'

'Stay where you are until perfectly recovered. A few stout hearts will go with me, and with the blessing of God I hope to be successful. Flora will be your nurse until strength returns once more to your limbs; then it will be yours to protect her until I rejoin you.'

Dale departed, accompanied by two of the emigrants. Gilmore and Buston remained behind to protect those not able to go on the trail, and who naturally look to man for protection.

Under the gentle care of Flora, in a few days I was able to be about again, though my strength was not fully restored.

Had our minds been at ease in regard to Arthur, time would have glided on very pleasantly. Many hours did I sit by the side of Flora, and listen to the wild tales of Gilmore and Buston. Sometimes we heard these startling recitals in the open air, beneath the bright sun, or the silvery moon, and at others in the quiet lodge, during the mild hours of evening, while the howl of the wolf and the hooting of the owl was heard in the distance.

Once, when I had recovered sufficiently, we sat near the door of our rural habitation, and Buston related the following, which I feel would be defrauding the reader to withhold from these pages.

'Many years have gone by,' said Buston, 'since I began to wander up and down between Westport and the Rocky Mountains. You can't find many spots in this great country as isn't well known to me. I could call every river by name that rises among the mountains, and goes flowing towards the big, blue sea. As for Ingin creturs, I know the whole race of 'em, and I can't say I know much good of 'em either. The Blackfeet and the Crows are the greatest blackguards of all the painted varmints. I've suffered a great deal by 'em, fust and last.'

Once I was trapping on Madison River. It wasn't a very safe place to trap, and I knew it; but as game seemed to be abundant thereabouts, I detarmined to try it awhile, hit or miss. So I found a snug out o' the way place, not far from the river, where I built me a little hut, which would answer my purpose very well while I staid there. You don't see such a place as that often, I tell you. On one side there was a great rock, as big as four of it, which sarved to conceal me from the Ingins. On the other three sides were thick and almost impenetrable thickets of furze and other kinds of wood. I used to be very careful about going about too boldly during the day; for I knew it wouldn't be prudent like. So when I went to set my traps, I took that part of the day when the creturs would be stirrin' the least. I was very successful for a time, and got quite a pile o' peltries. Well, one mornin' I went to look at my traps, and found that some of 'em had been stolen and carried off by the varmints. I said nothin', but set all the rest o' my traps in another place. I didn't sleep that night quite so well as usual, for I knew the creturs had discovered that a white trapper was somewhere in that neighborhood. I got up bright and early in the mornin', and went to look at my traps agin.

It was with the greatest difficulty that I could restrain my natural piety, when I found some more of 'em gone. Now you must know, youngster, that a man thinks a great deal of his traps, and don't like to lose 'em, when he's been to the trouble to carry 'em so fur. I tried to be as patient as I could, and set 'em agin, hopin' to have better luck.

I looked about a little and found tracks in the soft airth—tracks made by the varmints with moccasins on.

To tell the truth, and nothin' but the truth, I didn't sleep so well the next night as I did the night afore. I couldn't help thinkin' about my sitewation, all alone there in the woods. The Blackfeet might surprise and kill me any time, and I shouldn't be no wiser for it till I waked up and found myself dead.

The idee of dyin' in that style aint pleasant; it isn't like standin' up and fightin' for life, like a brave feller; there's a vast difference.

It allers struck me that dyin' in one's sleep was a kind of 'sneakin' way of gettin' out o' the world.

In the mornin' I visited my traps as usual, and found two more of 'em carried away.

'This wont do for me,' said I. 'I didn't bring my traps all the way up here, to have 'em stole by the tarnal Ingin indervidoals.'

I went to work and set my remaining traps in rather bad humor, and said some hard things. I reckon, about the varmints. When the night come agin, instead of going into my hut, I stationed myself in a thicket, near where my traps were set. I had a double barrell'd rifle at that time, that could be depended upon under all careumstances. Besides this, I had a brace of regular horse pistols, such as is used in the United States sarvice, by the troopers. These were tremendous things at a short distance, and would make a proper ugly hole in a cretur's skin. I loaded up my two shootin' sticks with oncommon care, and put my pistols in prime order, detarmined to sell my life at a dear bargain, if the Ingin indervidoals happened to find me. I laid down flat in the thicket, and watched the traps. I didn't make much noise, I tell you, for I understood woodcraft, though I say it myself as shouldn't say it.

I laid there hour arter hour, and all was as still as death. The stars come out kind o' pleasant like, and the moon shone down upon me as though it was the only friend I had on the airth. I shan't forget that night very soon, for I had a great many curious thoughts about that time. I had heerd people say that the planets was all

inhabited by some kind o' human natur; but it didn't seem to me possible that any kind of a varmint whatsoever, could manage to live up there. I made up my mind as I lay there, that there wasn't a single indervidoal livin' upon any of the heavenly bodies. The stars and the moon was made to illumernate the airth durin' the night, and for nothin' else.

But that's neither here nor there. My views of astronomy mayn't be altogether interestin'.

While I was studyin' about the moon and stars, and all sich nonsense, I heerd a noise not a great way from me. I thought at once it must be one o' the varmints, and so I opened my eye tight.

'What does that mean?' asked Gilmore.

'Keep cool, Brass-Eyes, and I'll tell you all about what happened. As I was obsarvin', I opened my right eye tight, and kept up a terrible lookin' towards my traps. The sounds that I heerd at first kept comin' nearer and nearer, and seemed to me like somethin' walkin' cautiously. Well, on it come, and pretty soon I had the uncommon satisfaction of seein' a Blackfoot standin' right over one o' my best traps.

The critter stooped down and sprung it with a stick, then took it up and was turnin' to look for some more, when I reckoned it was time to stop him. I aimed at the critter's head, and it's my opinion that a rifle ball never went through an indervidoal's upper story easier than that same ball did.

The sinful varmint dropped the trap all of a sudden, and fell back without so much as half a groan. I dont think the red feller ever realized what sent him off to the happy huntin' grounds. It was good enough for him, for its awful wicked to steal traps! I waited a few minutes to see if any more of the creturs were near, and then dragged the body and threw it into the river. When I had done this I set my traps, and took my place agin in the thicket. It was all of an hour afore I was disturbed agin. At the expiration of that time. I heerd other sounds, and another heathen in-

dervidoal made his appearance. I was nearer to this one than I had been to the other.

He sprung the trap just as his predecessor did. I let him turn fairly round with his back to me, then I couldn't restrain my religious feelin's no longer.

I jumped to my feet like lightnin', and lit right down behind him, *chucked* the rifle agin the back of his head and let drive. The cretur tipped over like a brick, and didn't give me so much as a crooked word, or look. His face wasn't in a state for his friends to recognize him you'd better believe. I threwed him into the drink, just as I had done the other.

'And you killed the whole tribe in that way, I s'pose,' said Gilmore.

'No, I didn't, Two Shooter; you shall hear. When I had dragged the Ingin's body into the drink, sunthin' seemed to tell me to go towards my hut and see what was goin' on in that direction. I obeyed the in'ard promptin's and crept softly back.

When I got very near the door, I began to think that I wouldn't go in, so I sat down in the thicket a little way off. You perceive that I had fired twice, and I was afeared the noise might attract the attention of other Ingins who might be in that vicinity.

I sat there with my rifle across my knees, thinkin' about it a long time—perhaps an hour. I didn't feel in the best of temper, because I couldn't keep the traps out o' mind. Just then I heard a slight rustling among the leaves. I looked steadily towards the spot where it come from and presently I saw a human cretur. He walked directly towards my hut. As soon as he reached the door I knew him. It was a *voyageur* whom I had seen in various places, under various circumstances. He was half French and half Ingin, and a rascally feller he was. He was allers found hangin' about some o' the Ingin tribes, puttin' them up to all manner of mischief. If he knew where there was white trappers or hunters in the vicinity, he was sure to go and see 'em, and pretend to be a great friend to 'em, find out where their peltries were, whether they had any *caches*, and

what was in 'em. When he had found out all he wanted to know, he wouldn't fail to play some ugly trick with 'em. If he couldn't manage 'em alone, he'd bring down a lot o' the varmints upon 'em, and ten to one, if some of the whites wasn't murdered on the spot.

As good fortune would have it, I had got pretty well posted up in regard to this cretur, for he had played off one of his tricks on me; but I was fortunate enough to escape with my life, and that was a great *marcy*.

I never could think of this treacherous varmint without sayin' some kind o' wicked words and I had resolved more nor once, to settle his final accounts. When I saw the anermal I couldn't restrain my religious feelin's on no account whatever.

'Go it, Bust-your-Biler!' said Gilmore.

'I'm gettin on as fast as I can; so dont interrupt me.

The half-breed cretur stopped at the door and listened; but he couldn't hear nothin', of course. He next tried the door to see if it was fastened. Findin' it wasn't, dont you think he had the impudence to push it open!

Well, arter doin' that, he seemed to grow bolder; first he *looked* in, and then he *walked* in, jest as though he was the lawful owner and perprieter of the consarn. I had managed to keep down my airly piety 'till that minit; but when I see him doin' that, I give right up to my feelin's. I arose from where I was sittin' and walked arter the varmint in double quick time, to use a military figure of speech.

I met him face to face in the door, and you probably never see a cretur looked so astonished. I had one of the horse pistols in my hand and the way it was loaded up was no man's business.

As soon as he saw me, he began a long per-larver, and tell me how glad he was to see me and all that kind o' stuff.

'That sort o' nonsense don't work on me,' said I, 'and with that I held the pistols about a foot from his stomach, and let him have it in the bread basket. He jumped up and yelled as though sunthin' had hurt him, and couldn't

seem to git over it. He rolled round on the ground like a mad cretur, tore up the airth with his hands bit at everything in reach, and put himself into all manner o' shapes, and in fact acted as though he had the *rebellious* colic.

'Go it, Cattridge-Box!' says I, 'It'll do you good in the long run. You need sunthin' extraordinary to change your wicked natur.'

I let him kick round a spell, jest to give him a chance to prepare for the new country he was goin' to.

'Very kind in you,' said Gilmore.

'Of course I didn't want to injure the varmints eternal prospects in the least. When a human critter is layin' aside his airthly natur, what has he to cheer him but his eternal prospects? Nothin' under the light o' the sun.'

'Well, dont keep the critter in pain,' added Gilmore.

'No longer than is good for his eternal consarns, Brass-Eyes.'

'He's been kickin' about five minits!' retorted Gilmore.

'That's but a short time on the very last end of a human cretur's life; but I'll finish him off if it'll be any accommodation to you, sooner nor I meant to in the first place, though I mustn't do no violence to the facts of the case.

When I thought his mind in a suitable state, and he was *willin'* to go, from this world o' pain I jest clapped 'tother pistol to the place where his nateral brains ought to have been and blazed away. It seemed to change his whole disposition. He laid down on the cold airth as quiet as though nothin' had happened. He's never been known to interfere with other people's consarns since; and I believe that was the last thing that ever occurred to him.'

'What did you do then?' asked the trapper.

'Gathered up my peltries, took my traps and started, resolved to git out o' sich a dangerous neighborhood as quick as possible.'

'Did you have a hoss?'

'Of course I had; a free trapper is never without a hoss, unless he meets with terrible bad luck.'

Two forty carried me a long way afore I concluded to make any stop. I commenced trapping agin in the neighborhood of Saptin's, a friendly infensive sort o' people, liven' upon the Yaller Stone, and its tributaries. I set my traps on Tongue River, which runs along near the base of the Black Hills, and I believe takes its rise among 'em somewhere.

Well, while I was there, I did sunthin' as I never did afore; I fell in love.

'Who with, Buston?'

'The gal was half Mexican, and half Ingin and a handsomer cretur you never set eyes on. Her father and mother were both livin' with the Saptins. I did my best to please 'em all, and succeeded. But I had a rival, and he was one of the chiefs of the tribe. He looked on me with an evil eye, as you may suppose; but I wasn't afeard of him, by no means, though he give me some ugly looks. The old folks consented, and I was married to my Ingin gal, in true Ingin style.

'Half Mexican, you said just now,' interrupted Gilmore.

'So she was, Brass-Eyes, and it would have done your eyes good to see her, she was sich a pictur of natural beauty. She was as much like oncommon Florry, as she could be, and I often think of it when I look at her. She proved a *rare* lovin and good wife while I had her, but that wasn't long; for she mysteriously disappeared one day, and I've never seen her since, from that time to this; and that was four years ago yesterday.'

'What on airth become on her?' asked the trapper.

'Can't tell you. All I know is that she disappeared, and that chief also disappeared, and wasn't seen no more among his people. I shan't never forget my Ingin gal, though I may wander over all parts o' the world. I never git up in the mornin' without thinkin' on her; and I never go to bed at night without hopin' that no harm has come upon her.'

'What was your gal called?' interrogated Gilmore.

'She was called the Runnin' Ivy,' returned

Buston, gravely. 'That was her Ingin name.' 'That's because she run away, I s'pose?' 'No; she was allers called the Runnin' Ivy.' 'She didn't prove to be the kind of Ivy that would cling to your affections,' added Gilmore.

'She was the *Runnin'* sort,' returned the hunter, with a sigh.

'Did you own a dog at that perticular period o' time?' asked Gilmore.

'I did, Brass-Eyes; and he had three names two for week days and one for Sundays. I allers run to extremes in all things. But I never could keep anythin' a great while at a time, more's the pity.'

'It appears,' added Gilmore, 'that you've had a runnin' dog and a runnin' wife, and a runnin' hoss! What in the name o' natur will you have next?'

'Don't be hard, old Catridge-Bax. Keep down your nateral piety. I shan't never forget the Runnin' Ivy.'

So we parted for the night; Buston to dream of the Runnin' Ivy, and I to dream Flora.

Gentle reader, whose dreams do you think were the sweetest?

CHAPTER XIV.

SURROUNDED.

WAS awakened early in the morning by Buston.

'What's the trouble?' I asked.

'Trouble enough,' he answered, hurriedly.

'We're surrounded.'

'Surrounded by mountains,' I replied, with a smile.

'By the Ingins.'

'What kind of Indians?'

'I dont exactly know; Utah's I should think.'

'What leads you to suppose we are surrounded by savages?'

'I've seen 'em, and isn't that enough?'

'Where, Gilmore?'

'He's tryin' to get a chance to bring Two Shooter to bear on some on 'em.'

I lost no time in arming myself, and then sallied out with Buston.

'You see that spur of the mountain on your right?' said the hunter, pointing with his finger.

'Yes.'

'Well, airly this mornin'—half an hour ago, perhaps—I see several of the varmints runnin' rom place to place, and peerin down upon us. I went and waked Gilmore, and he see the same. We kept kind o' quiet, and it wasn't long afore we see some more off in that direction. We then begun to watch putty close, and found in a short time that they were all around us.'

'If there were no females with us this would not be such bad news; it is for them only that I fear.'

'I'll fight for oncommon Florry and the female creatures as long as I can lift a hand. I'm not the man as gives back when danger and death looks me in the face.'

'Thank you Buston.'

'I'd stand up alone between oncommon Florry and a thousand Ingin indervidoals.'

'And you'd fight nobly, too.'

'I'd do my best, young man, and that's all anybody can do. Keep behind the trees as much as you can. Don't seem to be suspicious of anything wrong. There, this is a good place for observation: Let us set down here and watch a little while. I dont think they can see us here.'

I followed the directions of Buston. We took our position in a small cluster of trees. From the place we occupied, we had a very good chance to scan the mountain ranges around us. My eyes wandered anxiously and nervously along their steep and broken sides. Well could a wily enemy lurk among the thousand hiding places they afforded. There were beetling cliffs, mighty fragments of rocks, rent—heaven only knows how—by some terrible convulsion of nature; yawning chasms; precipices of a dizzy depth; gorges deep and almost inaccessible to unpractised feet.

'Look!' said Buston.

'Where?'

'Away there. Do you see?'

'Ido. I see a painted face. It seems to be nearing us.'

'It's a scout, probably. He's a comin' to see what we look like. It'll be well for him not to come too near.'

'Now I can see his shoulders. By heavens! he's reconnoitering, sure enough.'

'That's the varmint's intention, youngster.'

'Have you warned the rest of the encampment of the impending danger?'

'Gilmore'll attend to that. He isn't the man as will neglect anythin' as consarns the general safety. They've all got their orders afore this time. It wont be long afore you'll see all the men as can lift an axe, busy at work. See! they're at it now. They'll build a fort as will hold us all afore night, if the creturs don't come down upon us; and there aint much danger o' that, because they don't like fair fightin'. They prefer to fight behind trees, or to make their attacks under the cover of darkness.'

'After all they may be nothing but Root Diggers, and do not intend any acts of hostility.'

'They're led on by a white man,' replied Buston; 'a white man as stands more nor six inches in his shoes.'

'Osborne!' I exclaimed.

'Perhaps so; but I don't know. Gilmore and I caught a glimpse of a white face among the painted devils, and that's all we know about it. Just look at that feller, now!'

'I am observing him. He seems determined to find out what kind of a state of defence we are in. He sees the settlers at work.'

'And it don't please him, I dare say.'

'What should you call him?'

'A Utah.'

'Where is War Path?'

'He went with Dale.'

'And where is the trapper and guide, called La Roy, who joined us at White River?'

'He shouldered old Ironsides and went his way. He said there was a voice callin' him, and he must obey it.'

'A brave man! I would he were with us. Poor Arthur!'

'He was a fine lad,' answered Buston, 'and it will make sad the heart of oncommon Florry.'

'That Indian is still coming towards us.'

'He's makin' for that precipice jest afore him. When he reaches that, he'll have a good chance to see all that's goin' on.'

'I wish he might tumble over it and break his confounded neck!'

'He'll be careful not to do that. The creturs love life as well as a white man; though some of 'em die better. That's a darin' varmint. Cuss his ugly pieter! If it's only a little nearer.'

'He is a daring fellow, sure enough. He stretches his long neck over the precipice, and looks down. And now nearly half his body hangs over the yawning abyss. Wouldn't a rifle ball reach him from here?'

At that very instant there was a sharp report. The Indian scout swayed to and fro a moment, grasped spasmodically at the surrounding bushes, and then went whirling down the awful height.

'Good heavens! He's gone!'

'Go it, Cattridge-Box!' exclaimed Buston, with a yell of delight.

'Hurrah fer Gilmore!' shouted the sturdy settlers, who had been observing the progress of the scout for the last five minutes. 'Gilmore forever!'

Hark! All along the ragged sides of the mountain ranges, from gorge and rock, and beetling cliff, there breaks forth a yell, as if hell itself had cast forth its inhabitants, to give vent to their long pent up curses.

The helpless children and females within our encampment heard the terrific outburst; some grew deadly pale, some fainted, and others screamed with terror.

'That was a capital shot,' said the hunter. 'Two Shooter never did better. But it was unexpected, and the red-skin didn't have time to think of the happy huntin' grounds twice afore he was off.'

'I should like to get a good chance at one.'

'You'll have a chance afore many days, my lad. We shall have fightin' enough to do for a week to come. Look! I can see another cretur. If it's only where Brass-Eyes is. I wonder if he sees him?'

'Could he reach him, think you?'

'I think he could. Two Shooter's great on a long shot.'

'Gilmore's hard to beat.'

'He can't be beat. He's a dead shot. When you see old Brass-Eyes run his two lookers along them ere sights, you may know that sunthin' is goin' to be rubbed out, and that immediately. It's a little too fur to fire, but I've a mind to try the cretur. By aimin' high, I think I might possibly finish up his snubblunary consarns.'

'You'll have to do it quick, then, for he's making off with himself.'

The comical old hunter was in the act of bringing his rifle to his shoulder, when the well known crack of Two Shooter came once more to our ears.

'The devil sieze Brass-Eyes!' exclaimed the disappointed hunter; 'he's cheated me out 'o my shot. The red 'un has tumbled over.'

'You were a little to late that time, my good friend.'

'Jest half a second. The varmint tipped over kind o' graceful like, and I 'spose it won't make much difference in the long run who settled up his airthly consarns. There's one enemy the less at any rate. Moses in the bulrushes! how they yell up there!'

The figure of Gilmore was now seen approaching us. He appeared calm and collected as usual, but more serious.

'It was handsomely done,' said I, as he joined us.

'Two Shooter never wastes good powder and ball,' replied the trapper.

'What's the prospect?'

'Bad.'

'Do you apprehend much mischief from them.'

'If a single one of us lives to tell how I shot them two critters, we shall fare better than I have reason to expect. I don't want to excite anybody's fears; but we're in a desperate condition. There is hundreds of them varmint to a mere handful of us.'

'What shall we do?'

'Jest what they're doin' there; try to make

the place as strong as possible. Let's go and help 'em.

We all set ourselves to work right earnestly to erect a kind of fort with ramparts where the women and children could find a place of comparative safety while we were able to fight for them.

The enemy did not suffer us to proceed peaceably with the work, but annoyed us with an incessant firing. As they had but a few rifles among them, most of their shots fell short but those who ventured within reach of our rifles were sure to be the sufferers. Several of their balls fell near us, and once, one struck a tree I was cutting into; but it merely wounded the bark, its force being spent.

Occasionally a settler would put down his axe, seize his rifle and blaze away at his persecutors. Sometimes these shots would have effect; though not invariably; for the enemy was not near enough as a general thing for dead shots.

The work of fortifying our mountain embosomed home went on rapidly. A kind of fort formed of the trunks of the largest trees we could find, was soon erected. In building this, strength and not neatness was the sole desideratum.

Several times we feared the savages would make a general attack in order to defeat our purpose.

But the most they did was to creep as near as they dared, covered by a high rock, or under shelter of trees, fire, and not show their heads at all.

'I can see one approaching,' I said to the old trapper, who was busy at my side, 'and when he gets near enough, I shall fire at him.'

'Well, keep your eye on him, and pretend not to see him all the while.'

I watched the red skin as he gradually drew near. He was advancing under cover of a rock; but it was not large enough to conceal his entire body, and at almost every moment some portion of his person was exposed. This he did not appear to be aware of, so he came on.

'As soon as he fires, you take your rifle and level it towards the rock. It won't be long

afore he'll pop his head up; when he does that let fly and take him right between the two eyes,' said Gilmore.

The red-face came on. He reached the rock. I saw him aim and fire. The moment he fired his head disappeared.

'Now's your time,' said Gilmore.

I levelled my rifle towards the rock.

'Be patient; his head will come up soon,' added the trapper.

'I was patient, and the head came up as predicted. I fired, and the head disappeared.'

'He's got it,' said Gilmore. 'I wish all the reptiles were sarved in the same way. It would be better for you and Flora—it would be better for us all.'

Several incidents of a similar character occurred during the day.

I would have whispered many words of comfort to Flora, but there was little need of it; she was one of the calmest and most hopeful among us. Instead of needing strength, she was able to speak words of consolation to us. She was a little paler than usual, but I noticed no other change. The yells of the savages did not seem to terrify her; and the sound of the firing did not discompose her nerves.

'I am more inured to this kind of life than you imagine,' she said with a smile. 'Do not make yourself miserable on my account. There is *One* who is able to protect us in all places. Let us not forget His name.'

'I am a sinful man, but since you desire it, I will endeavor to direct my thoughts to Him.'

'Do it, not because I bid you, but because it is your *duty*, Edward.'

'I shall try to obey you, Flora.'

'Promise me one thing.'

'I will—two, if you wish.'

'Do not expose yourself to danger unnecessarily.'

'Since my life is valued by you, I will not.'

'Do you know I have been thinking of Arthur?'

'I saw you weep to-day, and though you were. What is it that you have been thinking of him?'

'That he may still be living; I dreamed that he was last night.'

'There is much in dreams,' I replied, hoping to encourage her by my seeming faith.

'I know there is, but you do not think so.'

'Didn't I say so?'

'You did; but you know *why*. As I was about to tell you, I dreamed of seeing Arthur, and he seemed well, and in no danger. You will think me weak; yet I have felt less uneasiness since on his account.'

'It makes my heart glad to hear this from you,' I answered. 'Your dream will prove sooth, I doubt not.'

'He was a good brother,' added Flora.

'A noble fellow. It will be a happy day when we meet.'

'Happy indeed,' said Flora, with a sigh.

CHAPTER XV.

SKIRMISHING.

BEFORE night we were in a tolerable state of defence. The structure which was to supply the place of a fort, was completed, and the men were employed in building a kind of breast-work around it. This was also built of the trunks of trees, arranged with strength and order.

If driven from this wooden rampart, we could retreat to our fort, and keep the enemy at bay there.

'What do you think of this work?' Gilmore asked.

'I think it will do us good service. It is well and strongly built. I see nothing to hinder us from fighting a good battle.'

'So we shall, my boy. We've been in one tight place afore; but it was'n't much tighter nor this, arter all. We stood beside each other then, and we'll do it agin. Only a single thread separated us from the gateway of eternity then. I've thought about it a great many times since, and wondered to myself that a youngster like you, could be so cool in the face and eyes of death. Perhaps you wouldn't be so willin' to die now, my poor boy. There's Flory, you know, to think about.'

The kind old man paused and wiped his eyes with the sleeve of his hunting shirt.

'Poor gal!' he added, 'perhaps she'll be spared. God knows how to take care of his own.'

'Let us hope so,' I replied. 'Let us hope and pray that it may be thus. As you have observed, you and I have been in a straighter place than this and escaped.'

'I've got to mark here the critter made with the burnin' brand; and I shall be the last human bein' to forget it,' answered my friend.

'When do you think they will attack us?'

'I shouldn't wonder if they did to-night. In fact they'll be skirmishin' all night—perhaps all the time.'

'There's one thing that we must think of.'

'What's that, boy?'

'What we shall eat and drink, provided we should be besieged for any length of time.'

'An old backwoodsman like me wouldn't be likely to forget *that*. There has'n't been a minit in the day but I've had my mind on't. If the critters can't fight us out, they'll starve us out; that's what they mean to do.'

'How long do you suppose what provisions we have will last us with economy?'

'Not much more nor three days at the longest.'

'Let me ask you one thing more: Do you think it possible for any of us to pass through the narrow defile by which we entered this place at the deepest and darkest hour of the night, and return again?'

'I won't say that it can't be done, but I'll venture to say that the human critter that undertakes that, will go on a *forlorn hope*—and you needn't expect to see him come back agin.—Them's the natur of my honest senterments, roughly expressed, accordin' to my nateral abilities. When it comes to that, my lad, I'll be the man as will go.'

'We shall see about that,' I answered.

'I've made up my mind to it, if worst comes to worst.'

'But few persons would be required to defend so narrow a pass.'

'I know it, but when that's done they must be outwitted. We are commanded to be cunning as serpents, and that's what we must do to git along with these Ingin indervidoals.'

Our whole party now took possession of the new structure, and forlorn as our condition was, we felt a sensation of relief when we found ourselves surrounded by those strong, though rude walls; but it was not on our account that we felt relieved—there were helpless ones with us for whom we cared.'

'How much like the Runnin' Ivy she looks,' whispered Buston to me, looking significantly at Flora, while she busied herself in performing woman's offices in the new dwelling.

'Poor girl!' said I, thinking of the danger that surrounded her.

'Have a stout heart,' said the trapper, 'I dare say there won't be no more nor half on us killed, and a few burned at the stake; and it's kind o' consolin' like to think on at this perticerler period o' time.'

'Consoling?'

'In course it is. I say that perhaps there won't be no more nor half or two thirds on us rubbed out, and leave the *probationer* state.—Now we can't tell who'll go, or who'll stay, because it would make us oneasy if we did.—We can set our minds to rest, and say inardly, it may be him, or it may be her, or this one, or that one, or tother one, and it leaves us a hope to cling to.'

'I can't see it in the light you do. The thought of half of us being roasted, in the way you hint at, makes me shudder.'

'But you mustn't think it's yourself that's goin' to be *agonized*, but some other onfortunate indervidoal.'

'I think we shall fight some before any of us will be roasted,' said a settler who had been listening attentively to the conversation.

'Them's the nater of my own in'ard senterments,' responded the trapper, who stood near us.

'When it grows a little darker,' resumed Buston, 'I shall go out and take a scalp, the Lord willin' and the weather permittin'.'

'You'll have to climb for it,' retorted Gilmore.

'Perhaps so, Brass Eyes. We shall have more knowledge on that perticerler subject arter we *know*.'

When the shades of evening began to gather, Buston loaded his rifle with great care. He then sat down and smoked a few whiffs of the fragrant weed with his usual carelessness of manner. He then arose and left the fort, for such I must call it, for want of a more appropriate name.

Our horses were all fastened within the breast works, with the exception of Two Forty, he being allowed to nip the grass without, close to the rampart.

'Two Forty come here; I want to see a you a minnit, and perhaps more nor that time.'

Two Forty pricked up his ears, and came briskly towards his master.

'Do you feel willin' to trot me round this 'ere holler square, old feller?'

Two Forty rubbed his nose against Buston's arm, as if to signify his willingness to trot his master anywhere he might want to go.

'I'd recommend you to go as if you'd been somewhat kicked in cend,' continued the trapper, vaulting upon the highly trained animal.

'What in the name o' the Bible are you goin' to do?' asked Gilmore.

'Keep down your religious feelin's, Brass Eyes. The Lord willin', and the weather permittin', I shall ride out for the ginerel benefit of my in'ard constitution. You'd better git your shootin' irons in order, because it is'n't onpossible that there may be a chance for you to go into the red niggers like *buildin' material*, afore long.'

'Like bricks, you mean?'

'I don't mean nothin' shorter, Brass Eyes. Go it, Two Forty.'

And Two Forty sprang out of the enclosure like a wild and maddened steed that had never champed the bit, or felt the weight of the saddle.

'What mad trick is the rattle-headed critter tryin' now, I wonder?' exclaimed the trapper. 'He won't never die in his bed. Jest see that

onaccountable varmint go. The Old Nick's in that hoss, or he never entered any critter on the airth.

Away sped Buston without saddle or bridle, whooping and yelling like an Indian. With increasing speed he swept around the mountain enclosure, followed by a continuous fire from the enemy; and answering cries of derision and defiance.

As he dashed on like a madman, guiding Two Forty with his feet and hands, he seemed to form a part of the animal, and govern him by the will only.

'I've seen a great deal o' ridin' in my day,' said Gilmore, 'but I never seed anythin' like that afore.'

'Except once,' I replied.

'Right, boy; when Black Ralph leaped that chasm!'

'It don't seem possible that he can live to make the circuit of the valley,' as the savages kept raining their balls after the fearless hunter.

But Two Forty bore his master nobly onward, despite the leaden shower.

Much to my amazement, he accomplished the circumference of the valley, unharmed by powder and ball. Suddenly Two Forty turned to retrace his steps, influenced, doubtless, by a well known sign from his rider; but instead of going in a circle he flew off in a tangent, and away he went, climbing up the spur of a mountain where the ascent was less steep and dangerous. Before we had time to recover from the new astonishment, which this bold manœuvre occasioned, he was within rifle distance of the enemy. Two Forty suddenly became motionless as stone, and instantly the report of Buston's rifle announced that the object of this daring act was accomplished.

The moment the rifle cracked, the horse turned and made for the fort. As a natural consequence the Indians rushed from their coverts, and many of them came whooping after the rider and his steed.

'Now's our chance!' exclaimed Gilmore, and brandishing 'Two Shooter' over his head he darted from the enclosure, with a speed scarce-

ly to be expected from one of his years, followed by myself and settlers. Buston dashed past us, and we fired several shots with good effect, judging by what we could see, and the yells which each fire occasioned.

For a few moments the bullets went singing about our ears in dangerous proximity. One of the settlers was wounded in this rencontre, and it was a long time before he fully recovered.

I wish I could jest put my eye on that white turn-coat for the space of a second,' said the trapper. As he spoke, a ball whistled through his foraging cap.

'Tisn't the first time, by no means,' he added, coolly. 'That's happened afore, more nor once; but a man can't die 'till his time comes. I'll fix the critter as-fired that.'

Gilmore was as good as his word. He fired, and I distinctly saw a dusky son of the wilderness go down.

How often, since that time have I recalled the strange scenes of that period of my life.—Even in the calmer sleep of riper years, have they passed and repassed vividly before me. I have seen the tall form of Gilmore, terrible in battle—the first to fight, the last to fly; and I have seemed to hear the crack of 'Two Shooter,' and have started up to see the keen eye that took such fatal aim, and knew how to send a bullet home—home to the heart. This is not all: I have seen Buston—with my dreamy eye—mounted upon Two Forty, flying over prairies, up mountains, speeding over every dangerous place, dealing death, returning in safety—cheering all hearts once more with his broad humor.

Gilmore—Buston; you will not be forgotten if God should lengthen out my life to the years of antedeluvian ages. You have stood by me in the hour of danger; your kind though rough words have comforted me in dark hours of extreme peril.

But there is one other vision that will never fade, and it is easily recalled. It is the vision of a youthful maiden—fair as the dwellers in the Moslem prophets' heaven—firm as the firmest, when the nerves of strong men are tried;

calm as the calmest, when the ruddiest cheeks grow pale: incomparable Flora.

I am digressing from my subject. The remembrance of the past has wiled me away; forgive me gentle reader.

We stood there in the moonlight, and fought as long as our balls could reach the enemy; but when they retreated to their mountain fastnesses, we returned to our fortification, where we found pale faces and anxious hearts awaiting us. Two Forty was grazing quietly close to the rampart, perfectly unmoved by his late exploits.

'A certain number of us will watch, while the rest sleep,' said Gilmore, 'for we shall all have need of strength.'

'I will take watch first,' said I. 'I never can sleep while danger is near. Do not speak to me of sleep. Look at these helpless ones, and listen to those distant shouts.'

'It's on account of these same helpless ones that I want you to get all the rest you can,' replied the trapper.

'None of us'll be likely to sleep much to-night, Brass Eyes,' said Buston. 'They'll try to surround us afore mornin', or I ain't no judge of red-skins.'

'I should'nt wonder,' answered Gilmore; 'but we'll be ready to meet 'em and trust in Providence.'

Not one of us laid down to sleep that night. Every one was ready and willing to do his best. We took our places silently at the breast-work, and with anxiety, looked continually toward the dim and shadowy mountain sides. Hour after hour sped on, and no sound disturbed the repose of the quiet air, save at long intervals, when the deep and melancholy cry of the wolf was borne to our ears, or when the night-owl sent forth his dismal hootings. Where were our foes? Had sleep set its silent seal upon their dusky lids? Were they dreaming perchance, in the land of souls?

All at once uprose upon every side of us the shouts of battle. The foe had crept down from their covert in the clefts of the rock, thinking to take our little fort by storm. We poured in

upon them a deadly volley, which seemed to disappoint and enrage them. They had hoped to find us unprepared. For a time the firing was incessant, and the Utah's held their own very well, considering that Indians are not good fighters, save in the woods. In one respect we had the advantage of them; our shots told a tale of death, while theirs rattled harmless, as a general thing, against the logs raised for our protection. Several of the settlers' wives made themselves useful during the engagement, not unfrequently loading guns. Before morning the firing ceased, and the savages fell back to their mountain fastnesses.

Not feeling inclined to sleep, lest we might afford the enemy some advantage, we naturally began to converse upon various subjects relating to Indians, and their mode of warfare. The name of Black Ralph was spoken more than once, when a settler by the name of Gray told the following story:—

'Before I settled upon the Red Fork of the Arkansas River, I was in the habit of trading with the Indians. I have made many journeys from Westport and St. Louis, up as far as Fort Laramie, and I have been as far as Fort Wallah Wallah, visiting the various tribes of Indians with whom the whites were on trading terms.

During these excursions, I usually joined some fur company, as it would have been very dangerous travelling alone. The articles of merchandise which I carried would have proved too tempting to the red men; I should have been murdered in the first dark pass, or in fact anywhere.

About a year and a half ago I left Fort Laramie in company with a party of trappers employed by the North American Fur Company. My object in going so far was to trade with the Nez Percés, Shoshonies, Bannecks, and other friendly tribes living near them.

When we reached the South Pass, I was taken sick. I awoke one morning, after a troubled sleep, with a dull, heavy pain in the back of my head and limbs.

My neck was stiff, my tongue was dry and parched, and my skin was hot and feverish.

I arose and washed my head in cold water, and strove to shake off the impending sickness; but it was too firmly fixed upon me to be shaken off so easily. When I had walked about a short time, a gloomy, desponding feeling took possession of me, and I went into the camp and laid down.

The pain in my limbs and head increased, and I felt a burning heat in all parts of my frame. I had a fever upon me. The trappers ate their breakfast as usual, and prepared to go on their way.

'Come, Gray,' said one, 'be lively—it's time to be moving.'

'I can't help it,' I replied, in a feeble voice. 'I'm sick, and can't go any farther.'

'He's got a regular fever,' said one. 'It'll be a long time before he'll be able to travel.'

'You won't desert me?' I said, with some anxiety of manner.

My companions looked at each other in silence.

'It would be an act of inhumanity to desert me,' I added.

'I suppose some one of us must stay,' replied the leader of the company, at length.

'Who will it be? is the next question,' added another.

'I will reward the man liberally who stays,' I said.

After considerable conversation which I could not hear, a Frenchman, who had acted in the capacity of *voyager* in our passage up the Missouri, volunteered to remain with me, for which service I was to pay him a stipulated sum.

Now I liked this fellow the least of all of them. There was not a single feature of his visage that was not ugly in the extreme. He in fact carried one of those villainous faces which marks a man an arrant rogue wherever he goes. With such a face he could not conceal his character—or disguise it for a moment. He was no favorite among the trappers. They said little to him and he kept himself sullenly aloof.

I believe every one of them was rejoiced to find any kind of a pretext to get rid of his company.

Such was the person who was left to care for me, during the weary and dreary hours of sickness. A poor companion indeed, even in health. He seemed more willing to tarry than I could have expected; but there appeared to me, to be a most diabolical smile upon his sinister lips all the while.

He produced an old black pipe, and sitting down where I lay smoked without interruption for an hour, favoring me occasionally with a glance from beneath his matted and heavy brows.

'Do you know much about fevers?' I asked. 'Moudieu! I know all about them,' he answered, with a hoarse laugh.

'Have you any knowledge of roots and herbs?'

'Le diable, I know all about roots and herbs too. Have you got any tobacco?'

I attempted to get him some tobacco from my package of goods, but I could not.

'It's in that,' I said pointing.

'I'll help myself,' said he; and in an instant his great red hand was tearing open the package. His eyes sparkled with pleasure, as he beheld the valuables contained therein.

I could not help shuddering at the singular expression of his face.

'You'll find a lot of the weed there, and you may use as much of it as you like.'

A grim smile was the only reply to that liberal offer.

My fever increased during the day. But my strange attendant did nothing but regale himself with smoking, and it would seem that he enjoyed it amazingly. If I turned restless from side to side, he smoked; if I uttered a moan of distress, still he smoked on unmoved.

When noon came, he replenished the fire, cooked a great slice of meat, and ate voraciously. The odor of the roasted meat, and the way he had of eating it made me sicker than ever.

While I lay there tossing upon the hard couch of fever, a curious idea suggested itself to my mind. I resolved to conquer my pain, lie still as possible, and impress him early with the belief that I was asleep. I hastened to obey

this inward impulse, and have reason to suppose that I succeeded in feigning a pretty sound sleep. But I kept one eye upon my kind nurse, you may rest well assured.

When my breathing became deep and regular, like the respiration of a sleeper, he began to look at me more attentively, and mutter to himself.

As I apparently kept on, his countenance grew fiercer in its expression, and he shook his fist at me several times; then he looked at my Indian merchandize with a greedy eye. This was not all; he got up and handled them over with evident satisfaction. He was thinking how much he could get for them if they were fairly in his possession.

Near the package lay my loaded pistols. I shall never forget the demoniac expression of his whole visage when he laid his hand upon them. He was in the act of cocking the weapon, when I thought it was about time to begin to wake up. I did so with a well counterfeited start and a moan.

The fellow threw down the pistols instantly, and commenced re-filling his old dirty pipe with great assiduity.

'This never will do,' I said to myself. 'There must be an end to this, or to one of us before a great while.'

'You told me you knew something of the nature of different kinds of roots and herbs,' I said with affected composure.

He nodded assent, without taking the pipe from his mouth.

'Well, if you know anything good for fevers, I want you to go and get it, and prepare it for me. When I recover, I will pay you well for your trouble.'

'I'll go,' he replied, 'but you'd better go to sleep first.' Before you wake up, I'll be ready for you.'

'You probably would,' thought I.

'Do not delay,' I said, 'for the fever is burning me.'

Rather unwillingly the fellow got up and left me. He had been gone but a short time before he returned pale and trembling.

I was greatly astonished to see such a change in his manner.

'What's the matter?' I asked.

'I've seen Black Ralph!' said he.

'No!'

'But I have.'

'Then probably your last hour is near,' I replied, wishing to impress him with that belief as much as possible. 'No person ever lives long after seeing him.'

'So the Ingins say,' he answered.

'How did he look?'

'Like nothin' human,' he replied, shaking his head dubiously. 'He rode a monstrous horse whose feet didn't seem to touch the ground, and he went like a messenger of Satan himself.'

'Is he a mortal, do you think?'

'He's a devil,' he answered, with an expression I shall remember to my dying day.'

'They say he always appears to those who have been *doing* wrong, or meditating some great crime,' I remarked.

The malignant villain fixed his smouldering eyes upon me as if to read the silent operations of my mind; but his face was as white as a winding sheet.

'I don't affirm that you have been guilty of any wrong,' I added, 'or that you have meditated any crime. I am only referring to the Indian notion of his character. If I were in your situation, I should prepare for the last journey.'

He produced his pipe again, and attempted to smoke; but he did not appear to enjoy it. He threw out a few whiffs, then held it in his hand until it went out.

How it rejoiced my heart to see this sudden change in his appearance. Perhaps fear would prevent him from carrying out his design of murdering me while I slept. Full of this idea, you will know why I talked to him in the way I did.

About an hour before sunset he got up and went out. He did not return. Night set in. I felt very sick, but managed to get some sticks and made a fire.

The waters of Sandy River flowed on, within gun-shot of me. I crawled down the bank and drank freely; for my thirst was intolerable. I then made the best of my way back, and laid down by the fire.

The deep draught of pure water which I had taken had a good effect. A gentle perspiration appeared all over my body, and in a little time I was wrapped in a profound slumber, forgetful of my late companion, Black Ralph, and everything else.

The sun was shining, and the birds were singing when I awoke. The first breathings of a delicious morning cooled the fever of my temples. I looked about me; the Frenchman was no where in sight.

What a sensation of relief I experienced when I found that he had not returned; for I knew I was fully in his power.

I arose, feeling somewhat better, though still feverish and sick.

Prompted by some impulse, I hardly knowing I walked slowly down to the river again, throwing off my garments, plunged into the waters. I shall always remember what a refreshing sensation of relief I experienced at the moment. My blood ceased to boil with fever; my brow to throb as if the veins of my forehead were bursting; my tongue no longer felt parched and burning in my mouth.

The fever had taken a favorable turn, and the crisis had past. I felt like a new man. The bath operating so favorably, I staid in the water a long time.

I came out at last, and while I drew on my clothes, tried to feel grateful for the mercy that had been shown me.

I returned to the camp, took my rifle, and walked until I began to perspire.

Just as I turned to go back, I saw a large buck looking at me with the greatest apparent curiosity. I immediately fired and wounded him; but the wound did not prevent him from running several hundred yards. I followed on at my leisure. Before I reached the spot where he fell, I saw a human body, cold stiff and dead, lying upon the ground.

It was the body of the Frenchman. I recoiled with an exclamation of horror. I had not entertained the remotest idea that any danger was really near him, though I had striven to excite his fears.

'Strange are the ways of Providence,' I murmured; as I strove to overcome the repugnance and dread which I felt, and approached the body.

Upon the left side directly over his false heart, was a small hole, about the size of a common rifle ball. Death had knocked there and found an entrance.

I sighed as I looked at him.

'Poor wretch!' thought I, 'you were unfit to live, and as unfit to die; but God is just.'

Deeply impressed, I left the spot, while the name of Black Ralph was associated with all that was strange and terrible.

In a few days I was sufficiently recovered to travel, and reached the country of the Shoshonies without accident.

CHAPTER XVI.

FINALE.

THAT'S a good story,' said Buston. 'A capital one,' I remarked. 'It illustrates the character of that unknown and strange being called Black Ralph. It would seem that he has indeed the singular faculty of ubiquity—existing in all places at the same time.'

'It's just as I've told you from the first,' said Gilmore. 'He's a critter as can't be tracked nor found out; one as deals out death in silence one as it isn't best to speak on too much.'

'And yet it appears to me,' I answered, 'that he never does any real hurt; it is those who meditate treachery only that need fear him. To the whites he seems a guardian angel.'

'Them's the natur o' my feelin's.' Give me your hand, boy,' and the old trapper gave my hand a hearty shake.

'What thinks uncommon Florry?' asked Buston.

'Just as our good friend Gilmore does,' she answered, with her usual kindness of manner. 'Do you give me your hand on that?'

'Both on 'em, if you wish; and you shall ride that uncommon hoss as long's he's able to trot out any human cretur.'

Upon the following day our fortification was strengthened by additional labor, and considerable skirmishing took place.

'I observed that a constant firing was kept up from a certain quarter which was in the neighborhood of several large rocks. This annoyed the men very much while they were at work. My own temper, as the kind reader knows, was not of the mildest kind, and I began to grow disagreeably excited; in short my evil nature got the mastery of me. I resolved to put a stop to their sport in that particular direction, or give them a chance to fire with some effect.'

Accordingly when the night set in, without making known my purpose to any person, I watched for an opportunity and glided from the encampment, as I believed, unobserved.

Anger often makes men imprudent, and it sometimes makes them cunning and cautious; and the last was the case with me.

Perhaps few persons are aware how much one resolute man can accomplish when he taxes every faculty of soul and body. He can perform wonders.

Strengthened by the fixed purpose, I felt within me, I crept towards the rocks which covered the foe. I was protected from view by the stunted shrubbery, and a rank growth of wild sage, as well as by the broken nature of the ground.

I went on slowly but boldly, and dragging my rifle after me. I had a large hunting knife in my belt, and an excellent pair of pistols 'good with a ball' and 'sure fire.'

Now in the hands of many persons these would have been almost harmless; but not so with me—for I had the courage necessary to use them—and courage will render any man formidable, if you give him anything like a fair chance.

I should think I was all of two hours in going two hundred yards up the mountain side. I was careful during this time to keep out of the range of the firing as much as possible; but in

spite of all I could do the bullets would go whistling over my head most musically. I resolved to see, if possible, something of the strength of the enemy, and I cherished a secret hope that I might meet Osborne—or rather that I might see him.

I felt myself in the right mood to encounter him then, and the thought of mercy or pity was not within me.

I worked my way onward with cat-like cunning. I knew well that I was performing an act of daring which few men would attempt, however experienced they might be in Indian warfare.

I was now quite near the nearest of the enemy, and the balls still whistled over my head. And often the shots of my friends from the encampment struck near and around me; thus was I exposed to a new danger.

I reached a large and broken hedge, from each side of which the red foe was firing. Nothing daunted, I crept onward with additional caution. I could now hear their voices distinctly when they spoke in an ordinary tone.

A few minutes more sufficed to take me to the place where the ledge terminated abruptly forming a covert for the enemy. Lying upon my face, I drew myself to its edge, and looked down upon the heads of about a dozen Indians. The ledge of rocks formed a fine bulwark for them. Having fired they would instantly retreat behind it, and remain in perfect security.

In the attitude I have named I observed their movements sometime. I heard the leaves rustle behind me. Alarmed I turned my head quickly to see what new danger menaced.

'Hush!' whispered a well known voice.

'Good heavens, Buston! is it you?'

'You may bet your life on it,' replied the hunter, in the same tone. 'Come on, old Brass-Eyes.'

'What, is Gilmore coming also?'

'Yes; he would do it. But aint you a brick, though!'

Then turning to Gilmore:—

'Hurry up, old Two Shooter; here's a chance for a sprinklin of death.'

'Hist!' whispered Gilmore.

For several minutes we all looked down in silence upon the unsuspecting red men. We drew back and gazed enquiringly at each other in the moonlight.

'It's best to have a shot all round,' said I; 'if it proves our last, so be it; and may heaven protect those we leave behind.'

'Two Shooter's ready,' replied Gilmore.

'Let each one select his Ingin,' replied Buston.

'And let the pistols do something said Gilmore.

'And the knife!' I added, with peculiar emphasis.

'Knife it is!' answered Buston.

'There won't be no great chance for it,' returned Gilmore.

'You've got a terrible ugly look about the eyes,' whispered the hunter.

Once more we gazed down upon our enemies. Some of them were loading their guns, others were telling of their daring exploits at different times and places; and a third party was engaged in knocking a buffalo's hump.

Each of us selected our man. The fellow whose heart I covered with the muzzle of my rifle, was pouring powder into his hand, while Gilmore, I observed, levelled at one who was relating many acts of bravery, with violent gesticulations, and a multitude of words.

'Are you all ready?' I asked.

'All ready!' was the whispered response.

'Let them have it then,' I hissed from between my fixed teeth.

We fired simultaneously. The Indian who was pouring powder into his palm, fell backward with it still in his hand; the fellow who was reciting his bloody deeds, left off in the middle of his story; the one who was roasting the hump, fell across his own fire.

Getting upon our feet, we ran to a spot where the ledge terminated less boldly, and leaped down among the Utahs. They were struck with a sudden panic, and fled from us.

'We followed and shot down several with our pistols. Their yells attracted the attention of

others who came rushing to their aid. Each of us grappled with a foe, and our hunting knives were soon reeking with crimson gore.

The first one I met hand to hand fell beneath the well-directed blow; not so with the second; for he was a strong active savage, and he struggled hard for the mastery.

We both fell to the ground, and tugging at each other's hearts, dealt furious blows. But I proved the stronger of the two, and when I arose I was grim and bloody, and my knife was quivering in his heart.

'It's time to go!' cried Gilmore. 'We've done enough for one night.'

'Go it, Catridge-Box! Give 'em death!' shouted Buston, in his loud ringing tones, at the same instant striking down a savage with his clubbed rifle.

Headless of the warning voice of Gilmore, I sprang at another Utah, and with a dextrous movement buried my knife in his bosom.

The trapper and Buston sprang forward to my aid; for the enemy began to press upon me in great numbers.

Though mirthful on ordinary occasions, Buston was a lion in battle. The enemy gave back. Gilmore, seized me by the arm and dragged me away.

'Now run, for life!' he exclaimed.

I hesitated.

'Think of Oncommon Florry!' said Buston.

The words acted like a charm upon me, and I ran for the fort with a speed that defied successful pursuit. We had accomplished half the distance when we were startled by a general discharge of fire arms.

The enemy had surrounded our fort during our absence, and we were cut off. We made a short halt, loaded our rifles, and with loud shouts attacked the enemy in the rear, with the fixed determination to force our way to the encampment, or perish in the attempt.

This bold manoeuvre took the Utahs by surprise.

Not knowing our numbers, they probably suspected there were many of us. They gave way, and we reached the fort in safety, greatly to

the joy of our friends, who were getting extremely anxious on our account.

'It'll learn 'em a good lesson,' said the trapper. 'They know now what kind of critters they've got to deal with.'

'Oncommon Florry is looking at you,' whispered Buston.

I looked up and met the gaze of Flora. She averted her eyes instantly, and a faint blush relieved for an instant the marble paleness of her face.

'You'd better wash your upper story a little, and your hands too. Your present appearance aint jest the sort to please the ladies, by no means,' added the hunter.

As I passed Flora, to do as my friend suggested, she placed a small pocket mirror in my hand. I glanced at it and returned it instantly, for I was startled at my own looks.

In a short time the firing without ceased, and was not renewed till the next day. At the urgent solicitation of friends, I laid down and slept soundly. I awoke greatly refreshed, and endowed with new hope and courage.

'The provision is gettin' short,' said the trapper, when we were alone. 'I've made up my mind to get out o' this place to-night and kill a buffalo.'

'That's easier said than done.'

'I know it; but there's nothin' onpossible. Who would have thought that you could have done what you did last night, and live through it; and yet you did live through it; well, what we're talkin' of seems hard to accomplish, and yet it may be done. It's a parallel case.'

'I will go with you.'

'That's what I was afeared of; I'd rather go alone.'

'What did you say?' asked Buston, who joined us at that moment.

'We were speaking about going through the defile in quest of food.'

'Two Forty and I are calculated for that kind o' business,' replied the hunter. 'We'll take the job off from your hands.'

'Fix it just as you please,' said I, 'only do not expose yourself unnecessarily.'

There was considerable skirmishing during

the day, resulting in nothing very important to either party.

A dark, stormy night set in. The thunder, heard faintly in the distance at first, now broke over our heads in terrible volleys. The lightning's flashed along the heavens, and the rain began to descend in torrents. A tree, not far from the encampment, was struck and shivered from the tops to the roots.

'It's a fearful night,' said Flora.

'Yes; the demon of the storm and the thunder rides triumphant. See! that tree is on fire. What a flash that was!'

'It lighted the whole extent of the mountain ranges, and I saw distinctly the faces of our foes,' answered Flora.

'The critters are afeared o' thunder. In times like this they think the Great Spirit is angry,' said the trapper.

'Perhaps now would be a good time to strike a blow,' I added.

'On such a terrible night as this?' asked Flora, with faltering accents. 'Somehow it seems wrong to seek the lives of our fellow mortals while the elements are in such fearful commotion.'

'What we do is in self defence, Flora.'

Buston now drew Gilmore aside, and they conferred together in a low tone. I heard the latter say 'I'll see to that,' and soon he left the fort.

Flora and myself were left standing alone at the door of the same.

'The storm abates nothing of its fury,' I observed.

'On the contrary it rages with greater violence. What a fearful crash that was! It shakes the mountain ranges, as it goes echoing among them. Think of the power of Him who is able to govern even the elements in their fiercest moods.'

At that instant a blinding flash illuminated the whole valley, and the rugged elevations that fenced it in.

'I thought that flash revealed the figure of a man,' remarked my fair and brave companion.

'Of an Indian, you mean.'

'A white man, Edward. Look towards the

spot where I am pointing, and when the next sheet of flame lights up the valley, you will perhaps see him.'

I followed her directions, and beheld distinctly the tall form of Gilmore. He was half way up the mountain side. I turned to look for Buston. When I found him, he was painting his face with various strange pigments unknown to me.

'Where is Gilmore going?' I asked anxiously.

'To git an Ingin dress,' he answered. 'I'm bound on an expedition, and must have one.'

'But how is he to procure one?'

'He'll strip one of the dead ones, and if he can't do no better, he'll use the knife.'

'That's a dangerous undertaking. I must follow him. The lightning will reveal him to the enemy.'

'So it would you, if you should go after him. Stay where you are. I'll risk Gilmore where I wouldn't risk myself. He'll be back in the course of three quarters of an hour. The varmints are kind o' bewildered now; the thunder and lightning puts a damper on their courage.'

'You intend, doubtless, to pass through the defile to-night?'

'You've guessed it, my lad. Two Forty and I are bound to shine.'

When he had finished painting, he took a buffalo skin and cut it into several pieces. These pieces he bound on to the feet of Two Forty. He was thus employed when I returned to the side of Flora.

'I have been watching the bold trapper,' she said. 'He is walking directly into the face and eyes of the enemy. It is a pity that such a brave man should throw away his life.'

Again the lightning flashed, and sent its broad glare of light along the mountains; but Gilmore had disappeared.

'I failed to see him that time,' remarked Flora.

'He'll be more cautious how he advances, probably, as he approaches them.'

The next time I saw the brave old trapper by the lightning's red lamp, he was fighting with the enemy—one man too many.

'Who will follow?' I cried, and seizing my arms, was rushing from the encampment, when Flora laid her hand quietly upon my arm, saying:—

'Stay, Edward. The old man is victorious. The last flash of lightning revealed him standing unharmed and alone. There, that flash revealed him returning to us.'

Flora was right. In a short time the trapper made his appearance, bearing a small bundle; it was an Indian's dress.

'Three cheers for Brass-Eyes!' said Buston. 'Go it, Cattridge-Box!' And three as hearty cheers went up from the fort as ever arose amid the din of a terrific storm.

I glanced at Gilmore's hands, and perceived that they were not of the natural color, the blade in his belt was of the same sanguine hue.

Buston took the dress without a word of inquiry, and soon returned to us the exact counterpart of a Utah Indian.

He mounted his famous steed, and with his usual—

'Go it, Two Forty,' sprang from the enclosure, and soon disappeared in the deep darkness.

Gradually the reverberating thunder ceased to break over our heads; the lightning grew fainter and less vivid, and long before morning the storm had passed.

The following day the Indians were unusually quiet, and we judged by certain movements which we noticed a general attack that was meditated sometime during the coming night.

The usual precautions were observed, and all went on quietly until about one o'clock. At that hour the mountain ranges were suddenly lighted by bright fires which streamed up one after another, and seemed to dance about in a singular manner.

'That's the work of a white man,' said Gilmore. 'Them lights are caused by pitch-pine torches, and they mean to burn us.'

'I doubt whether they can make these materials burn,' I replied.

'Some of these trunks was putty dry when we placed 'em here, and if they hadn't a been, it wouldn't have taken a great while to dry them in the hot suns we have here. They in-

tend to come down upon us in a body, throw their blazing torches on to our fort, and all around it. If they succeed in setting it on fire we are lost; but you'd better believe that some of the varmints won't live to see the sun rise to-morrow mornin'.

'We will shoot them down like dogs!' I exclaimed, 'if they make such an attempt.'

'We'll do our best, and nobody can do better nor his best.'

'If these helpless ones were not with us,' I replied, turning, and looking upon the emigrant families, 'I should care little for yonder red fiends.'

The emigrants—ten in all—were stationed judiciously within the ramparts, and everything in the shape of fire-arms was made ready for action. Some of the wives of the settlers took their places by the side of their husbands, with the heroic determination to die with them, if all our exertions should prove unavailing.

I observed one female in particular who exhibited great courage and spirit. The history of this female was somewhat singular, and she well deserves a passing notice. She was about twenty-five years of age. She had formerly been in captivity among the Crows, having been taken by them near the Wind River Chain of the Rocky Mountains, while on her way to the great Salt Lake, with a large party of emigrants. She remained among this wandering, marauding people for the space of two years, when she escaped from them during one of their long excursions near Laramie Plains.

Having some idea of the locality of Fort Laramie, she endeavored to reach it; but unfortunately lost her way, and fell in with the Arapahoes. She passed some months with that tribe of Indians, but finally escaped from them also, with the intention of finding her way to Bent's Fort. Again her evil genius prevailed.

Possessing little practical knowledge of that portion of the country, she failed to accomplish her object; but after many days of suffering, reached the settlement on the Red Fork of the Arkansas River.

When I joined the settlers, she had been

with them several months, but I knew little or nothing of her history, until her heroic conduct attracted my attention while we were besieged among the mountains, though her extraordinary beauty had often excited my admiration. She had domicilled with Mr. Gray, and had won the esteem of every one by her sweetness of temper, and many acts of kindness. But she always seemed to me to be laboring under a settled sadness, which nothing could dissipate for any great length of time. She always passed among us by the name of Alice. Between her and Flora a very strong and sisterly affection subsisted, and the dangers they had recently experienced had strengthened it.

Flora and Alice were standing near me, watching with painful interest the fires dancing meteor-like upon the mountain ranges.

'You had better retire within the fort,' I said, taking a hand of each.

'Flora had better do so,' said Alice.

'I prefer to stay here,' replied Flora. 'The feeblest hand can be useful where there is a will. I have foresight enough to perceive that those burning brands will be hurled among us; and I can extinguish one of them as quickly as the strongest among you.'

'Very true; but the thought that you are exposed to danger, will be sufficient to make me miserable.'

'Well, let us go in,' said Flora, and she and Alice left me to my unspeakable relief.

Before two o'clock, the fires of our enemies were approaching on every side. It was a strange and startling sight! Soon from the base of the mountains half way up their sides, the lurid glare of the flaming torches, fell upon grim and painted visages moving steadily towards us.

'That's the work of Osborne,' said Gilmore. 'Curses upon his renegade heart! That's what they've been so busy about all day.'

'There are hundreds of them,' I remarked.

'Yes, boy; it'll soon be all over with us.'

'And Flora?'

'Will be spared,' added Gilmore, 'spared by Osborne and for him.'

At that moment the object of my solicitude

approached and laid her little hand upon my arm.

'Edward, I have a request to make,' she said, in a low earnest voice.

'Speak on my own girl,' I answered, pressing the fair hand to my lips.

'It is that I may not be taken prisoner.'

'Not while I live, Flora.'

'That is not what I mean. When you see that all is lost, be more merciful than our enemies—put an end to my existence with your own hand.'

'Impossible! How could Edward Seward lift his hand against one dearer to him than his own life?'

'Edward, I entreat of you, by the love of merciful heaven, to listen to my request.'

'Promise,' said Gilmore, in a hoarse voice, while tears flowed down his weather-beaten cheeks. *Think of Osborne—save the dear gal from dishonor.*

'I solemnly promise!' I exclaimed with a choked and faltering voice.

For a single moment I held her to my heart, and kissed her cheeks, her brow, her lips, as I believed, for the last time on earth.

'My blessing on you, gal,' said Gilmore, in a broken voice. 'I'll do the deed with my own hand afore you shall be taken.'

Flora gently disengaged herself from my arms and disappeared within the fort.

'They come,' added the trapper, 'and their torches blaze finely. It will take every woman and child in the encampment to put them out, when they begin to fall among us. Hush!'

The stillness that had reigned hitherto, was now broken by an universal shout.

'It's a war-song,' said Gilmore. And higher and louder swelled the shout, and the chorus of savage voices. It rang out among the gorges with terrible distinctness, calling up innumerable discordant echoes.

'Be all ready, men!' cried Gilmore. 'Don't fire, a man of you, 'till you hear Two Shooter speak, then fight 'till you drop down dead.'

'So let it be,' answered Gray. 'There's not a man here that fears to die in defence of his own.'

On came the burning brands, swung aloft in savage hands, forming a circle of flame around us. More fiercely arose the battle shout. Our hearts seemed to stand still with expectation.

The circle of fire narrowed, and the wall of flame grew momentarily more dense.

The enemy were within gun shot, but Gilmore stayed his hand, and Two Shooter lay quietly across the breastwork. How deep and death-like was the hush that had fallen upon our little garrison.

The trapper stood immovable as a man of iron.

More dense and narrower still grew the flaming circle. We could see the red hands that held the burning wood, and the bedevilled faces that they lighted toward us.

There was a moment of breathless, fearful suspense. The eyes of the enemy were visible. Two Shooter leaped to Gilmore's shoulder, and fire streamed from the muzzle. A light went down, and the hand that held it, never held it again. Instantly we poured in a deadly fire. Many burning brands fell to the earth.

The Utahs wavered, and I heard a voice well known cheer them on.

'Oh for a shot at Osborne!' exclaimed the trapper.

With a fiendish yell they rushed upon us. As they reached the rampart, we gave them a second volley; but it checked them only for a moment.

'Now it is hand to hand, and man to man!' cried the trapper. 'Give 'em death! hurl their brands into their faces! fight like devils, all!'

While Gilmore was speaking, a shower of burning torches fell around us, and upon the fort. I saw the females rush from within and commence throwing them over the rampart with a heroism unequalled; and Flora was of the number.

'They are scaling the breast-work! Beat them back, men!' I shouted, and leaping forward, beat back three with as many blows. Desperately raged the battle for a few moments. Our men seemed to be everywhere at the same time, fighting with the strength of lions.

Though we fought with superhuman courage,

it was not possible in the nature of things that we could hold out long against such overwhelming numbers. Some of the enemy had already scaled our breast-work, which was blazing in several places, despite all our exertions; the fort was also on fire; one of the settlers was killed, and several of them desperately wounded. The smoke blinded us, and the burning sparks and splinters were continually falling upon us.

'Kill those within the breast-work!' shouted the trapper, and every one did his utmost to obey.

The flames were now spreading in every direction, and some portions of the breast-work were defended better by the fiery element, than we could have defended it with our bodies; but the enemy were pouring in, and the fight now went on within the ramparts.

I looked about for Flora. She stood near me. Her eyes met mine, and she said, in that dreadful moment of carnage and horror—

'Remember your promise!'

The words nerved me on to deeds of desperate daring.

'All is lost!' said Flora, as I ceased for an instant from the work of slaughter.

At that instant a white man leaped over the rampart, followed by a dozen savages. He sprang towards Flora, and threw his left arm around her, fighting with his right.

'We're lost!' shouted Gilmore. 'Remember your promise! Good bye, boy! God bless you, and give you an easy death.'

I heard no more, nor heeded the words of the trapper. I saw Alice struggling with a savage, and the ruffian arm of Osborne around the waist of Flora. I fought my way towards her, bearing down all before me.

The flames roared and leaped up from the breast-work, and from the fort, and hope abandoned every heart; but I still fought my way towards Flora.

All at once, over the flaming ramparts leaped a mighty steed and a mighty rider. As his face was seen in the red glare of the burning timbers, it was grim and terrible to our enemies as

would have been the visage of the arch fiend himself.

As he thundered down among us, he dealt fatal blows with a weapon which he wielded with his right hand.

The Utah's gave back, and he rode them down in spite of smoke and flame. Suddenly his eye fell upon Osborne. With a shout of exultation he spurred his gigantic steed, which, with a tremendous bound and snort, cleared the space between them and his victim. The instant the hoofs of the animal struck deep in the soft and bloody soil, the tall form of Osborne sank down to rise no more.

Alice was still in danger—for an athletic savage was in the act of striking his knife to her heart. The eagle glance of the strange rider was upon him—the steed dashed forward, and ere the fatal weapon had tasted the blood of Alice, the Utah's brains were dashed against the crackling timbers of the fort.

But the fearless hand that dealt the blow seemed suddenly paralyzed; the unknown threw himself from his horse, and with a cry of joy clasped Alice to his bosom.

As he did so, a deafening yell of 'Black Ralph,' and 'Machinito,' *Machinito!* rent the air, and the Utah's fled in every direction.

'Go it, Two Forty! Carry double!' said a voice, and Buston cleared the rampart with a flying leap, and a female clinging to his back. With his clubbed rifle he struck down one of the retreating enemy.

'Go it, Catridge-Box! the day is ours!' added the hunter, as he dashed after the flying foe at a mad rate, with his fair companion still mounted behind him.

In two minutes from that time there was not an enemy in sight.

'Thank God!' said Gilmore, fervently.

I held the fainting form of Flora in my arms, while our strange deliverer was using all the means in his power to recover Alice, who had relapsed into a deep and death-like swoon.

'This is the 'Runnin' Ivy,' said Buston, as he returned, and a sprightly looking girl jumped lightly from the back of Two Forty.

'If you could only find that dog with three names, you'd be a made man,' retorted Gilmore, with a smile.

'She didn't run away on purpose, Brass-Eyes, by no means. My old rival took her away by violence; but she escaped, and has lived among various tribes since. To-night I had the good luck to find her; but I had a hard chase to overtake her, as she didn't know who I was. So, when she found out, she jumped up behind, and left the Utah's with right good will.'

Our unknown deliverer now appeared, leading Alice by the hand.

'It's Black Ralph!' whispered Gilmore, but the words reached the stranger's ears.

'Forrester!' I exclaimed, involuntarily.

'You are both right,' he replied. 'I have been Black Ralph and the Forest Fiend. You will know me no more as Black Ralph. The reign of the Forest Fiend is ended. Many years ago I loved this maiden. She was my affianced bride. We journeyed towards the Great Salt Lake with a large party of emigrants. We were attacked by the savages. Most of the emigrants were slain, and I was left upon the field for dead.'

When I recovered my consciousness, I saw only the stiffening bodies of many of my late companions. I survived that terrible encounter, but the fate of Alice I never knew. I swore vengeance against the red men, and you all know how well I have kept my word. By means of a kind of *explosive* which makes no report, I have been able to do my work of death in silence. Often have I hovered about the white trappers and traders, to protect them with the terror of my name. I have always punished treachery, and befriended the innocent.'

Mounted upon a steed of great power, I came and went unseen, and unfeared; for I took the precaution to wrap my horse's feet with buffalo skin when I approached my victims; and sometimes I suffered them to see me a few hours before I wrought my work of death. It is through that my name became a word of terror among the red men! One of their numbers would drop down dead of a sudden without visible

cause. They would raise him up. A small wound would be found in the region of the heart, bearing every appearance of having been inflicted by a rifle ball. But no sound had been heard—no marksman had been seen!—Whence, then, came the messenger of death! Who among them could answer! Not one. They said that some evil demon infested their woods and wilds, and their hearts were filled with awe. They knew, and could conceive of no *explosive*, that could send a leaden ball to a human heart in silence; that was a secret known only to myself. Concealed from view by rock and tree, and hill, I sped the unheard messenger, and then swept away like the wind. Many have felt my vengeance. But now shall the red man rest in peace. I will pursue them no more with my hatred, follow them no more with unrelenting fury. The work of vengeance has been more than fulfilled; and the wrongs of Alice avenged. Henceforth, blessed with the love of her beside me, shall my days flow on like the current of a peaceful river. The past let us all strive to forget, while we crown the present with good actions. All the acts of my life while I have figured in the character of Black Ralph, I do not attempt to justify, but many of them bring with their remembrance no pulses of remorse, for I often laid aside my assumed character, and as a simple trapper or hunter joined parties of white trappers, discovered their scouts, punished the guilty and protected the weak and helpless. I have often been near you, Edward Seward, since you left Westport, and you have, let me hope, been benefitted by my proximity. An Indian fell dead on the quiet bank of the Red Fork of Arkansas River. Prairie Wolf gave up his breath on the sloping hill-side. A savage ceased to live, of a sudden, on the banks of the Rio Colorado. All of them were mortal foes to you; hence they died.—Had I not have been near you, you would have fallen long ere this by the hand of Osborne.

But why have I been thus interested in you, you will probably ask? Listen! I will reveal a *secret*.

I am your father's brother! My name is

truly Forrester. I loved my brother, wild and erring though he was; is it strange, then, that I have felt an interest in his child—a child inheriting all the fiery impulses of his nature, and all his generous qualities of heart.

'Why was you Osborne's second when I fought him?'

'In order to favor you. Had I loaded his gun as he was in the habit of charging it, nothing could have saved you; for he was a dead shot.'

'And the *warning* I think I can now understand.'

'Many of my movements have been mysterious; but not one without an adequate *cause*. I might have slain Osborne many times, but that I had no right to do, as he had never injured me. The most I could do was to be ever near you, when I discovered that you were my brother's child, to warn and save you in the hour of peril.'

'How did you discover that such a relationship existed between us?'

'By means of certain papers which you lost mysteriously; also by a ring which you wear upon the middle finger of the left hand. Now all is briefly explained, and you can answer the question of—'

'Who is Black Ralph?'

'But when I wash this dark paint from my face, you will know him no more. My Alice recovered, my hostility towards the red man dies.'

Reader, I have little more to relate. My story is well nigh told. I have only to add that Arthur, his father, and the settlers who accompanied him, returned to us in safety on the following day.

But how Arthur found a white captive among the Indians, and made his escape with her, and by her assistance, and how she proved to be Gilmore's long lost daughter, and how she became his bride, I cannot stop to explain. The indulgent reader will be kind enough to picture it all out in his own mind, and try to imagine the happiness which these pleasing events produced.

We all journeyed to the Great Salt Lake in safety, where a triple wedding took place. I

was united to Flora Dale; Forrester to Alice; Arthur to Gilmore's daughter; and the heart of the old trapper was glad.

Buston and the Running Ivy participated gloriously in the festivities of the occasion, and the former cracked his jokes liberally at the expense of his friend 'Brass-Eyes.'

Two Forty is still living, and 'Oncommon Florry' still has the privilege of riding him.

* * * * *

Hark! I hear the voice of Gilmore; and there is joy in its tone. I see the face of Forrester, and it is radiant with hope.

Black Ralph is no more; but his name will long be remembered with awe by the red dwellers amid the western wilds. And here comes Arthur with his bride upon his arm. There is a ringing, mirthful sound in my ear; it is the voice of Buston.

Gentle reader, *adieu*, and my blessing, and that of Flora go with you through the devious windings of life.

THE END.