

MOUNTAIN MAX;

OR,

Nick Whiffles on the Border.

TALE OF THE BUSHWHACKERS IN MISSOURI.

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OR

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CHAPTER I.

CLARI.

The dwelling to which attention is now directed stood on the west bank of the Missouri River, and was, in 1861, and for many previous years, occupied by one Robert Kinmouth. The spot which this man had chosen for a home was situated on a bluff that stretched like a wall along the margin of the river for a distance of several miles, broken on the surface into a succession of hills and vales, presenting to the eye very bold and striking outlines.

The house was accessible by a road that wound among trees and eccentric mounds; also by numerous foot paths and by water. It was protected on the north by a thick belt of cottonwood that broke the force of winter winds and summer winds; while ornamental shrubs, clustering vines, green bushes, cultivated fields, hammock and gully, ridge and valley, filled up and completed the landscape.

At the close of a golden day in the month of June, in the first year of the great American Revolution, Clari Kinmouth, eldest daughter of Robert Kinmouth, by a singular coincidence of circumstances, was, for a half-hour, the sole occupant of the House on the Bluff. During that half-hour, an event happened that was destined to have a determining influence on her life. The door was suddenly thrown open, and a tall man strode in, hot with exertion, and panting for breath. Perspiration streamed from his brow, and he leaned against the lintel of the door for support.

Clari arose in alarm, and looked wonderingly at the intruder, who wiped his raining forehead, and vainly tried to speak. For a few moments, two gazed at each other mutely. The man had a sun-tanned yet handsome face, a shapely person, and was quite six feet in height. His head was bare, and his long brown hair floated over his brows. He was dressed in a dark-green suit, worn and abraded by woods, and camps,

and toilsome marches. A belt of black leather was buckled about his waist, but it supported neither the deadly revolver nor the hunter's knife. The stranger was unarmed. He smiled faintly, and made a conciliatory gesture. Instantly obeying her impulses, she brought a glass of water and presented it to him. He received it eagerly, and drank hurriedly. The cooling draught restored his will and self-possession; but his first movement was not calculated to reassure the young lady, for he closed the door and drew the latch.

"I am pursued by enemies!" he said. "I was surprised and beset while unarmed, and I have had a terrible race for life. Had the treacherous hounds been on foot, I could have distanced them; but they were mounted, and acquainted with every path and by-way, while I am a stranger in this part of the country, and obliged to trust to my instincts, though to the woods and mountains born. I am still followed. The chase is not yet ended. Hide me, and save me!"

The stranger's voice was eloquent, and his manner earnest and convincing. Clari listened with both terror and interest. Her cheeks grew white as the petals of a lily. She was very fair, and the fugitive felt her beauty. He hoped much from her pity; he drew auspicious auguries from her tender eyes; there was prophecy in her attentive attitude.

The words of the stranger rang in Clari's ears: "Hide me, and save me!" Where should she hide him? How could she save him? She hesitated. She tried vainly to think of a place of concealment.

He noticed her embarrassment, and said: "Fear not. Your kindness shall not be abused, nor used to the detriment of yourself and friends. You shall not be implicated in the matter of my escape. I will swear eternal secrecy."

"You misinterpret my hesitancy," replied

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Meantime, Clari had resolved on something. Without a word, she ran hastily from the room and down stairs, leaving him staring at the pine partition. He lost the sound of her for a moment; presently he heard her springy step in the lower hall, then on the stairs, then on the

There was a violent knocking at the door, and a tumult of hoofs and voices. The stroke of the hammer ceased. The fugitive heard rustling of garments, and knew that she was silently restoring them to the books. His heart beat with solicitude for her.

"She was always handy with her tongue," uttered Barker. "But the time has come when the tongues that speak not to our minds must be silent. Union or no Union, is the test question now. Down with the Constitution

Some time had been consumed in the parley at the door. The fading daylight had grown dimmer, and the forms of the armed men were more terrible for the misty gloom that enveloped them. Yet through twilight and deepening shadow she could see the expression of each, and the pale glinting of sabre and carbine.

CHAPTER II.
IN THE HOUSE.

Alick Harker paused before Clari Kinmouth. There was a history of disappointed expectation in his face, which she read with secret dread.

He was a short, stout figure. There was a sufficient development of sinew and muscle—a preponderance of stomach; short, stumpy limbs; large feet; large head; thick neck; square, wide shoulders; a red, puffy face; small eyes; snub nose; with a heavy growth of hairy shrubbiness about the mouth and chin. He was armed with an ancient sabre, in an iron sheath that clanked at his side, hanging by two steel chains; with a breech-loading carbine, and a brace of Colt's revolvers.

Planting the point of his iron-cased sabre upon the floor, he leaned upon its tarnished hilt, and expressed, through mouth and eyes, somewhat of his character, and of his feelings toward the girl standing quietly before him. When he had looked until mute insolence had exhausted itself, he said, in suppressed and ominous tones:

"I have heard the name o' Kinmouth mentioned more than once, of late, and have thought to visit this house by way of warning. Your father, and the hanger-on, Archie Roe, and your half sister, Kitty, and, in brief, the whole family, are more than suspected of disaffection to the new Confederacy."

"Archie Roe, a demented youth, with his head full of harmless fancies, must indeed be a dangerous enemy of Southern rights!" replied Clari, with a smile.

"Ho that is not for us against us," retorted Harker, doggedly.

"Perhaps some of your sharpshooters had better pick him off, to prevent him from overthrowing this young republic!" said Clari, bending her nether lip sarcastically.

"It is advice not unlikely to be followed," muttered Harker.

"Kitty and I may prove equally pestilent," resumed Clari, in the same tone. "Why not make an example of us? I am expecting her momentarily, and we shall have little power to resist you. The Confederacy should be made safe beyond peradventure, certainly!"

"It may come to that," said Harker, averting his eyes.

"Women have been scourged in Tennessee, I have heard," observed Clari, her nostrils dilating with proud scorn. "There is equal humanity and magnanimity in Missouri, no doubt."

"She's chaffing," interposed one of the six, out of temper at the delay. "She's tryin' to gain time, and git your mind off the track of Mountain Max. This is underground business, this here is. It's underground business, I'll swear!"

"Get a light!" exclaimed Alick, gruffly, to Clari.

"If you have servants, command them," said Clari, with easy indifference.

"You are d—d perverse, Miss Kinmouth!" cried Harker, wrathfully. "You only confirm my opinion of you, however. And let me inform you, that you are doing yourself no good. Safety is something, in these times, as you may learn to your cost. If the fugitive is concealed in this house, I swear to you we'll burn it to the ground!"

"You will find lamps on yonder table," she replied, pointing. "Light them, and search, if you must, but with some respect to order and good housekeeping."

While the lamps were being lighted, Mr. Kinmouth, with two females, a youth, and a colored girl, were driven up to the door by a sturdy negro.

Kinmouth entered. When he saw the kind or men he had for visitors, his countenance was troubled. But he was not taken entirely by surprise. He had long been apprehensive of a call from some of his Secession neighbors, and from Alick Harker in particular.

"Here comes your father-in-law," cried Noah Dixon, one of the most rabid and cruel of Harker's followers, and who, notwithstanding the moroseness of his temper, made some pretensions to wit.

This remark produced, as it was expected to do, laughter and grimace at Harker's expense.

"Hold your tongue!" he hissed, fiercely. Then to Mr. Kinmouth, who stood looking from one to another with silent inquiry: "We think there's a d—d Unionist concealed in your house, and we're after him."

"I believe you are mistaken, sir," answered Kinmouth, quietly. "To my knowledge, at least, no one is secreted here."

His words were so calm and serious, that they seemed to carry conviction of his honesty to his rough hearers.

"You mayn't know nothin' about it, but dog on me if the gal don't!" said Dixon. "He disappeared hereabouts, and she's had plenty o' time to smuggle him into some durned hole or other; and if we can't find him, we'll make her; for them as hides can find. And you'd better be keeful yourself, old man, for we're makin' a clean thing up and down this yer river; and them as won't fight nor talk for us, must run or hang. Go ahead, Alick, and don't let the gal look ye out o' countenance. Whar shall we begin to rummage?"

The youth, who came in with Kinmouth, had, during this interval, stood watching the face of Clari. He now stepped forward so as to bring himself into notice.

"Go away, Archie," said Clari, in a kindly voice. "Keep out of the way of these people."

"I know what you have come for," said the youth, speaking to Alick. "But it's a poor place to come to, to get new ones. I've got all that are to be found, and you can see them if you like, with pins run through their backs."

"Get out from under my feet! It's not bugs nor beetles that I'm after," growled Harker, pushing the boy aside.

"What do you want at the Bluff, if not bugs, and beetles, and long-legged hoppers?" asked Archie, in innocent surprise.

"A different kind of a bug, poor fool! from those you stick pins through, and preserve with so much care," sneered Harker, with an evil glance at Clari.

"A different kind of a bug, is it?" cried Archie. "Then I'm with you. I know every nook, and corner, and chest, and dark hole, and closet, and I'm the boy to show you."

Clari heard this with alarm. She feared that the prying curiosity of the boy might prove more dangerous than the blind zeal of the disunionists.

"Stay with me, Archie," she said. "These gentlemen do not instill humble insects, but turn their steel against their brethren."

Harker was about to repulse the youth, when Dixon interposed with:

"Let the bug-fool go. His folly may prove sharper than our wisdom. See! the gal grows pale."

"Against their brethren!" repeated Archie, thoughtfully. "That must be a new kind of beetle. But where'll you begin? In the cellar, or the garret? Here, or there? Above, or below? The cellar is too damp for bugs; the lizard and the eel creep on the moist ground, and toads sit on the slimy stones."

Archie Roe caught the lamp from the hand of Dixon, and looked at Harker for the expected direction.

"To the cellar first!" said Alick, authoritatively, "and Hugh Bramble and I will stay here lest the game should slip us while below."

"This way!" said Archie, springing ahead, with the light.

And in a moment the outlaws, save Hugh and Alick, disappeared. For some minutes their muffled voices could be heard beneath the floor. Then they came up; and a general search followed. Beds were thrust through and through with sabres; dark closets were probed with their steel points; and even innocent handboxes were mercilessly stabbed. Impossible places were examined. Female frippery was cast profanely to and fro, and household gods were trodden on.

Archie Roe witnessed this wanton invasion and desecration with apparent indifference, and would have talked on continuously of bugs and beetles, on which his mind tenaciously dwelt, had not Harker threatened him with his sabre. Then, for Clari, came the greatest trial of all—

the search of her chamber. She mechanically followed them to the critical spot, while her half-sister, Kitty, clung trembling to her garments. Close upon the heels of the latter, stiff and stately, fat, fair, and forty, came the Kinmouth housekeeper, Sally Dowse by name. Sally Dowse was a self-sustaining, strong-minded institution. Sally Dowse stood up for her rights. Sally Dowse was irrepressible. Sally Dowse couldn't be put down. Sally Dowse never failed to speak her mind whenever she thought there was sufficient reason for speaking. She was just the person for a pressing occasion. Behind the limp skirts of Sally came a smallish and indescribable colored girl, who, for some days, had been seen within a certain pale and distance of the housekeeper. This dark piece of humanity had received the soubriquet of Folly; so, although Ruffianism led the way, Folly brought up the rear.

Hugh Bramble approached Clari's bed, and with a malicious grin, impaled it with his sabre, as Archie impaled bugs with pins.

"He's not there, at all events!" quoth Hugh. "Though I might expected to find him there, nat'ral enough, she bein' a Unionist, and he bein' a Unionist."

He jerked his head insultingly at Clari.

"If it's a man," spoke Sally Dowse, striding resolutely into the chamber, "which I ain't, and can't be, which is a thousand pities, I'd learn to conduct myself decent in decent people's houses. I wouldn't tackle feather-beds and bonnet-boxes, and toss women's gowns about as if they didn't cost nothing, and was only fit for the rag-bag. Neither would I become an outlaw, nor a Secession pillager, nor a murderer and whipper. Take that from Sally Dowse!"

"Throw her out of the window!" advised Hugh Bramble.

"Be silent!" admonished Clari, pulling her by the sleeve.

"I never will be silent! I was made to go, and go I will, till Death freezes my tongue," answered Sally, with undaunted front. "Are thoughts for nothing, and tongues to speak 'em for nothing? In my case, never! I don't say what it may be in anybody else's case, but in my case, not at all! Throw me out of the window?" She looked hard at Hugh Bramble. "See what you've got to throw, will ye? There's a hundred and sixty pounds of me. A hundred and sixty pounds of Sally Dowse."

"Out of the way! I don't care if there's a thousand pounds of you!" cried Hugh, making a rush for a wardrobe.

"If there was ten thousand pounds of me, every ounce of it would be Union flesh and bone, and blood!" retorted Sally, emphatically.

As his men moved about the room, Alick Harker kept his gaze on Clari. He rather expected that her face would give him some

information respecting their nearness or distance from the object of pursuit. The girl understood him, and kept her countenance cleverly. Just then she saw some splinters of wood upon the floor, which had been detached by the displacement of the board, and in the urgency of her haste, left unnoticed. This startled her. She observed that Archie Roe was looking at her at that instant with singular intensity. She was surprised to see him suddenly drop on his knees and plunge at something with his hands, muttering, "A bug! A bug!"

Harker pushed him with his foot, and he was up as quick as he went down, and Clari perceived that the splinters, which had excited her fears had strangely disappeared. There was no accounting for this. It could not have been the result of accident; and yet, what else could it be? Perhaps the tell-tale fragments of wood had been pushed out of sight, or clung to the lad's garments. At all events, they were not now likely to produce mischief, and she was relieved of an uncomfortable apprehension.

"What's all this trampery stuff hanging to the wall?" said Harker, wantonly piercing an elegant morning-robe with his sword. "Perhaps she's hidden him in this delicious way. These Union girls don't stop at anything. They are as wily as the devil."

With these brave words, Alick Harker gallantly dislodged every article of apparel that hung against the wall which sheltered the fugitive.

"That's manly and becoming!" quoth Sally Dowse. "There's a petticoat that still dangles from a wall in the corner there; charge at it, gallant leader! Don't falter because there's a trifle of steel in it. On, my Don Quixote! On, invincible knight of La Mancha! This is no wipe-sack, but a veritable petticoat. After a little practice, perhaps you'll have courage to tackle me, or Miss Clari, or Kitty."

"You're a she-dragon!" retorted Harker, embarrassed, in spite of his natural audacity, by the quiet smile that lingered on the lips of Clari.

"You used to come courting Miss Clari, didn't ye?" resumed Sally Dowse, with provoking coolness. "If you'd tackled her wardrobe, and cut and slashed right and left amongst the linen, you'd had better success. There's nothing like courage to win a pretty girl."

Sally planted her hands on her hips, and laughed heartily; but it was not a laugh that an angry man hears with indifference; it was a tantalizing laugh that lashes him to fury. Alick clenched his fist and advanced upon the offender, who seized a heavy curling-iron from a toilet-table, put herself in a defensive attitude, and unflinchingly awaited the onset.

"Come on, Macduff!" said Sally Dowse. "Come on, and I'll pin ye to the wall, as that boy pins beetles and butterflies. See if I don't!"

She cut and thrust adroitly with her weapons within a few inches of Harker's lambent nose, who prudently retired from the vicinity, under a heavy fire of raillery from his comrades. To cover his confusion, and further annoy Clari, Harker began to knock on the walls. He did not expect to make any discovery, nor did he think there were spaces beyond.

He reached the spot where the fugitive was hidden. It gave a hollow echo to his blows.

"This don't sound just right," he said, doggedly.

"Come away," replied Hugh Bramble. "There's nothin' to be found here, for there's no place to hide a person, big or little."

"You are mistaken, Hugh; there is a man hidden here. I can see him," replied Harker, approaching Clari.

"Where do you see him? Where is he hidden?" asked Hugh, incredulously.

"In two mirrors," answered Harker, pointing to Clari's eyes. "There is a man in her eyes."

"If you can see him, he is not concealed," interposed Kitty Kinmouth, who had been a silent and terrified witness of these proceedings. "Go away, rough men. This is not proper and becoming. You vex and distress us without cause."

Poor Clari blushed consciously as the sturdy ruffian, Harker, confronted her with his strange accusation.

Robert Kinmouth, who had ascended to the upper hall, and been engaged for some time in a severe struggle to maintain self-possession, now presented himself at the door of the chamber.

"Alick Harker," he said, "I might have expected different treatment from a neighbor. Why this rude invasion of my dwelling? Why this insulting freedom of manner, and this wanton disregard of the property of another? Why this disrespect to my daughter? Is this Confederacy Outrage and Pillage?"

Kinmouth spoke with emphasis, for he was indignant.

"The Confederacy," returned Harker, shrugging his shoulders, "is Peace."

"I have yet to see some of its peaceful fruits," added Kinmouth. "Thus far, I have seen but terrorism and unbridled license. Alick Harker, I must ask you to take your fellows and leave my house."

"And I must answer you that I will not go till I please!" retorted Harker, frowning.

"As for concealment, resumed Kinmouth, "I will pledge my word that there is no one hidden under this roof."

"We don't want your word," growled Dixon. "We've had words enough 'bout this yer business."

"Hang the old traitor!" proposed Bramble. "Such chaps is worse nor the Tories was in the Revolution."

THE PLACE OF CONCEALMENT.



"Hold on, boys!" said Harker. "We'll straighten this tangled matter, right off. I'm right sure that the man we're after is somewhere about these premises, and that this girl knows where. Now, Kinmouth is a regular old Unionist, and deserves straggling as much as some others that we've fitted hemp neck-ties for; and we'll hang him, if she don't tell!"

He pointed at Clari suddenly. She glanced uneasily at the outlaw.

"You needn't look, girl; I mean it!" he muttered.

"That's yer kind!" chuckled Noah Dixon. "We'll have a rope round his neck in the twinklin' of an eye."

"Get a rope, some of ye!" commanded Harker, whose expression grew every instant more menacing.

"Ay, ay! A rope! a rope!" And two or three of the men ran away in search of a rope. During their absence, Alick Harker, with folded arms and sinister aspect, stood eyeing Clari. His rugged features expressed both malice and exultation. He tried to conceal neither of these emotions. There was too much ruffianism in him to make even an endeavor at delicacy.

It was a trying moment for Clari, who felt that a portion of her secret—she knew not how much—had been discovered. A question arose in her mind: Did this bad man mean what he had threatened? If the affirmative were true, what alternative was left to her? An alternative most obvious. What should she do? Which way would her agitated resolution sway? Where would her mind rest at last? The subject was too dreadful to realize; she would ignore it. She would think better of human nature.

CHAPTER III.

SAY OR SULK.

The men who went after the rope returned presently, but too successful in their search. They held up the twisted cord—fatal symbol of death.

Clari maintained a tolerable firmness.

"I was never muzzled, and I never will be!" said Sally Dowse, stretching out the hand and advancing the foot. "It's my privilege to speak the truth, though I die for't. What is true I say, and what is false I expose. If a man's a wretch, I don't mind saying so. If he's a liar and a thief, or a murderer, I say it all the same; and I find that the truth, and nothing short, pays me good interest. If I didn't speak my mind, I'd blow up, like a fire-ship. Alick Harker, you're a mean, miserable, low-lived, sneakin', skulkin', outrageous, murderin' black-guard! You ain't fit for a public hangman. You'd better put that rope round your own neck, tie it to the bed-post, and jump out the window. If you was to do this, there might be some hope on ye in the next world, arter a few

hundred year of torment. But you hain't got courage enough to do this part o' the country such a favor. Don't touch that man, I warn ye!"

She brought her stout arm on a line with Kinmouth.

"He's a good man, and good men are scarce. His neck wasn't made for ropes, nor ropes for his neck. And as for the child"—she looked at Clari proudly—"you can't scare her! She's too much like me to be scared. As for having a man-critter shot up in the house, you know better; and the whole thing is jest a sham to pull over the women's clothes and be mean. Thank Heaven! her clothes is all you can ever touch, or make free with. You's fool enough—"

"For the sake of prudence be silent!" exclaimed Clari, fearful of the consequences of thus irritating Harker.

"Fish swim, and tongues talk. That's the law o' natur'," answered Sally; "and what's the law o' natur' is as firm as the law o' gravitation."

"Seize the old man!" said Harker, with dogged coolness.

"You shall not touch him!" cried Clari, springing toward her father. But Noah Dixon had already laid a hand on his shoulder; an indignity which Kinmouth immediately canceled by knocking him down—a natural but perhaps indiscreet retaliation. But Kinmouth was aroused, and did not pause to hold counsel with plodding Prudence. A fellow who officiously advanced to slip the rope over his neck shared the same fate, when Hugh Bramble and two others threw themselves upon him simultaneously, and prevented the further use of his sturdy right arm.

Sally Dowse advanced to the rescue; but one of the miscreants menaced her with a pistol, and she was forced to be an inactive witness of the scene. Kitty, greatly alarmed, entreated them to desist, while Clari, knowing them better, remained silent. With a grim smile, Harker watched her features, and enjoyed her distress.

"You see how matters stand," he said, his eyes falling before the clear, steady gaze of Clari. "You can say or sulk, reveal or conceal. In one case, your father is free, and some one else hangs; in the other case, your father—"

"I will not trouble you to repeat it," interrupted Clari. "It is but an empty threat. I cannot believe that you have such a purpose. It is impossible. There are degrees of crime, and human depravity must stop somewhere."

She spoke with wonderful calmness, and tried to believe that which she affirmed; but her heart palpitated with secret fear.

"You flatter yourself that I am trifling," answered Harker, "but, by —! I'm in earnest. The man I want is in this house, and you shall speak the truth. By fair or by foul, you shall give up your secret!"

During this brief colloquy, Kinmouth's arms

were pinioned behind him, and a running noose slipped over his head. This was done with much dexterity; for these outlaws were not new at the business. As for Sally Dowse, she could not restrain her anger. Although prevented from rendering muscular aid by muscular difficulties, her tongue was still under her control, and no power could stop it without stopping her breath at the same time.

"This, I s'pose, is what you call life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, guaranteed to us by the Constitution of the United States of America! This is equal rights, isn't it? This is peace and prosperity, law and order, grace and gospel, fun and freedom? If your new Confederate concern gets to running this way afore it's three months old, what will it be when you get the wheels greased?"

"Can't you stop that woman, some of ye?" muttered Harker. "Cram a table-cloth into her mouth, if you can't do any better. Push her down stairs: tie her hand and foot; no matter what; anything to stop that infernal voice."

"There is only one thing, Alick Harker, that can stop my bangle, and that, whatsoever it may be, will stop my circulation simultaneously, instantaneous, cutaneous, and subterraneous!"

Sally Dowse disengaged her right arm, which had been taken violent possession of by Dixon, and rounded this decision and sonorous period with a grand defiant flourish.

"You may hang and burn them, confisecate and overturn, make yourselves the terror and the curse of the land, break the hinges of society, and disarrange things generally; but as long as I live, I shall be the same identical institution that I now am. While I have strength to draw in and breathe out a thimbleful of air, I shall use it up to the last half oxygenated atom, in running down to the lowest notch this vile miserable, one-horse Confederacy! And a lame horse at that!"

By this time Noah Dixon had got his hand over her mouth, acting under the delusive impression that she could be stopped; but a hollow gurgling in her throat told that the heavily freighted train of thought was steadily moving on, accompanied by sound, if not by articulation.

Clari was too much agitated to see anything that partook of the grotesque. She began to realize that these men were in earnest.

"Speak now, or never! Miss Kinmouth," said Harker, gruffly. "There stands the old gentleman, and there stands the men who will give him a lift over the window sill into the open air very soon! Now what have you to say?"

He raised his eyes slowly till they met hers—hers so intense, so beautiful, so sad. He looked down with a slight flush, possibly of shame; for a bad man may be momentarily

ashamed of conduct which he has no intention of mending.

"Alick Harker," answered Clari, in a tremulous and touching tone, "is it thus that you manifest your friendship for me—a friendship which you once affirmed deserved a softer name. Change your thought; recede from this great sin. Say that you did but jest. Release my father, and call away your friends. Redeem yourself while you may. Listen to the appeals of humanity and mercy. Be not deaf to the kinder impulses of human nature. Outrage not the sacred obligations of common charity."

The voice of Clari took a melting tone, and flowed like liquid music into her tender plea. She might have spared her eloquence. It was this very mood, touching and tearful, that gratified the unforgiving temper of the rebel outlaw. A flush of unmanly triumph passed over his swarthy features.

"I never go back," said Alick Harker. "My work is always before me. A purpose, good or ill, never grows weaker on my hands. I meant to remember your pride whenever chance or change should give me the advantage. Now is the time of that remembrance. Where now is your scorn of me—the curled lip, and the disdainful eye; the mocking voice, and the haughty figure? Gone is your contempt. Eye and lip droop meekly; the voice is tender, and the form humble. Why this change? Because all things else have changed. By a potent wave of the magician's wand, a great nation has fallen to pieces, and the elements of society seem rushing back to their original chaos. The North no longer rules. From the banks of the Missouri down to the Gulf, the people are free. We will drive out the fanatics, and possess the land. Death to Federal Unionists! We want no warrant for our authority. Our power is our authority—our might is our right. I tell you we will make clean work of it. The Unionites must fight for our Confederacy, or hang for the Union. The two things are before them—fight or hang. Let them choose, and choose quickly."

"My father is past bearing arms," replied Clari, shivering at the horrible energy which Harker threw into his words. Contemplating his fierce expression, she could think of nothing but the sanguinary miscreants of the French Revolution. His comrades inspired no less aversion, and were terribly impatient of delay.

"Age is nothing," sneered the outlaw; "and has nothing to do with the question. It is you that are to say. You hold in your keeping life and death. So that is settled." He turned to his creatures: "Drag him to the window, boys. Don't mince matters. Make everything right and tight. Don't be squeamish about his throat. A little preliminary choking won't hurt

him. Take a stout turn around something, a hook, a bed-post, or anything firm. Break out that glass. Crush the sash with your foot, Hugh. That's it!"

A shower of shattered glass and wood went ringing and rattling to the ground.

"Stand the old man upon the sill," continued Harker; "and when I say the word, launch him out, and let him dangle. He shall die under his own rain-trough—under the drippings of his own home sanctuary."

Too willingly and rapidly these villainous instructions were obeyed. Kinmouth was placed upon the window-sill, the rope was made fast, while two men held him ready to consummate a murder when Harker should give the signal. Kinmouth was calm, but deathly pale. He had kept his eyes fixed on Clari, and when lifted to the window, turned his head so as to keep her yet in view.

"My child," he said, for he began to perceive that she had really something to conceal, "if you have given shelter to a good and true Union man, either in this house or out of it, I charge you not to betray him. His life is worth as much at mine; and if younger and stronger, it is worth more."

With clasped hands and drooping strength, Clari stood gasping for breath. Kitty, less firm, fainted and fell into the arms of Sally. The black cheeks of Folly seemed to bleach with terror; her pearly teeth chattered like bits of ivory shaken in a dice-box. Miss Dowse was so choked with wrath, that she could only mutter, "The villains! The villains!"

Never was Clari so painfully agitated. Every faculty of the mind was held in abeyance by the suddenness and crushing weight of the alternative so cruelly cast upon her. The atrocious expedient which she could not believe in, at first, she now dizzily and shudderingly sensed. She tried to speak; but tongue and lips were dry, and gave no sound. Harker looked toward the executioners. Clari threw up her hands for delay. The rebel outlaw glanced at her colorless face, and felt the sweetness of a revenge morbid and unnatural in its vindictiveness.

"Father!" gasped Clari; "I must—I must speak!" Her voice was scarcely intelligible.

"Be firm, my girl," answered Kinmouth, in tones clear and brave. "If the man escapes, tell him to avenge me."

"I cannot, I cannot! It is impossible. I must save you."

At the moment that Clari Kinmouth ceased speaking, there was a crash directly behind Harker. A board was burst from the wall with such force that it flew against and nearly prostrated him, and the fugitive, glowing with fierce and manly indignation, sprang into the room; then, glancing around and scarcely pausing, rushed to the window, drew Kinmouth from his

perilous position, knocked one of the scoundrels down who was holding him, and pushed the other through the shattered sash, giving him a fall of fifteen feet to the ground below, upon sharp fragments of glass. For a brief space, surprise chained the faculties of Harker and his ruffians; then revolvers were drawn and sabres unsheathed. The fugitive caught Noah Dixon by the neck, and held him before him for a shield, and there was another interval of inaction; the disunionists having no relish for shooting their companion.

While the catastrophe was thus held, as it were, at arm's length, a horse at full gallop was heard to stop at the door, and before anything more than a mute inquiry of eyes could be made, a man sprang up the stairs, three steps at a time, and looked in upon Alick Harker's terrible tableau.

CHAPTER IV. WHOM IS IT?

The person who entered in this abrupt manner was somewhat above the average height, of a straight and hardy figure, and of an age hard to arrive at by the ordinary rules of calculation. He might have numbered forty, forty-five, or even more years; or he possibly might have been taken for a person younger than either of these figures. His face, though weather-beaten, had evidently been kept young by a cheerful disposition and a genial turn of humor. His rather small eyes were, no doubt, under ordinary circumstances, good natured; while his large mouth was manifestly formed for quiet drollery and all manner of quaint things. His beard was of various colors, and presented a flourishing growth of some years. It fell on his tanned buckskin frock like the beard of a Jewish patriarch. In that human brush one could have found weds of white, yellow, red, gray, and dark brown; but the real silver threads were few. This variegated crop of hair did not conceal the expression of his mouth, the forage of the upper lip being carefully pushed aside to favor the necessary functions of that important item of face.

This personage was dressed like a pilgrim from the far trapping-grounds of the West—with moccasined foot, with legged calf, and cap of skin. Some kind of fire-arm was slung across his back by a stout leathern strap. By his side hung powder-horn and bullet-pouch. In a belt around his waist he wore, conspicuously, two of Colt's world-renowned revolvers, and an anomalous weapon in a sheath, that seemed a cross between a bowie-knife and a broadsword. Whatever might have been the pluck and quality of this sudden visitor, it was quite apparent that he carried metal.

He looked straight before him, around the room, across it in every direction, and at every person and every expression in it; then what

had been manifest of lingering good nature, latent humor, or slumbering wit, vanished in the twinkling of an eye. His brows contracted; the small, clear orbs under them flashed fiercely; his lips closed tightly together, and the long, patriarchal beard shook wrathfully. Pushing back his anger almost as soon as it appeared, with hand on weapon, and eye on Harker, with form more erect and wary than an instant before, he said, in a voice singularly self-possessed, yet full of menace:

"Here's a condemned diffikilty, I reckon! Of all the p'ison critters, in case of a cussed little diffikilty, I'm the p'isonest. There's a polar attraction about diffikilties that draws me to the spot like a locomotive engine. Diffikilties is the nat'ral pleasures of my life, specially where there's mean and wicked ear'n's or and there's villains to be punished. What means this here? Why is that rope round that man's neck—why does that other man stand at bay—why are all these weapons drawn—and who fainted that gal, and made this other one look paler nor a ghost? Speak, some on ye, for I'm sventin' to get into this diffikilty!"

When the bold intruder began to speak, Harker and his fellows began to look at each other in an inquisitive way, and to revive their somewhat dampened courage; but there was not one of them who did not instinctively wonder at and fear him. Some of them were covertly turning the muzzles of their pistols upon him, but he discovered the trick in a moment, and waving his revolver slowly to and fro, covering first one and then another, added, in a tone the deadly earnestness of which could not be mistaken:

"The first rebel of ye that p'int's weepion at me shall fall in his tracks. He shall, I swear to gracious!"

"Go 'way! stranger," answered Harker, choking with rage. "We don't want you, and you are not by any means safe here. Begone, or you will meet your last diffikilty. We are desperate men, and you had better not meddle with us."

"I know you're desp'rate men, and that your cause is desp'rate, and that you'll come to a desp'rate end as 'tis fittin' all traitors should!" retorted the stranger, nothing intimidated.

"If I understand this summat," he resumed, with steady emphasis; "you scesech outlaws is goin' about like ravenous wolves, to devour and to destroy, to pillage and to kill, to burn and to lay waste."

He paused, and turned his eyes upon the fugitive, who still held Noah Dixon by the neck, much to his discomfort.

"How is it, Max? How is it, my boy? Haven't I put 'em where they belong? Haven't they chased you down as if you was a wild beast, to be harried and worried, and rubbed out, at last, by lead, or by steel, or by halter?"

"You are right," said Max, impressively. "You always judge correctly. Your guesses are better than the written depositions of some men that I could name. Never was buffalo or bear, stag, or fox, hounded as I have been by these lawless scoundrels! Have a care, I entreat of you, my old friend, or they will shoot you unaware, when your eyes are not on them."

"I see every dog of 'em, Max, and he falls fust who fust tickles me," answered the newcomer, determinedly.

"We three are enough for them," cried Kinmouth, casting the cord from his neck with a hot flush of insulted manhood.

"Quite enough," said the man called Max, tightening his grasp on Dixon's neck. "I have thrown one of the rascals out of the window; I hear him groaning among the broken glass below. Three true men can cope with six false ones. I have always found that an honest man, in an honest cause, has a stout arm and a stout heart. Let the traitors commence the attack."

The man, Max, gave Dixon a pinch with his muscular fingers, that made him gasp like a fish just taken from the water.

"Shoot him!" muttered Noah, who had no relish for the tortures of strangulation. "Put a bullet through him, can't ye?"

A more rigid contraction of the fingers stopped the fellow's voice.

"Woe to the man as draws a head on him!" said he in buckskin, raising his voice. "Grief to him as gives Mountain Max a supper!" lead! Or a dinner, or a breakfast on't, for that matter. It would be a burnin' shame for a true mountain man, who's faced all manner o' varmint, in all manner o' places, whose eyes never blink at danger, whose aim is dead certain at eighty rods and up'ards, and who shoots plumb-centre at three hundred yards, to be rubbed out by a mean secession skunk! It would, I swear to gracious!"

"That must be Nick Whiffles, or the devil!" exclaimed Allick Harker, thrusting his head forward, and staring inquisitively at the weather-beaten face of the stranger.

No one replied. The man of the moccasined foot and leather hunting-shirt, drew himself up straighter, and smiled. There was pride and calm self-assurance on his lips. He looked like a person who asked no particular favor of any one, and that knew how to take care of himself in all places, and in every contingency of life.

"I'll bet my skulp," growled Hugh Bramble, "that that d—d Fremont sent for him, and he's come down from the mountains of Californy, where he's been huntin' grizzlies, to have a finger in this secession business."

"May the devil take Jessie and the little Mustang!" added Harker, in an undertone. Then to the intruder, who stood calmly in the door: "Speak, mister: Are you Nick, or Satan?"

"A man as knows so much, should know more," said the stranger, with composure. "But I was never afraid to speak the truth."

Mountain Max shrugged his shoulders, and curled his nether lip a trifle.

"Leastwise," quoth Nick, in a slightly qualifying tone, "I may boldly say that I never was cleared to speak my mind when there was occasion for't. I don't vally tellin' ye, mister"—he looked hard at Harker—"you nor no other p'ison traitor as treads the sile o' the Fed'ral Union, that I'm Nick Whiffles, and nothin' shorter; Nick Whiffles from the mountains and valleys; Nick Whiffles from the prairies and plains; Nick Whiffles from the lakes, and rivers, and trappin'-grounds of the wide Nor'west! I'm he! Oh yes! O Lord, yes!"

Nick looked quietly at vacancy, after the old fashion; and the comical twinkle reappeared in his eyes.

"He come down from the mountains with Max," muttered Bramble, with a boding shake of the head.

"You're wrong there, Secesher," answered Nick. "We didn't come together, by no means. He come fust, and I afterward. I haven't been long in this rebellious nest, I allow. Didn't git here a minute too soon, neither. I'm jest in time for this little diffikilty."

"If you know when you are well off, old boy," replied Harker, menacingly, "you'll leave this little diffikilty, as you call it, immediately."

"I never run away from a diffikilty," said Nick, with a negative motion of his head. "I never in my life run away from a diffikilty; though I had a brother once who could run like a four-wheeled wagin. He allers run, my brother, but all his ancestors on his mother's sister's side ran afore him. Runnin' run in his blood, as 'twere. But there was one peccol'arity about my brother's runnin': he allers run toward the danger, and not from it."

Nick glanced at Harker with a grim sort of humor. At the same time he drew his second revolver with his left hand, and with easy nonchalance of manner, cocked it. Each of his brown hands now held six shots. Notwithstanding his quietness, there was something in his air and attitude that overawed Allick Harker and his followers.

"I've heard of you," said the rebel outlaw, doggedly. "Much has been said and written about you; but I don't believe half on't. You've been published in the newspapers, put on the stage, scerved up in books, translated into French, and hashed up in every style to suit the modern appetite; but I care no more for you than I should for any adventurer from the mountains. This is a bad place for you to come to, Nick Whiffles. There's different pastime going on here from trappin' beaver, shooting bears, and picking off a naked Indian, now and then."

"Go on, Secesher; you've got the floor," said Nick. "Speak your mind while you've got breath to spare; for it's ten to one if you outlive this 'ere Secession row. I've done for snorter men nor you be, early in the mornin', afore breakfast. As for the stories you've read in the p'ison newspapers, I've nothin' to say of 'em, whatsomever. It don't concern you much whether they're true or false. A good many things are printed that are hard to believe. My gran'father, the historian, published some vollums that was as true as Sinbad the Sailor, and yet there was people bad enough to shake their heads when they was readin' 'em. I'll die if there wasn't!"

The corners of Nick's mouth twitched slightly, and he threw a furtive glance at Max.

"The historian of your exploits and your gran'father were about alike, I should think," said Harker, contemptuously. "The author of 'Nick Whiffles' would be out here taking Secession notes if he wasn't afraid of Secession bullets. He finds it safer to concoct his Munchausenisms under the brooding wings of the abolition oligarchy, than to trust himself over the border, where steel, and not ink, is deciding the great question of union and disunion."

"As for that matter, Secesher, I've heard tell that them as can wield the pen and make printed books can wield the sword and the rifle, likewise. But that's neither here nor there. I never like to talk of my own exploits, more nor I like to hear a friend slandered behind his back. They may print my name in as many languages as they please, and I shan't be none the worse for't. But one thing I can tell ye, and tell ye hearty and true: I'm down on this Southern Skedaderacy! If ever a man was down on't, that man is the man afore ye. I love the starry banner of the United States. I do, by mighty! I haven't been much under its protection for some years o' my wanderin' life, but when I do hear its folds a flappin' over me, my heart begins to thrill with pride, and I feel a head taller nor any man atween here and the Gulf. Whenever I look up and see the old flag, I swear to gracious, I feel as if I could lick a wagin-load o' traitors!"

Nick set his teeth together, and breathed hard. Allick Harker turned pale, for he thought the man in moccasins handled his weapons rather carelessly. He moved uneasily. He cleared his throat, and said, huskily:

"You're on the wrong side, Nick Whiffles! Come over and help us. We need you. Ay, and you needn't come for nothing, either! You shall have Confederate gold and a Confederate commission. We could soon raise a regiment to fight under you. The fact is, your name is popular clear down the river to New Orleans. I've heard you talked of on the steamboats and in camp, and I know what I say. Listen to reason, and seize good-luck by

the forelock. Float in with the tide, Nick Whiffles."

The rebel outlaw tried to get up, considerable enthusiasm of tone and manner, but his remarks came with an ill-grace, and with more of sullessness than inspiration. Nick heard him patiently and with apparent gravity. He lifted his shoulders and laughed quietly when Harker ceased speaking.

"Confederate gold!" quoth he, incredulously. "Let's see some on't, will ye? I'll give ye a handsome bonus for every dollar you've got in good yaller ore. If you said Confederate brass, 'twould been a different thing; for I allow there's plenty o' that among ye, and a giniwino article, too; without any alloy of the precious metals in't. Confederate gold! I want none on't! I ain't up for sale yet; when I am, Jeff Davis and his travelin' menagerie can come and bid for me, and p'raps I'll go cheap. If Jeff should chance to be the purchaser, the best use he could put me to would be, hangin'; for a disloyal critter that can be bought and sold, is better sawed up cold than t'otherwise, Confederates. I allow, are improved by hangin' a few hours in the open air. As for a commission, I'd like to see the man as would dare offer me sich a monstrous humbug! You've got no government, and where there's no government there's no authority. The authority of the United States is supreme from Maine to Georgia, and from the Rocky Mountains to the Gulf of Mexico. Don't talk your villainous treason to me! I can't turn traitor arter I've been a true man goin' on forty year. Them there seven-starred rags won't do for me. I'd rather fight under an old woman's apron tied to a broom-pole, than to follow sich a contemptible rag to battle. Oh yea, I'd rather lay down and die, than to fight for anything but the old banner. I want a flag that's got a history to't, and Liberty on't. I can't fight for cotton and niggers, but I can fight for freedom and the Union as hearty and faithful as any man that lives. I can do that. O Lord, yes!"

Nick raised his voice, and his rough cheeks glowed.

"Don't talk to me no more in that way," he added. "I'm mighty narvous, gen'ly, and pistols sometimes go off o' their own accord, s'enamost."

"Shoot him, some on ye, can't ye!" stammered Noah Dixon, who still writhed in the ungentle grasp of Mountain Max. "'Tisn't fair, this is'n't."

The pitiless fingers stopped all farther articulation. Harker and his crew were greatly embarrassed. They meant mischief, but had a wholesome fear of Nick Whiffles' revolvers. Each wished to make an attack, but no one had the courage to move first. Few men care to stir when a pistol-bullet is the penalty of motion. Harker felt that something must be done.

To stand longer, staring at Nick Whiffles, was useless; not only useless, but cowardly. Each waited for the other—each looked at the other—each inwardly cursed the tardiness of the other. A silence ensued that was enjoyed by Nick only.

CHAPTER V. MOUNTAIN AIRS.

The lamp burned dimly in the hands of Archie Roe. It threw an uncertain glimmer over all. It shimmered on the pale face of Clari; flickered over the white lips of Clari. Clari felt faint and weary. She glanced at the man called Max—the stranger called Max, whom she had befriended. His eyes were upon her—his eyes, dark and full of gratitude. She looked down, and a sickly blush overspread her features.

"If there is to be fighting," said Max, "let the ladies retire."

"You couldn't have said anything more sensible," interposed Sally Dowse, who was engaged in the benevolent employment of supporting the half-conscious Kitty. "Stand aside, you land-pirate," she added, glancing with lofty contempt at Harker. "Stand out the way, and let me pass with this girl."

Bearing her lovely burden, Miss Dowse attempted to pass the ruffian, who, glad of any event to attract momentary diversion, sprang backward toward Archie Roe and struck the light from his hand. Friend and foe were instantly in darkness. There was a shuffling of feet, a hurried changing of positions, and a determined rush to the spot where Nick Whiffles had stood. Full of blind fury, each of the outlaws was anxious to give a wound to the sturdy mountaineer. In the light, all of them had shrunk from an attack; but darkness, they imagined, favored a sudden and effective onset. They were signally foiled, for Nick had too much experience to remain on the threshold for a mark. Sabres met and crossed in empty space, and several received wounds from their friends which were intended for another. Some of the more reckless of the disunionists discharged their pistols at random, but fortunately without injury. There was a pell-mell retreat down-stairs, one or two of the villains falling from the top quite to the bottom, in a very damaging and perilous manner. Nick averred afterward that he happened to be near the head of the staircase during their confused and clattering exit, and that some of them must have run violently against his clenched fist, and in a way calculated to disturb their respective centres of gravity. There was much limping and swearing in the hall while one of them was fumbling for the door, and their spirits were far less jubilant than when they entered the premises.

But it fared hardest with Noah Dixon, for Mountain Max had held him fast during the

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whole parley. The moment the lamp was extinguished by Harker, he lifted the knife from his feet, and without much trouble dropped him from the window. Genuine expressions of pain followed his rapid descent, and Max was satisfied that he had not escaped without some portion of the punishment due to his deeds. The greatest anxiety of Max was for the safety of Clari. He heard the pistol-shots with a shiver of alarm. He felt his way toward her. He found her; he threw his arm about her, and stood prepared to defend her; but the noise on the stairs, and presently at the door below, assured him that the room was clear of the rebel marauders. A few shots fired after them by Nick hastened their flight and dangerously wounded one of their number. Their horses had stampeded, and those who had come so bravely-mounted and confident, went away on foot with far different feelings.

"They're runnin'," said Nick Whiffles. "The prison critters are runnin', and I hope they won't stop till they run straight into the Gulf. That's the only kind 'o' sea-bathin' for succession sickness. It'll be a mighty resort for 'em by-and-by, I allow. They'll go down in vast multitudes at the pint o' Federal bagnets."

Nick blew the smoke from his revolver, and paused to think about the Gulf of Mexico as a rebel bath.

Max felt Clari trembling, and gradually yielding to the reaction of intense excitement. He staid her sinking form and spoke words of cheer; she heard them not; the danger being passed, the great pressure upon her energies suddenly removed, the revulsion proved too much for her—she fainted. The larger the man, the smaller she feels; and the stronger he is, the weaker he becomes when a pretty woman faints. These general principles held good in the case of Max. But his embarrassment did not arise from the mere awkwardness of inexperience. Clari had become something more to him than an object of common interest. She had stepped at once to the highest place in his mind. Both his reason and his imagination exalted her. Her high qualities had surprised and pleased him, and given him a reverence for the character of woman, new and strange. Clari had thrilled and magnetized him. Clari, in fact, was the only person he could think of, and she was now an absorbing thought.

Fortunately, Archie Roe came to the rescue; he re-lighted his extinguished lamp, and Max hailed its fitful rays with unfeigned satisfaction. Immediately there was a gathering of the household, and Sally Dowse and the negro girl Folly were, for a time, in great demand, and exceedingly useful.

By the united efforts of all concerned, something like order was finally restored, and the household and its visitors were quietly assembled

in the lower part of the house. Clari, recovered from her temporary weakness, now looked firm and serene, although somewhat pale. Kitty, quick in her emotions, was the first to be cheerful and to forget her recent terror. Sally Dowse was severe and dignified, and more serious than usual. Folly chattered and laughed, and showed her white teeth; impressions made upon her fluctuating mind soon gave place to others; and the same thought seldom held her long under its influence. Robert Kinmouth was the gravest of the parties. He realized the great danger from which he had escaped, and for the first time since the breaking out of the Rebellion, understood the perils that surrounded him and the evils of the times. The conviction at length came home to his heart, that no man was safe at his own fire-side, and that even women could not find sanctuary at home. He looked at his daughters, at the crazed Archie and his servants, and could not repress a sigh of anxiety. Mountain Max, as he was persistently called by those who knew him, was silent and modest as a girl. If his eyes were somewhat excursive in the direction of Clari, it is not to be wondered at, the circumstances being such as to call out peculiar feelings of admiration and gratitude. Her kindness in defending him; her ingenuity in selecting a hiding-place; her efficiency in effecting the concealment, and her fortitude in refusing to betray him, were items most thoroughly remembered and appreciated. This girl had risen from the mediocrity of common feminine humanity to the very summit of heroism and unselfishness. Clari was beautiful. Her brown, crispy hair; her soft yet lustrous eyes, and a pretty mouth, expressive alike of thought and refinement, were not things to pass unnoticed and unadmired.

The mountain man, the pupil and companion of Nick Whiffles, had seen enough of society in California, New Mexico, and other places, to comprehend the many distinctions of female character, and particularly to appreciate worth and beauty combined. He was ensnared by Clari. He had stepped over the charmed circle of her life, and henceforth he was to be held in vassalage to her will. His peace of mind was in a great measure to depend on the motion of her lips—the formation of a syllable—the tender turning of an eye. But Max scarcely understood this yet. He was in a maze of delicious uncertainty in regard to his own sensations. Nevertheless, Max, the sturdy; Max, the strong and fearless; Max, the mountaineer; Max, the wild, free rover, had found his subduer, his eager and tamer, the mistress of his actions, if she chose to be; and, in brief, his destiny. The wild-beast hunter and tamer was to be hunted and tamed; humbled by the eyes of Clari; tamed by her authority. Max had enough to think of.

Nick Whiffles, who had been out to look after his horse, unwilling to trust it to stranger hands, came in with the old careless, comical, quizzical impression on his face. It was impossible to keep his elastic spirits long under restraint. The quiet humor would lurk in the corners of his mouth, and tremble under his grayish lashes. Nick didn't look very old. He really did not. The last few years had not wrought any particular change in his countenance or person. He was still straight enough and stout enough for all the practical purposes of life. Major-General Fromont had sent for him to come down from the mountains, with a few chosen woodsmen and sharpshooters, to take a hand in playing out the game of Rebellion. The general's letter found Nick ready to start of his own free will, with quite a number of the identical men wanted. Max Bosworth, his pupil and friend, was dispatched that very day with Nick's answer, while Nick, a day or two afterward, followed more leisurely. He reached Missouri without serious accident, and established a small camp. Some of his men had arrived, and others were on the way, in squads and parties, traveling fast or slowly, as the mood suited them.

It will be seen that Nick came just in time, and that his presence worked important results at Kinmonth's.

"Where is your mother?" Kinmonth asked, looking uneasily at Kitty. "I like not this continued absence."

"I don't know," said Kitty, somewhat troubled by her father's manner. "She went away early in the afternoon, attended by the boy Splayfoot."

Now, the boy Splayfoot was a knobby-headed negro, by no means of a boyish age; but it should be known that slaves are all boys and girls, to the day of their deaths.

"She and Splayfoot go often," added Kinmonth, reflectively. "I sometimes wonder where she goes, and what her business may be. It is now late."

Kitty seemed distressed, and did not care to encounter her father's inquiring glances.

"The excitement of the last hour," resumed Kinmonth, "has kept her from my mind; but now I am quite disturbed."

"Splayfoot will take care of her," said Archie Roe. "Splayfoot keeps near her when she talks with the men in the gray coats, with the gilt things on the shoulders."

Every one in the room involuntarily turned toward Archie. Kinmonth flushed to the brows.

"With what men does she talk?" he asked, abruptly.

"With the men in gray coats, with gold lace on them," answered Archie, quickly.

The face of Kinmonth grew more troubled.

"They touched their hats, and they smiled

when they met, and she gave them something that looked like a bit of white paper. Then they sent Splayfoot away, and they talked a long time. I laid in the bushes close by, but out of sight, and the gold-laced fellows were the Jeff Davis Confederates, the rebellious Secessionists, with swords and pistols, guns and carbines, and horses to drive out the Unioners, make fighting soldiers, and have everything their own way."

Every one in the room heard Archie's remarks with pain and surprise. Kitty kept blushing, and looked furtively at Clari. She certainly displayed a consciousness of something unpleasant and embarrassing. Her father observed her confusion. It was known to the family, and to some of the neighbors, that Mrs. Kinmonth had secession tendencies. When the subject of separation from the Federal Union began to be agitated, she made no secret of her sentiments, but spoke them freely and openly. After the pretended withdrawal of Missouri from the Federal compact, a notable change came over her. She became singularly reticent in regard to the Rebellion. Some persons thought that she had renounced her secession proclivities, and no longer sympathized with the disloyal disturbers of public security. A few, however, were wiser, and believed that her silence was more dangerous than open avowal.

Mrs. Kinmonth was the second wife of Robert Kinmonth, and the mother of Kitty. She married young. She had been called handsome, as a girl, and still retained, in a remarkable degree, those good looks that had first pleased the eyes of her husband. Mrs. Kinmonth was so well-preserved, that she and her daughter were often mistaken for sisters. Their relationship looked more probable to strangers than the real one. It could not be disguised that she was yet fair, and capable of exciting admiration. Her temperament was eminently Southern. Her blood was hot, and her will imperious; but sense, adroitness, and shrewdness, modified these, and held them, when expediency required, in comparative abeyance. Mrs. Kinmonth was subtle. She was a political intriguer, notwithstanding her ostensible retirement from the bitter discussions of the day. That Mr. Kinmonth was aware of her secret adhesion to the Confederacy, there could be no doubt; but he was not prepared to hear that she held correspondence with the enemy. He would willingly have been spared the mortification of Archie's disclosure. He felt humbled in the eyes of Nick Whiffles and Max Bosworth. A moment of reflection convinced him that he ought not to entertain such feelings, and that he should not condemn his wife on the mere testimony of the youth.

"My wife, I trust," he said, looking at Nick, and smiling faintly, "is no rebel."

"No man ought to know better nor you," answered Nick. "The gal there," he pointed to Kitty, "seems to be turnin' all sorts o' colors. I allow she don't believe a word o' t."

Nick quietly removed his rifle from his shoulders and placed it against the wall, within reach. Kitty's cheeks grew burning red. Nick kept her under his observation pitilessly.

"Don't believe a word of what?" asked Kinmonth, somewhat curtly.

"A word about her mother's bein' a rebel," replied Nick. He paused an instant, and no one taking up the subject, he continued:

"Nor that she carries information to the Seceshers. Nor that she has private meetin's with 'em, to put the necks of her neighbors in to halters; to accuse and to betray. Oh no! Nothin' o' the kind!"

"You are too hard on Kitty, Mr. Whiffles," said Clari. "Kitty would not willingly harm a human being. I will answer for her truth and integrity. She would knowingly enter into no compact that would endanger the peace and safety of Union families."

"I thank you, Clari," cried Kitty, throwing her arms around Clari's neck, and concealing her glowing face upon her bosom. "I am grateful for your goodness," she stammered.

"I know nothing of intrigues, and I receive no confidence that I can evade."

"That I am sure of, darling!" said Clari, soothingly, kissing her white forehead.

Mr. Kinmonth looked and listened with increasing curiosity.

"There's no harm in the gal," resumed Nick. "There's neither cruelty nor treachery in her nature, which is childlike, true and trustful."

"But I remember very well how the chestnuts was got out o' the fire, once on a time. To cheer up, little'un, and don't think that Nick Whiffles meant to put you down, or to be hard on ye in the latestest way whatsoever. I never was hard on gals. O Lord, no!"

Nick spoke so kindly and genially, that the impulsive Kitty instinctively put out her little hand in token of forgiveness. Nick carefully touched the tips of the dainty fingers, and said:

"All right, gal. I read your natur' as if it was a printed book. But your honest little heart will get ye into condemned little difficulties, if you don't look out for't, sooner or later. Don't meddle with other folks' secrets. Let 'em as has secrets keep 'em. Drop 'em as you would hot shot. I had an aunt once that was full o' secrets. They were stored away in parts of her system, like mouldy goods in an auction-shop. They was crowded into or from attic to cellar, and she wouldn't part with one on 'em for love nor money. The consequence was," added Nick, looking gravely at the floor, "that she got so full that she couldn't hold 'em. The last one killed her. She bust, my aunt did."

Nick sighed regretfully. "Dreadful scandals escaped," he resumed, "when her flues collapsed; and they buried her and her secrets as quick as they could, in a gutta percha box. It's been said that women-folks couldn't keep secrets; but my aunt, you see, gave the lie to that, p'int Hank, and died from the unnatural strain on her organs."

Kitty brightened up, hoping that Nick's suspicions were directed into the channel of humor, and that his keen eyes had ceased to study her.

"She was unlike another female relative o' mine," Whiffles went on, "who had such a horror o' secrets that she wouldn't go to bed with one on her stomach, but out with it to the first neighbor that come in; and if no good gossip didn't come in, she'd on with her bonnet and shawl, and off she'd trot to peddle it out with additions and variations, and in this way get relief for her tender conscience. You've heard tunes fixed up with variations, so that they looked as if the notes had been sprinkled on 'em from a pepper-box. I knowed a nasty, cheese-eatin', German critter that lashed up 'Sweet Home' in such a way that you couldn't tell it from 'Rory O'Moore' or 'Daniel Tucker'; and that was just the way with that woman's secrets when she peddled 'em out. There wasn't no difference so to speak, atween 'Bonny Doon' and 'Yankee Doodle', and 'twas the variations that done it. You musn't rob a woman of her variations. O no! sartin not."

"Come, Mr. Whiffles," interposed Clari. "I won't allow that."

"Nor I, neither," quoth Nick. "A woman can keep a secret. Nobody in the world is so keener of a secret as a woman. If she feels her strength a goin', and her secret in danger, she'll git half a dozen cronies to lay hold on't and help her keep it. If it gits away, it'll be arter a condemned struggle, I tell ye. But, Lord, bless ye, most secrets ain't strong enough in the arms and legs to git away when they've once closed with 'em, and floored 'em, as it were. Howsomover, a secret is big enough to go alone when two respectable women can't carry it comfortable."

Nick Whiffles took out a handkerchief of an anomalous hue, and with an air of benevolence wiped his swarthy face. "But that's neither here nor there," he continued. "A story is a story, and a lie is a lie; while the truth is jest as much a truth now as if it hadn't never been spoke since the world stood. As I've stated afore, there was a liar in the Whiffles family, and I've allers been glad it wasn't me. But I won't talk o' that now. One thing at a time is my way. Never stop to make diversions to the right and left, and spin long yarns; I don't, when there's business to be done, though my father was a great hand for that. I've knowed him to stop, with his food halfway to his mouth,

to tell a condemned story that nobody on earth could believe without overstretching his faculties. He had a heap o' family traditions. Used to tell about some of his ancestors, his gran'mother's gran'father, I believe, catchin' three hundred foxes and tyin' three hundred firebrands to their tails, and turnin' 'em into his neighbor's wheat-field to damage it—a caper that allers seemed to me onnat'ally foxy, so to speak. Then there was another piece o' nonsense he used to relate for a fact, consarnin' a party o' hunters and trappers which crossed the Red Sea on dry land; a thing as was never done afore nor sence. Where that piece o' water is, I don't know, never havin' come across no sea o' that partic'lar color durin' all my marvellin' up and down the Western kentry, where there's every kind of a sea that's worth mentionin'."

"Father," sez I, "don't go on in that way," sez I. "It'll grow on ye," sez I.

"What'll grow on me?" sez he, kinder gruff. "You'll git to believin' on 'em yourself, one o' these days," sez I.

"Nick, you rascal!" sez he. "You young heathen," sez he, a feelin' arter his cane, "don't you believe the Scrippler?" sez he.

"As fur as I know it," sez I. "But there wasn't no Scrippler in our family, not as I'm aware on."

"The Whiffleses could do what anybody could do," sez he, givin' me an ugly look. "Prehaps," sez he, "you wouldn't believe 'bout the sun's stannin' still a couple o' hours, so that a sartain great general could cut and slash among his enemies," sez he, "and put 'em to the pint o' the sword."

"Was that general any of your folks, father?" sez I.

"That's nothin' to you," sez he, rayther sullen. "As for you, you pagan," sez he, "the sun might stan' still all day, and you wouldn't kill the vally of a dozen red squirrels, let alone smitin' your enemies."

"Was he a major-general," sez I, "or only a common militia general, good for muster days and May trainin'?"

"Nick," sez he, frownin', "you're old enough to take to the woods. You're too old for my family," sez he. "I can't have anybody round that won't swallow the family traditions. Do you believe that a fish swallowed a man?" sez he, turnin' on me mighty sharp.

"Is it a test question?" sez I.

"Answer me," sez he, as stern as he could speak.

"No more nor I believe that a man swallowed a fish," sez I.

"'Twas a whale!" sez he, shaking his cane at me.

"No man ever swallowed a whale," sez I, bristling up.

"Git out o' my house!" sez he. "And don't never come back," sez he. "And take the Apoc-

riphy with ye; and if you don't believe it, you're a liar!" sez he.

"Seein' the old gentlemen was right wrathly, I picked up my traps and started. I took to the bush, and didn't see him ag'in for three years and up'ards; and then I went bac out o' sheer curiosity to see if 'twas a Whiffles that was in the fish business. The old man threw a beaver-trap at me, and told me to give him no more o' my sarse. 'The Whiffleses is an old family,' sez he, in a pariental, musin' sort o' way. They've had a hand in everything as has happened sence the beginnin' o' time. An ancestor o' mine was lookin' over the wall at the time the apple was eat. They built birch canoes, the Whiffleses did, in the time o' the flood, and paddled about right smart durin' the whole o' the shower. They was allers in difficulty, but managed to take care o' theirselves toler'ble comfortable. Your misbelievin' mind," sez he, "will be a great damage to ye, at one time or 'nother. I s'pose you have heard the story of forty b'ars carryin' off two old children for puttin' their thumbs to their noses at somethin' their father told 'em?"

Nick paused again, and glanced about the room at his audience. Although he had been talking very pleasantly, there was a shade of anxiety on his face.

Kitty was calm; her impulsive nature had been soothed by the unpretentious humors of the trapper. Kinmouth was the most serious of the party.

Mountain Max, acquainted with Nick and his ways, did not once withdraw his eyes from the features of his old friend, but kept them fixed on the sun-browned visage with visible expectancy.

"But what I was comin' at," said Nick, in a voice that slightly faltered, "was this."

He took a slip of paper from his pocket, and slowly unfolding it, advanced it nearer to the light, and seemed to read it carefully.

CHAPTER VI. MRS. KINMOUTH.

Having stared at this paper an unreasonably long time, Nick arose, and handed it to Kinmouth.

"I picked this up in the boy's camp," said Nick, with a nod at Max. "It may throw some light on this here business, and I hope it will do nobody no harm. You needn't read it loud, unless you want to; but perhaps you can tell what hand writ it. I never could write much myself. I allers made p'ison work on't when I writ to the gals, when I was a young man. Hooks and trammels wasn't in my line, I allow. I took nat'rally to the water, and some'at to whisky, but never nat'rally to ink. I'm told that no two handwritin's is exactly alike, and I swear that mine isn't the same twice in a twelve-month. Now, that bit o' paper seems innocent

enough to look at, but there's a heap o' consequences in it. It give Max a dreadful sweat; it scared these gals, and it brought you within an inch o' your life; and not your life either, but your death."

Robert Kinmouth received the paper with an unaccountable foreboding, and grew notably pale the moment he examined it. Clari watched every change of his countenance.

"I will read it," said Kinmouth, in a suppressed tone. "Fairness to Max Bosworth requires that the contents be known to him."

He read as follows:

"GENERAL PRICE:—As you know, I am secretly the friend of the Confederacy, and you may always rely on my friendship and fidelity. I incur some risk in writing these lines, but trust that I have managed matters so astutely, that those around me are entirely ignorant of my sentiments. I have discovered that the person called Mountain Max, a sharpshooter from California, recently arrived, is lurking about in the woods two or three miles above here, waiting for our Nick Whiffles, who is daily expected, at the head of a band of Union desperadoes, from the mountains. I think that Altek Barker, with some of his bushwhackers, might easily surprise and capture this fellow, Max, who is reported to be particularly daring and dangerous. The quicker these pestilent Unionists are exterminated, the better. I've no doubt, general, but you will soon free Missouri from Yankee rule. My husband, I regret to say, sympathizes with the Northern fanatics; but I trust that my loyalty will be sufficient to save him from the halter. Tear this into a thousand pieces as soon as read. I have disguised my hand; but some people, you know, have sharp eyes, and I would not be unavailing until I have done the Confederacy essential service. Yours for Southern rights, "A FRIEND."

In a postscript was added:

"Tell your people to respect the life and property of my husband. At heart, he is really a good man; and I wouldn't have him hanged for the world!"

"A kind and considerate soul, whomsoever she may be!" said Nick, dryly.

Kinmouth did not stir; he continued to gaze at the paper.

"Let me see it," faltered Kitty.

"No," answered Kinmouth, quickly, "it is not necessary."

Clari continued to observe her father, but did not speak. A painful silence ensued. Max was mystified; but there was a quiet gleam of intelligence in Nick's eyes.

"Father?" said Kitty, persuasively, holding out her hand.

"I tell you, No!" said her father, with sternness.

"I never knew him to be so cross," sighed Kitty, nestling to Clari.

"Snub your curiosity, little woman," quoth Nick. "Curiosity is a bad thing in gals. You've got the pith on't, and what's the good o' lokin'?" Writin' is writin', and it can't be no more nor less nor that."

"I have a dreadful suspicion," whispered Kitty to Clari. "Dear Clari, do say something. Say that somebody you know is good and true, and the friend of all."

"All that you wish, dear," murmured Clari.

"And yet the truth is truth, and must be met sometime," responded Kitty, with a shiver of terror.

"Hush! Mother has returned. I hear her voice without. She is giving orders to the servant about the care of her horse," said Clari, with a nervous start.

Kinmouth crushed the paper in his hand, and thrust it into his pocket. The door was opened, and a fine-looking woman entered, followed by a stout negro. The lady was Mrs. Kinmouth, and her black attendant was the boy called Splayfoot. The skirts of her riding-habit were gathered up gracefully in her left hand, while in the right she carried an elegant riding-switch. She paused near the threshold, cast a quick and penetrating glance at every face; then, with remarkable self-possession, made a very becoming obeisance to the company. Each person present mutely acknowledged a commanding mind, and a brilliant and fascinating woman. Kinmouth felt his heart beating hard against its mortal boundaries. His love struggled with his pride and his honor. Pretty and graceful women have certain immunities—a tacitly-rendered courtesy and allegiance. Open-handed manhood gives it spontaneously and without grudging; and Mrs. Kinmouth enjoyed a momentary triumph, though intuitively conscious that something out of the common routine of life had occurred.

Both Clari and Kitty cast an unquiet and inquisitive look at their father. Kinmouth was outwardly calm. Though taken at a disadvantage by the suddenness of his wife's entrance, he quickly rallied, and showed himself equal to the occasion.

"You ride late, Helen," he said, somewhat coldly. "The roads are not safe, and the day should furnish light enough for your equestrian excursions. Nor is it prudent to expose your health to the night air."

"You are quite right, Robert," answered Mrs. Kinmouth, ingenuously. "I expected a scolding, and, to speak the truth, deserve one. But you have not been alone, I perceive."

She glanced at Max and Nick Whiffles; but her eyes went quickly back to the first. Observant and appreciative of such things, the uncommon physique of Bosworth did not escape her notice. A connoisseur was Mrs. Kinmouth in many beauty. His frank and noble countenance impressed her favorably. She inwardly hoped that they should not differ on political subjects; but differ or not, she resolved to be tolerably well pleased with him, provided his sense was equal to his figure.

"Mr. Bosworth, Mrs. Kinmouth," said the courteous husband, introductoryly.

Mrs. Kinmouth acknowledged the mountain-creeper graciously, and turned carelessly toward Nick, who found less favor in his eyes. Kinmouth was embarrassed. Luckily, he thought

of the name of Nick's horse, and clapped it on to the trapper without ceremony.

"Mr. Swingfoot, Mrs. Kinmonth. Swingfoot from up river, somewhere."

Kinmonth coughed, to conceal his deception; while Nick accepted the name of his horse with becoming meekness.

"Your most obedient, Mr. Swingfoot," said Mrs. Kinmonth, with mock seriousness, dropping a courtesy so low that it would have been grotesque in a woman less graceful.

"Till death do us part," quoth Nick, with a mild motion of the hand, and not in the least put down by the lady's over-politeness.

Mrs. Kinmonth had whirled from Nick with a charming flirt of her skirts; but when she heard his calm rejoinder, she gave him a quick look over her shoulder.

"In these troubled times, Mr. Swingfoot," she remarked, with a felicitous mingling of the burlesque and the serious, "death often parts people unexpectedly."

"You are quite right, my lady," responded Nick, with unusual courtliness. "I've known folks that was quite well in the mornin', hunted down and hanged afore night."

There was something in the tones of Nick that startled the ears of Mrs. Kinmonth.

"True," she replied, with an affected shiver. "Dreadful things will sometimes happen."

"Your husband can take his oath o' that, mum," said Nick. "The secession bushwhackers have been here, and there'd been a hangin' in your own family, if it hadn't been for the providence o' God."

A hot flush suffused Mrs. Kinmonth's face. Conscious guilt, Nick thought, revealed itself in her hot cheeks. One moment she was silent. She bit her rosy lip with her white teeth; then, looking steadily at her husband, was mistress of herself again.

"Robert," she exclaimed, "what has happened? I see signs of confusion here. Speak, Robert!" She advanced a step, with every appearance of solicitude. Kinmonth had hard work to believe the convictions of his heart, as she stood before him, so beautiful, and apparently so earnest.

"Some of our good neighbors have been here in your absence, Helen," he answered. "They were led on by that scoundrel, Alick Harker, and fine work they have made in the house. They made war on innocent wardrobes; and you will find your own and your daughter's apparel hacked and mangled by these pillagers."

"I care not for the dresses," cried Mrs. Kinmonth. "Tell me if they threatened you!"

"They did more nor that," interposed Nick Whiffles. "There'd been a pison difficulty if I hadn't come jest as I did. They was goin' to hang him from his own chamber-winder. But I put a stop to that. I did, by mighty! And the mean skunks skedaddled."

"So they tried to hang you, Robert," said Mrs. Kinmonth, musingly, lifting her riding-switch as if to strike something she could see with her mind's eye.

"He has spoken the truth, Helen," answered Kinmonth, gravely.

"Alick Harker?" queried Mrs. Kinmonth.

"Alick Harker," said Kinmonth, with his eyes fixed upon the tip of his wife's foot, that peered daintily from beneath the sweeping habit. A woman knows what will tell on her side of the question. Charming women have charming ways. Homely women have homely ways. Male sight is always ready to sacrifice reason to that one sense—at least, for the time being. Mr. Kinmonth was a very firm man, but a charitable and considerate man, also. He could not help glancing from mother to daughter, and from daughter to mother again. They were wondrously like in person. Mr. Kinmonth choked down his feelings, and made a generous margin for political acerbities and partisan zeal.

"I'll be even with him!" said Mrs. Kinmonth, compressing her lips, and striking her skirt with her switch. "See if Alick Harker don't answer for this insolence!"

"One might nat'rally be excused for askin' how?" observed Nick, with a calm assurance that could be put down by nothing human.

Mrs. Kinmonth had the prestige and all the elements of an adept; but Nick's simple remark confused her. She perceived in an instant her false estimate of the man. She was conscious that no ordinary character was observing her, and weighing her in the balance.

"If the punishment falls on him, no matter how," answered Mrs. Kinmonth, with a dignity that was really superb. Then, to her husband:

"Robert, I am greatly disturbed. What have told me fills me with terror. I must know the particulars. Excuse me, gentlemen"—she looked at Max—"for a few moments, while I make some changes in my apparel. A riding-habit is rather embarrassing for the house. Kitty?"

She made a gesture to Kitty, and swept from the room with that indescribable ease and confidence which a graceful and thorough woman of the world only can successfully assume.

CHAPTER VIII.

KITTY.

Kitty looked hesitatingly at her father, and arose to follow Mrs. Kinmonth.

"Kitty?" he said.

The girl stood still. Kinmonth approached her, and addressed these words to her in a low voice.

"These are times, my daughter, when we are obliged to practice the utmost prudence. Life, property, and happiness are at hazard. Mrs. Kinmonth will ask you many questions concerning the stirring transactions of the evening."

You need know only that a fugitive Unionist sought safety here, was befriended by Clari; and, you may truthfully add, was discovered by Harker and his men."

He stopped an instant, then added:

"It is not expedient that Mr. Bosworth should be identified with the person called Mountain Max, nor that the man whom I introduced as Swingfoot should be known for the present as Nick Whiffles. There are reasons why this deception should be practiced with your mother. Do you understand?"

"I don't know," she stammered. "There are some things that I am afraid to understand. I mean well, father; but I am weak and impulsive. I love you both so much! I want to obey and oblige both. It places me so awkwardly, father!"

Her voice trembled, and she looked at him timidly.

"Be strong for the right," said Kinmonth, kissing her forehead. "Go to your mother; she waits. Be subtle, my little Kitty, for once in your life. Be like Clari."

He glanced at Clari with evident pride.

"Impossible!" murmured Kitty. "Clari is so strong, self-possessed, and self-reliant, while I am so weak, wavering, and uncertain of myself. It's a terrible thing to be so constituted that we wish to give nobody pain. But I'll try, father! I'll try to be dreadfully deep!"

And with the most honest and amiable face to be found, Kitty ran after her mother. Hurrying up-stairs to Mrs. Kinmonth's chamber, she found her seated, waiting for her rather impatiently. She had yet made not the slightest change in her toilet, and sat gently whipping her habit with her switch.

"Well, Pussy?" said Mrs. Kinmonth, carelessly.

"Well, mother?" replied Kitty, demurely, without trusting herself to encounter the bright eyes of her mother.

"That makes two wells; and two wells, according to the old proverb, make a river. What did you loiter for?"

"I came right along," said Kitty, not very promptly.

"Come here, you little dunce, and let me dust your jacket for you!" said Mrs. Kinmonth, with playful nonchalance, gently striking her shoulders with her switch. "You can't lie, and you know it."

"Why should I lie?" answered the girl, attempting to parry her mother's acuteness.

"Don't measure swords with me, Pussy," continued the lady, more seriously. "You know I'm the cleverest at such exercise. I must know what has taken place here. It is necessary that I should immediately be informed of everything that has happened during my absence."

"Better take off your hat and gauntlets,

mother. I can talk just as well while you're busy," answered Kitty, evasively.

"Let me feel your paws, Pussy!" laughed Mrs. Kinmonth, taking her hand. "How velvety they are! One can hardly feel the incipient claws through the soft pile. You are a very harmless creature, as yet, Kitty. And as for your wit, you haven't a particle to spare. You are not old enough to deceive a wise grimalkin like myself. You want to get out from under my eyes, and tell me an artless, pretty story, while I am changing my dress. It never'll do! Don't waste your feeble powers, girl. There is not wit enough in the family to make actresses of both of us. Something very serious has transpired here. Now, what is it? Down, down, and make a clean breast!"

Mrs. Kinmonth drew Kitty down upon a cushion at her feet, so that she could look straight into her eyes.

"Come, little fool! Begin to tell me the lie your father told you to tell."

The lady was very quiet, yet very full of that self-sustaining assurance that so surely overcomes resistance.

"I was not here at the time the trouble commenced," began Kitty; "but Clari was. Clari can tell it the best."

Mrs. Kinmonth gave her a little cut with the whip, and muttered, "Pshaw! Go on."

"It seems, however," continued Kitty, "that a Union man was pursued by some Secessionists, and took shelter in the house. Clari hid him in the wall, and when Harker came, she couldn't tell where he was. They made horrid threats, and finally were going to murder father unless she would tell. The villains got a rope and put it around his neck, and it was very, very frightful! I thought I should die!"

"Wouldn't Clari speak?" asked Mrs. Kinmonth, quickly.

"She was dreadfully agitated, and father began to believe that there was somebody hidden in the house. So he told her if there was, and he was a good Union man, and was younger and stronger than he, not to betray him. While Clari stood, with clasped hands, in fearful uncertainty, Mountain Max—"

Mrs. Kinmonth started nervously.

"What's the matter, mother?"

"Go on," said Mrs. Kinmonth, bending toward Kitty with eagerness. "Mountain Max?"

"I am a little before my story," continued Kitty. "It turned out, afterward, that those shocking bushwhackers had started a man called Mountain Max lately from the gold mountains of California—and," she added, gathering courage, "not so much from the gold mountains, I should think, as from the grizzly bear mountains—whom they had surprised somewhere up the river. And the person whom Clari had hidden was he. Hearing what had been said, this Mountain Max burst from his concealment,

to save father, and relieve Clari from her dreadful embarrassment."

Mrs. Kinmouth was now somewhat pale. She listened to Kitty's words with earnest attention. "He acted splendidly, Mountain Max did! He sprang toward father, whom they had placed in the window, ready to push out"—Kitty shuddered—"drew him away from the danger, and knocked one of the men who was holding him, right through the window."

The fair narrator stopped, and recalled her father's instructions.

"What happened then?" queried Mrs. Kinmouth, compressing her lips.

"So he saved father's life," added Kitty.

"And what became of this Max?"

"They took him away," replied Kitty, wondering at her own powers of dissimulation. "The Secessionists took him away. And about that time the men below came, but not soon enough to do any good."

"Bosworth and that keen-eyed man in buckskin?"

"Yes," said Kitty.

"Strange that a man should have the same name as his horse!" said Mrs. Kinmouth, musingly.

"Same name as his horse?" repeated Kitty, coloring consciously.

"As I passed the tables just now, I saw a strange horse, covered with a red blanket, on which was painted, in black letters, the name 'Swingfoot.' Now, was that the man's name or the horse's name?"

Mrs. Kinmouth got Kitty's eyes under hers, and held them steadily.

"I should think so," murmured Kitty, rather irrelevantly. "Father introduced him, you know? Father wouldn't have introduced him, you know—"

Kitty took her eyes away suddenly, and let them droop to her mother's chin.

"You never will be able to tell lies ingenuously, my poor little girl!" said Mrs. Kinmouth, with a sigh. "Just under the word 'Swingfoot,' she went on, 'were the initials 'N. W.'"

"'N. W.!' murmured Kitty, with hot cheeks. "Perhaps it means North West."

"Or New World, or Night Walker!" added Mrs. Kinmouth, mockingly. "Or, more probably, Not Warranted! It cannot mean Nick Whiffles!"

Mrs. Kinmouth laughed, but it was a troubled laugh.

Kitty showed guilt, and with a downward glance, expressed the opinion that "Not Warranted" looked reasonable.

"Catherine Kinmouth, stop equivocating!" said the mother, sharply. "What does it suffice. You are but a jointed doll in my hands. I can take you all apart in a minute!"

"And put me together again, I suppose," sighed the girl.

"Come, my child, be frank," continued Mrs. Kinmouth, with most winning tenderness of manner. "You have done your duty to your father, although your blushing falsehoods fall harmless at my feet. You are an honest, single-minded, well-meaning girl, and nothing but simple truth sits easily on you. I wish you could intrigue a little; that you had more art, and were more of my mode of thinking. Politics don't seem to get into your head at all; or, if they do, they get in at the wrong side. Rebellion is the thing for us, my dear. With rebellion comes war, and war, though terrible in some respects, is brilliant with heroic deeds and gilded with history. The Confederacy is 'War.' Let it come! Those who survive it will have tales to tell. The South has cast off her allegiance to the Constitution, and will never go back to its bondage again. The Federal power will be shaken and overthrown!"

Mrs. Kinmouth spoke in a grave and earnest fashion. Kitty regarded her with awe.

"I wish you had the courage," the lady went on, presently, "to help me."

"In what way, mother?" Kitty asked.

"By carrying a certain message to a certain place."

The girl instantly thought of the letter she had seen, and became very pale.

"What! terrified already?" exclaimed Mrs. Kinmouth, with a toss of contempt.

"We ought to be careful what we do," observed the daughter, significantly.

"Of course, we ought! I am suspected, I suppose? There was a certain awkwardness upon you all as I came in. I felt it immediately. I am not to be deceived, Catherine. I shall be watched in future. I cannot go out again to-night, therefore, I must have a trusty messenger; and you shall be that messenger."

"I?" exclaimed Kitty, thoroughly surprised.

"You, my little girl," said her mother, quietly.

"Leave the house at this time of night? You cannot mean it! I have not a particle of courage, and never had." Kitty looked at Mrs. Kinmouth with dilated eyes.

"You have courage, puss, but don't know it," she said, with insinuating tenderness, toying with the girl's hair.

The latter shook her head.

"At your mother's bidding, you will be brave as the bravest. We have always been good friends, Kitty. I have never claimed authority over you, but that of love. I am sure you will not refuse to comply with a request that concerns my personal safety. You would not care to see me harmed."

Mrs. Kinmouth's splendid eyes beamed eloquently upon her daughter. Kitty raised her mother's white hand, and kissed it reverently and affectionately. She rendered silent homage to her brilliancy and beauty.

"I will write a note," continued Mrs. Kinmouth, "which you shall conceal on your person. Before writing, however, I will put off this habit, and you shall put it on. It will fit you charmingly. Come, off with your muslins, and I'll cast my outside as quickly as you will. Here goes hat; here goes skirt; now for a struggle with the buttons; here go buttons and necktie, and here go I out of the whole!"

Kitty arose, and during the denuding process, stood staring at her mother.

"You don't begin, puss. I shall have to take hold. Here's at you!" Mrs. Kinmouth began with Kitty, who offered but slight resistance, and soon became passive in the adroit internal hands. In a sort of wondering stupor, she allowed herself to be put into her mother's habit, hatted, and gloved. Then the mistress of these ceremonies wrote a note with notable rapidity, folded, and sealed it carefully.

"Put it where girls carry their love-letters," said Mrs. Kinmouth, archly. Kitty mechanically unbuttoned her corsege, and put the note in her bosom.

"Now, remain here till I come for you," said Mrs. Kinmouth. "Splayfoot shall bring the horses round to the side-door, when the coast is clear."

"Stop, mother!" faltered the girl. "I will not go, unless you will swear to me that this errand will harm no one."

"Why should I harm any one? Be not so distrustful. I am not a wicked woman, I think. I'll swear, however, as much as you like. Folly shall go with you."

"Folly enough!" murmured Kitty.

"I'll instruct you where to go, by-and-by. You must keep your wits about you, and not forget."

The girl shivered.

"You are thinking of the night, and the darkness, and the danger!" "Dispel such fancies. The girl, Folly, will keep you from thinking of such things, and the distance is not long."

Mrs. Kinmouth drew on a handsome wrapper, kissed Kitty, glided from the chamber, closed the door, and looked her in.

CHAPTER VIII.

PARTING WORDS.

Kitty had sensations. Sensations are both common and cheap, but not always agreeable. Never was the girl so singularly placed. Natural affection for her mother struggled with natural timidity of character. The times were unsettled, and the roads particularly unsafe, especially at night. She had a great horror of Secession plunderers and outlaws. While she was picturing to herself the terrors of a nocturnal encounter with such—some one knocked at the door, and presently she heard the voice of Clari:

"Kitty! Kitty!"

Kitty remained silent.

The knocking and the calling were repeated, then Clari went away. Kitty was relieved by her departure. She was in utter darkness. The time seemed long, and she was weary with standing. She groped about for a chair, and sat down, full of apprehension. She was glad to hear the key turn and the door open.

"Courage, Puss!" said Mrs. Kinmouth. "I have been detained by the person your father calls Swingfoot. There's art in that brown-faced fellow. I have his little gray eyes! It's all right, now. You must go out at the side door, and walk directly toward the trees, where you will find Splayfoot with the horses. Splayfoot should go with you, but I have an instinctive feeling that he'll be watched."

"Watched for what?" asked Kitty.

Mrs. Kinmouth colored, set down her lamp, then took it up and lighted another by it.

"People are suspicious of every body now-a-days. Slaves, you know, may be tampered with. Folly will do, I think. I have bribed her, at any rate. Sally Dowse is the pump-handle that I fear the most. But Sally has gone to bed, and I hope that some pestilent fever will keep her there for the next three weeks. She's too Northern for me, that creature is. I execrate and detest every bone in her body!"

Mrs. Kinmouth frowned irefully, and her pretty mouth was, for an instant, distorted with overmastering aversion. Kitty had never seen such a face on her mother. She was startled. She wondered what strange mood had seized her.

"Don't stare, little duncie? Your wit is a slow coach. I have a born hatred of everything that is Northern—with the single exception of dry-goods from New York. We can buy their trumpery stuff the same as we buy things of dirty Jew peddlers. Yankees are supremely groveling and low."

The deeper part of Mrs. Kinmouth's character was getting into action. Her impulses were ready to bear her along.

"My charming fool! How I pity your apathy! You should hate Yankees! You don't know the luxury of hating Yankees! To hate Yankees is the Southern rage. I hate them with all my soul!"

Mrs. Kinmouth clenched her white right hand, and set her white teeth together. Her lips looked as if they had been jointed with mechanical nicety.

"Mother, you terrify me!" cried Kitty. "I never heard you talk so before. I thought everybody liked Sally Dowse. She defended us, to night, bravely."

"How well I like her, she shall know by-and-by!" retorted Mrs. Kinmouth, impetuously. "I have got things in working order. When I put my hand on her, she will know it."

When Mrs. Kinmouth said, "put my hand on her", she looked like one of those fallen angels whose glory is gone, but whose brightness lingers.

Kitty gazed at her with parted lips. Her mother changed her expression like the glancing rays of the sun.

"Heed me not, dear! It is time for you to go. Pass down the stairs very softly. You will find the side door ajar. What are you looking at, child?"

"This habit—isn't it Clari's?"

"Attend to what I am saying. You will find the door ajar. Go out quietly, and mount silently from the boy's hand. The girl Folly will be there before you, mounted on Sally's little Indian pony. Go down the bluff road about half a mile, then turn to the left through an oak opening. You may remember that there is a beaten track there—follow it. At the distance of three quarters of a mile, you will reach a deserted cabin. A person will be waiting your appearance there, to whom you will deliver the note. When you have delivered the note, return immediately without speaking to the person receiving it. Let Folly remain a little behind you when you see the cabin, that she may not witness the passage of the note. Can you remember all this, Kitty?"

"I can remember it well enough, but I doubt my courage. But I will do my best. I will think all the time that I am serving you. You are sure there is nothing to harm any one in this errand?"

She looked earnestly at her mother.

"Certainly not! Am I not a woman?"

Mrs. Kinmouth's face became soft and kindly in expression.

"I thought," stammered Kitty, "while you were gone, and I was standing here in the dark, with no mortal eye on me, that perhaps—that possibly—"

While Kitty faltered, Mrs. Kinmouth kissed her tenderly upon both cheeks and gently pushed her from the chamber.

"You are so irresistible, mother!" murmured the girl, full of love and admiration. "How can one help going where you wish her to go? I will do whatever you bid me. You must make hearts ache, dear mother! I pity the man who comes under your smile and the light of your eye."

Mrs. Kinmouth kissed the rosy lips that pronounced these flattering words, then put a lamp into Kitty's hands and stood at the top of the stairs till she had flitted down them and out of the house.

CHAPTER IX. ON THE ROAD.

Kitty's heart was in a strange flutter as she passed out into the darkness. She made, as she believed, the short passage to the trees un-

observed. She saw no one, at least, and that was good evidence that she was not watched. She found Splayfoot with the horses, as she had been led to expect, and mounted precisely as she had been instructed. The little coward meant to follow her instructions to the letter, and make faithfulness to details stand in the place of courage.

The negro girl Folly was already there, and mounted on a diminutive pony which had long been the peculiar property of Sally Dowse. Folly was neither a wit nor a fool; her character, like a pendulum, vibrated between the two points. She was all sorts of a contraband. She was full of fun, mischief, and idleness. She was faithful as long as there was no incentive to betray; honest, as long as honesty was no trouble. She did not care what happened, so long as she remained personally safe and unharmed. She liked to be sly and comfortable. She had innumerable tricks and odd humors that could be traced to no probable cause, which often brought her to grief, and irritated the self-sustaining Sally to the last parallel of endurance.

Folly had been bought for a trifle at St. Louis; but was not in the least cast down because she was a cheap chattel. Though often taunted by the other servants with being a "low-priced nigger", she never, on any occasion, displayed temper or the slightest sensitiveness on the subject. Although she was not good-looking, she was good-natured, and it was her uniform good nature that made her tolerated by the Kinmouth household.

Attended by this singular compound of humanity, Kitty gathered the flowing reins till her horse was full in hand, and set out on her mysterious errand. It was not the kind of companionship she would have chosen, for Kitty had a wholesome fear of Folly, notwithstanding the grinning cleverness of her mouth.

"Now, Folly, if you behave well," said Kitty, coaxingly, "you are to have something when we get back."

"Don't want noffin'!" said Folly, briefly.

"But you shall have a present, nevertheless," added Kitty.

"Got too many them yer presents, now. Lor! I's full o' presents. What's the use? Ain't no use! Die and leave 'em all, ye know? I'm gwine to lay up my treasures 'bove. Guess there's room enough for 'em dar!"

Kitty heard the girl laughing in the happiest manner.

"No moths dar; no rust, no kind o' bug! Dar's the place to keep things. Cl'ar de track, white folks! De nigs am goin' home!"

Folly had been to two or three camp-meetings in the course of her life, and she never could succeed in getting them out of her head. Camp-meeting reminiscences haunted her continually, and played fantastic parts in her grotesque character.

"Curb your tongue, Folly, for this is not a time for idle talk," answered Kitty, rebukingly. "We are in danger, and something may happen to us before we get back."

"I s'pect there will, Miss Kit—Lor! I almost knows thar will. I feels it in my bones. Fact is, de Jeff Davis Confederators will jes' come down on us, and ear' us cl'ar off, de Jesus knows whar!"

"Hush, girl! don't go on in that strain. You should always speak encouragingly and make the best of things," said Kitty, tartly.

"Dat's so, if 'twasn't for de conscience, miss. But I's got a conscience, miss, dat's done gone big enough for two. Des 'yar woodses, Kit, am full o' rebellioners. Lor! If thar's anything that sets me quiverin' like a bowt o' jelly, it's them yer Confederators. They wouldn't make noffin' o' gobblin' up a dainty little bit of a Unioner gal like you. How dark de trees am! 'Pears like there'll be thunder and sharpenin'. But dat yer's of no count. Like to see it strike de big pines!"

Folly pretended to shiver, but her white teeth were roguishly gleaming through her thick lips all the while. She crowded closer to her mistress, and managed to run her Indian pony against her stirrup-foot, and seriously endanger her equilibrium.

"Vexatious creature!" exclaimed Kitty. "I wish you would be careful, girl. Instead of giving you my coral necklace, as I intended, I think I shall have you punished when I get home."

"Tell ye what, Miss Kit, dat yer's better for me than 'tther thing. You see I can't lay up no coral necklaces 'bove, but whippin's I's had gone into on. On count on den' yer, and they makes us so much better, too! White folks won't stand no chance, 'kase why they isn't walloped enough below. Lor, Kit, de whippin' of dis yer world work out de glory!"

Kitty did not answer, thinking silence the best way of checking her garrulity. Her timidity increased at every step. The road was lonely and dark, and she had no one to protect her but this chattering girl and her own innocence.

"I'll die," whispered Folly, abruptly, with a well-acted start, "if I didn't think I seed a Confederacy!"

"Where?" gasped Kitty.

"Here, dar, eb'rywhar!"

Folly pointed rapidly and somewhat wildly in every direction, and batted her little Indian pony harder than ever against her mistress' stirrup-foot. The timid letter-carrier shrieked with pain and fear, while the girl grinned like an imp of darkness, as she was.

"You will mislead me, you careless ape!" exclaimed Kitty, indignantly. "You are hurting me with your awkwardness. You are preparing yourself for punishment."

"I's allers in trouble! I wish I was in de land of Canaan. Glory, hallelujah! My soul's marchin' on!"

Folly broke off as if she were very brittle, and heaved a camp-meeting groan, so heavy in volume and so dolorous in tone, that it sent the blood tingling to Kitty's extremities. She was prepared to see Alick Harker and his outlaws rise up before her, full of wickedness and violence.

Folly slyly checked her pony, and mischievously allowed her mistress to go on some yards in advance. Kitty missed her presently, and was greatly perplexed. She addressed the girl, but received no answer. She stopped her horse, and Folly simultaneously stopped her pony. It was very dark, the trees towered gloomily above her, and her situation was really painful. She regretted that she had undertaken such a service. She heartily wished herself at home with Clari. She called the name of her attendant, and after repeating it several times, got in answer:

"I's jes' ahind, Miss Kit. Run agin a limb, and got brushed right off dis yer Ingine pony, same's if I's a fly. Thought 'twas a Confederacy. Hope you haven't been skeered. Couldn't help it more noffin! Took away my breath. But I don't ear. My soul's marchin' on!"

With these deceitful words, Folly started the pony, and was soon ambling along beside Kitty.

CHAPTER X.

KITTY BECOMES HER OWN MOTHER.

Kitty's heart beat rarely; it thumped against its bars; it palpitated within its narrow boundaries; it throbbed with fear. Numerous fancies went flying through her brain. She had but one conservative element to save her, and that was love for her mother. That exalted emotion pervading all her being beat backward the encroachments of terror, and kept her from falling from her saddle in sheer fright.

She turned to the left, according to directions, and quickening her pace, neared the designated goal. It grew lighter. Pale starlight glimmered through the trees. She looked anxiously for the deserted cabin. It appeared, finally, after she began to fear that she had passed it.

"Remain here," she said to Folly, "till I return. My errand is to that small cabin."

"Glory, Miss Kit! I's afear'd to stay ahind," protested Folly.

"Do as I tell you!" answered Kitty, with more nerve than she usually displayed.

The girl reluctantly stopped, and Kitty proceeded. No encouraging light streamed from the little window of the cabin; it seemed tenantless. She checked her horse and looked at the door in silent expectancy, not unmixed with incredulity. Would any one appear? She thought not. When she had waited a few mo-

ments, she moved her horse about, so as to make a noise; and this expedient proving unsuccessful, she summoned courage to ride up to the door and knock; and a very timid, tremulous knock it was.

It was a wonder that she knocked at all; but the same feeling of filial affection that had hitherto sustained her, gave her resolution. She backed her horse at once, surprised at her own boldness.

The door was opened without delay, and a man in a colonel's uniform looked out, and seeing what kind of visitor he had, gave a gallant military salute, and came out. Kitty stiffly returned his salutation, and stumbled in her corsage for the letter, which she presented in silence, and was turning away, when the officer addressed her:

"Stay, madam! Leave me not so hastily. I was directed to meet you here, and receive the note which I now hold in my hand."

"My errand is done," answered Kitty, "and I must return."

"It is not light enough to read this little messenger," said the officer, putting the note in his pocket, "but I dare say it will keep till morning. I thank you, madam, for bringing it. If there were more ladies of your zeal and energy, our cause would not languish. Though personally a stranger to you, your name is quite familiar to me. But, pardon me, you are much younger than I had expected; although you were described in the most flattering manner by the person with whom you have been in correspondence."

Kitty was embarrassed, but said nothing. In fact, she knew not what reply to make, for she was now placed in a position that she had not counted on. She thought of her youthful face, and regretted that she had not come veiled.

"Be not offended at my freedom," added the man, perceiving that Kitty was confused. "If I manifested undue surprise because you unmeasurably surpass the—the—accounts I have heard of you, I am sure it is an impoliteness that a woman ought to pardon. The Confederacy must prosper. Mrs. Kimmonth, while we have such fair friends and allies."

"You are disposed to flattery," said Kitty, rallying. "You should bear in mind that starlight is deceptive."

"It deceives well in this case, at all events. I wish there were more starlight in the world."

Kitty glanced at the Confederate officer while he was speaking, and perceived that he had a good figure, and, so far as she could judge, a good face. She thought there would be no harm in permitting him to remain in his somewhat ludicrous error. It was novel to be admired as her own mother. She smiled at the rare conceit.

"See me by sunlight, and you will change your mind," she slammered.

"The change would be in your favor, I do

not doubt," returned the officer, quickly. "But tell me," he added, adroitly changing the conversation which he had the sense to know could not much longer be agreeable, "how are all the good people at the Bluff? I had hoped they would have different views when it came to this. But it seems that there is but one faithful among the Kimmonths, and that one a lady—a lady, I may truthfully say, as daring as she is fair, as courageous as she is charming."

The officer bowed in a courtly and respectful manner.

Kitty was prudently mute; but she heard his testimony concerning the Kimmonths with strange eagerness.

"General Price, he resumed, has spoken in the highest terms of your services. 'Mrs. Kimmonth,' said he, 'is full of Southern fire; she will stop at nothing. She hates Yankees, and would die for our young republic.'"

"Very young, indeed!" thought Kitty, whose attentive ears more than redeemed her silent tongue.

"The other Kimmonths are different," he went on, with the air of one who was conscious that his auditor knew all and more than he knew about it, and would receive with perfect complaisance the family portraits. "Your husband, madam, begging your pardon, is a stubborn Federalist—mild in demeanor, but deeply in earnest. He would hang sooner than renounce. He would have been disposed of long ago, by the bushwhackers, had it not been for you, madam."

Kitty shuddered. What a revelation was this!

"Then, there is Miss Kimmonth. I wish we could have had her. She is said to be a young lady of character; but, unluckily, it is on the wrong side. She is beautiful, intellectual, and self-poised. These elements are excellent; but she is not your daughter. The Northern poison is in her veins."

"Yes!" sighed Kitty, a little hypocritically.

"After Clari, Kitty," added the Confederate officer, with a smile. "What shall we say of Kitty, madam?"

"The truth, by all means," answered Kitty, hastily.

"Your daughter, Kitty! You are very good, madam. What shall I say? Kitty is not Clari. Not by any means! She is pretty; she is innocent; she is charming; but Kitty is a child. She is a creature of impulse—a lovely little weathercock, which turns ever with the wind. You see, madam, that I am no stranger to the Kimmonths."

"You know them but too well, sir! Go on with Kitty. Your frankness pleases me, while, at the same time, it assures me that you are what you seem," said Kitty, with an effort.

"I protest that I will go no farther! Kitty is the charming cat's-paw of her charming mother!"

The young officer lifted his cap, like a true son of chivalry.

Kitty Kimmonth felt as if she had been suddenly plunged into a cold bath. First, came a glow of conviction; then, of humiliation; then, of indignation. For the first time in her life, she was conscious of her own character, as seen by others. The realization was thrilling, and full of wholesome influences. Her pride being touched, her sense of personal danger grew less and less. She began to study the appearance and moral value of the man standing so nonchalantly before her. That he was full of dash and audacity, there could be no doubt. But his audacity was so lubricated with urbanity, that she could not well be offended with him. There are those who can say very impudent things in a very pleasing manner; while others, more honest, but less happy in expression, make enemies with every word they utter, without intending anything of the kind.

The officer was of goodly height, slim of figure, and rather graceful in his general making-up. His attitudes were easy, and he talked without effort. His head and face were most noticeable. There was a clear track of white from his face to his crown, which, when his cap was off, gave him a look of age that did not really belong to him, he not being a day over thirty-five. His nose was large and beaked. He had hawk's eyes, with black heavy brows and lashes. His face was ruddy with good living, and rather elongated. He had very black and prosperous mustaches, which had never wanted for care. They were nicely brushed away from mouth, and fiercely twisted at the ends. These, with a small, jetty tuft on his under lip, was all the beard he wore.

There was light enough for Kitty to make these observations with tolerable accuracy. He had glittering shoulder-straps, and wore a handsome sword.

"You might have omitted the pretty flattery of the mother!" said Kitty, with affected coyness, tossing her head as she had seen her mother toss hers.

"I should have spoiled the truth, Mrs. Kimmonth; and I never like to mar the truth, especially when it sacrifices a pretty compliment to a pretty woman. Compliments, madam, are the proper food of the sex. They are legitimate. Confound me, if they ain't just the thing! They are arrows that only require to be shot skillfully to hit the mark. I have sent many, and I never knew one to go amiss. Compliments are the prayers that we offer to Beauty."

"Prayers!" repeated Kitty, with open eyes.

"Prayers for friendship, prayers for love, prayers for favor," responded the officer, coolly. "These are the prayers of men."

"Do not pray to me!" said Kitty, curtly, with another toss of her head, *a la mater*. She loved her mother so well that she could easily

act like her. Her self-love was so touched that she forgot the situation. "Kitty is said to be fairer than her mother," she added, experimentally.

"I believe not the tale!" laughed the officer. "Were I to ask favor of lady to wear on my helmet during this struggle, she is not far off of whom I should beg the priceless boon. Kitty may be beautiful; but the woman has no inspiration for me who has not compactness of will and strength of character. I could not ride into battle with the colors of a pretty cipher fluttering on my breast. I like not spiritless creatures. Clari would do better; but you, madam, best of all."

The officer lifted his cap again, and fixing his eyes on a white ostrich feather upon her hat, added, with increasing earnestness and chivalrousness:

"If you would but give me that feather, I would ask for no better favor; and I give you my knightly word it shall go with me to battle, and float gayly where bullets fly thick and fast."

Kitty smiled, and mischievously tearing the feather from her hat, cast it at the stranger's feet, with an air that she knew was her mother's. She inwardly vowed to avenge herself on the conceited fellow who had so disparaged her, and sneered at her weaknesses. There was the feather, and he could wear it where he pleased. She had an idea that they might meet again, and that she could make him feel that "charming cat's-paws" might be dangerous. She resolved to wound his vanity, and to re-assert and remodel herself. She deemed it a happy thing that she could now read the price-mark they had placed upon her. She thought she would stily put a new figure on it sometime, so that when people looked over the Kimmonth goods they would not find her so very cheap.

Her feelings were of a mingled kind. Tears and smiles were very near. The grotesque and the vexatious were never so mixed up in one girl. But Pride was near enough to clap a finger into the right balance, and give Kitty a piquancy and a power over herself that were quite new. From that moment, Kitty Kimmonth began to shape a new character for herself, and to rise to the dignity of true womanhood. She thanked the lucky stars that had tricked her out in a riding-habit, and sent her on a mysterious errand in the middle of the night; for she had learned a lesson that she should never forget.

Holding his cap in his left hand, the Confederate officer stooped, and picking up the snowy plume, with an air half-playful, half-grave, buttoned it into the breast of his coat. The whole action was gracefully done. A woman has an eye to grace. If anything is prettily done, she is sure to see it. Kitty gave him a little nod of approbation—for her mother! She meant to do things well—for her mother!

She had had the tact and self-possession to keep her face partially averted during this impromptu lingering, and as often as the officer edged around, she, by an imperceptible pressure upon the bridle-rein, made her little horse take a corresponding turn; so that the courteous rebel was half-distracted by half-seen beauty. He was tantalized all the while—tantalized and surprised—tantalized by an incomplete view of features so lovely, and surprised at the extreme youth of the suppositious Mrs. Kinmouth.

"My name, madam, is Blackmer," he said, in a tone more serious. "I am a colonel in the Confederate service. Should my body be left on some future battle-field, your white plume will be found with me. My heart shall beat its last throbs against it."

Just then some pale rays of light flickered over Kitty's face, and made it lovely; indeed, Blackmer involuntarily rendered it the homage of his admiration. While he was giving this silent worship, Kitty touched her horse with her switch, and galloped to meet Folly, who, tired of waiting, had been gradually approaching for the last few minutes.

CHAPTER XI. CONFESSION.

As Kitty rode homeward, she began to regret that she had delivered the letter. The new light she had received gave her new motives and desires. She no longer wished to be the passive toy of her mother. If that mysterious missive were again in her possession, she would keep it and make a different disposition of it. A few words of plain truth sometimes change our preconceived notions. She inwardly thanked Colonel Blackmer for his voluntary contributions to her knowledge. So deeply was she absorbed in self-inspection, that she allowed her horse to walk through the dreariest portions of the way, much to the annoyance of Folly, who now felt those fears and fancies which she had previously feigned.

"Gwine mighty slow, Miss Kit!" she muttered. "Don't know the meanin' of this yer. Pears like ye ain't so skeery as ye used to was."

"There's no particular hurry," answered Kitty, absently. "I rather like the solitude."

"Glory, Miss Kit! Should think you'd been to camp-meetin' and got a change o' heart. Its powerful lonesome here, Miss Kit. It pears like the woods was crowded with charcoal."

Just then, Kitty discovered something in the road, but a few yards distant. It seemed the figure of a man, but it was quite motionless. She prudently stopped her horse, and Folly was not slow to follow her example.

"Don't be skeered, women-folks!" said the figure, composedly. "There ain't no danger, I allow; leastwise not from me."

Kitty knew the voice; for Nick Whiffles had

a vocal style of his own. This meeting embarrassed her. She wondered if the man would know her. Could she not pass him, unrecognized, in the darkness? If she spoke, would he know her voice? She whispered to Folly:

"Speak to him, girl. Say something—no matter what—and let us pass on."

"Go 'long you low, white trash!" said Folly, obedient to the bidding of her mistress. "No 'spectable pusson 'd be out this yer time o' night."

"The very idee that was in my mind," replied Nick, dryly. "If I owned cattle o' your color, I should cross-fetter 'em at night, by mighty!"

"Don't go for to insult Miss Kit, you California Unioneer!" added Folly.

"You don't talk to him right," whispered Kitty.

"Who's Miss Kit?" asked Nick.

"Mars'r Kinmouth's gal, Miss Kit is," answered Folly, going from bad to worse. "And as for cattle, a cullud pusson is no more a cattle nor you be!"

"Here's a queer, little diffikilty, by gracious!" exclaimed Nick. "What on airth are ye here for, gal, at this time o' night, when your honest old father thinks you're abed and asleep?"

"I will answer you some other time. I must hurry home, now. Excuse me, Mr. Whiffles," stammered Kitty.

"You shall go where you please, little woman, and I'll see you safe there; but I'd nat'ally like to know the meanin' o' this. It must be some 'at uncommon that brings ye out to-night on this solitary road, with the dark woods all round 'ye, and the Seesh up, and prowlin' in s'arch o' mischief. Your mother has a hand in this, I'll warrant. A cat's paw is soft when the claws are in; but puss can scratch when her back is up. Beware, gal, beware!"

"What do you mean, sir?" faltered Kitty.

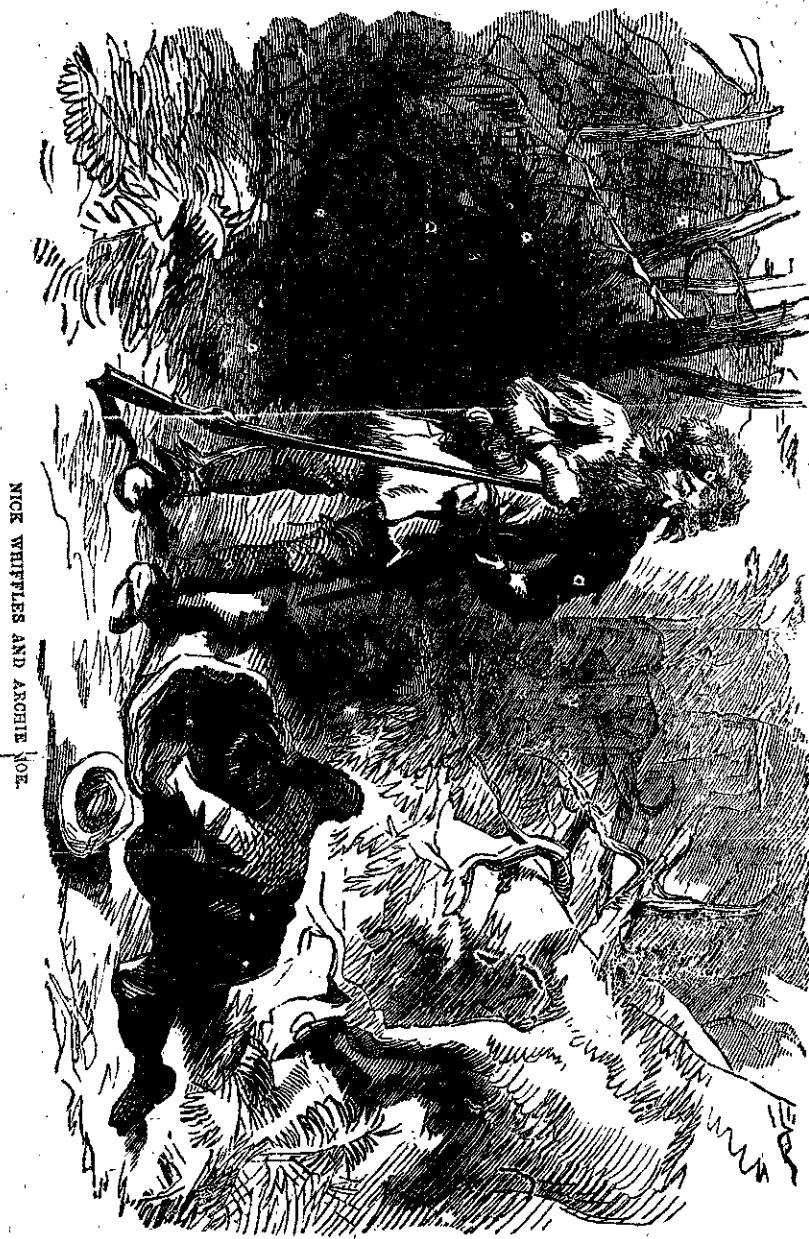
"That these are times o' danger; and he or she that isn't a friend, is an enemy. There's no half way place in this business. There's two roads, that go in different directions, and we must take one or t'other o' 'em. You can't to and fro between 'em. Gal, gal! you're bein' led into a p'ison diffikilty. I see it as plain as plain can be. You've been on a secret errand for your mother, or some other person; and my word for't, there's betrayal and death in it for somebody."

"Death and betrayal in it for somebody!" repeated Kitty, with a shiver of apprehension.

"You may believe it as if 'twere a text o' Scrip'ter," returned Nick, with emphasis. "Now, tell me what you've done?"

Kitty sat silent and trembling on her horse. The voice of Nick sounded to her like the voice of Jufy.

"Tell me what you've been doin', gal?"



Kitty remained mute, yet thoughtful.

"Perhaps some'at can be done," Nick went on, seriously. "Perhaps some'at can be done to avert the danger that threatens some human life or lives; it may be my life or his'n."

"Or who-e?" asked Kitty, eagerly.

"Max Bosworth's—Mountain Max, we call him up among the placers."

"You suspect that my errand concerns him and you?" queried the girl, anxiously.

"I do!" said Nick, impressively.

"You certainly—that is, if it were so, you would not harm me?"

Nick Whiffles had his rifle resting across his left arm; he dropped the butt of it to the ground, not very suddenly, but after a little reflection, and looked up at Kitty with doubt and surprise.

"I allow I didn't understand ye, miss! I don't think I exactly got your meanin'."

"She means that she bein' a gal, you wouldn't hurt her on account o' that ar," explained Folly.

Nick Whiffles glanced upward at the dim heaven, downward at the dark earth; dropped his chin to the backs of his hands, which were placed over the muzzle of his weapon; shook his head slowly, smiled, then in a gentle tone, answered:

"Never heard much 'bout Nick Whiffles, did ye? Never read nothin' 'bout him, I reckon. Never knowed of his hurtin' anybody in the feminine line, I s'pose?"

Nick raised his head, and Kitty could see through the gloom that he gazed at her compassionately. He tapped upon his breast with his right hand.

"There'd be a condemned diffikilty inside here, if it's to hurt man, woman, or child. If you was the biggest enemy as ever was, bein' what ye be, I wouldn't lay a rough finger on ye, or harm a hair o' your head. But you ain't my enemy, nor nobody's enemy but your own. Be easy child; you are safe with Nick."

There was an irresistible magnetism about Nick's voice. His manner carried conviction with it. Kitty dropped the reins on her horse's neck, and replied:

"I believe you! I carried a letter from somebody to somebody."

"One of the 'somebody's' I can guess at; the other 'somebody' is immaterial."

Folly had fallen back a little behind her mistress, and Kitty made her last remark in a lower tone of voice, leaning forward toward Nick.

"What was talked of afore that letter was writ?" he asked.

"Ah!" exclaimed Kitty, with a thrill of conviction.

"Yes?" said Nick, gently.

"I'm not so weak and so mean as to tell!" she answered, with sudden energy. "I may

have been a convenient cat's-paw, but I'm nobody's cat's-paw now!"

She raised her person in the saddle, and felt angry; not at what she was doing, but at the thought of what she had been.

"That is good!" responded Nick, gravely.

"You're gittin' hold o' something you never had. Go on in that way, and them as think you're a win'mill, to be turned by anybody's breath, will git taken in. You've answered proper and right. I can see that the tall, brown man from the mountains was talked of afore you left the house on the Bluff. Your journey couldn't been long, miss?"

"To a cabin on the right," answered Kitty.

"That'll do," returned Nick, reflectively.

"I thank ye for so much. I'll remember ye in every diffikilty. Go home, gal, and rest in peace. Nothin' 'll harm ye atween here and there. It's all right. It is, I swear to gracious!"

Kitty moved on, quite affected by what she had heard, leaving Nick Whiffles in the road, looking after her.

CHAPTER XII.

ARCHIBALD ROE'S SECRET.

Nick Whiffles watched Kitty out of sight. He looked along the dark pathway long after she had disappeared. There was speculation in his gray eyes, and something like compassion in his heart. He wondered what the girl was thinking of and what would come of her night's work.

"Fair enough," said Nick, talking to the trees and purring winds. "Too fair, for that matter. It does one's eyes good to look at sich. They're like the roses and the lilies that please the eye, and give momentary satisfaction to the senses. That's what the likes o' them be, with a moral to't; though the moral is sometimes left out, so to speak. That gal means well. She does, by mighty! But she puts me in mind o' them creepin' plants that run up and coil round the trunks o' trees for support. She's the creepin' plant, and her mother's the vine. That, I allow, is nigh about the truth on't, or as close on't as we ginerly get. She seemed a little spunky, jes' now. I wonder what was the meanin' on't?"

Nick applied gentle friction to his head.

"Spunk, by gracious! the more I think on't! As I studied her at her father's, I didn't set her down for any spunk; or a trifle at most. Some'at has come over that gal within the last hour!"

The old hunter paused, and sighed. Sighing was an old habit.

"Virtue itself," he added, "may be made an instrument of evil."

He felt himself pulled by the sleeve. All the instincts of the backwoodsman were at once awakened. He wheeled on his heel with sing-

lar quickness, for one of his years. He cocked his rifle, too, with the same motion. His sharp and alert manner changed when he saw who stood beside him. He lowered the hammer to the case with an air of disappointment. It was only Archie Roe who had pulled his sleeve. He did not recognize him at first, but presently he remembered having seen him at Kinnmouth's. Nick recalled a slight figure and a comely face, with large eyes—eyes now dreamy, now bright, as the lad's thoughts fluctuated to and fro.

"Well, what do you want?" Nick asked, somewhat petulantly.

The youth was silent a moment. There seemed to be a doubt in his mind—something not quite clear to his understanding.

The moon came out from the clouds, and shone more brightly on the man and on the boy. The boy looked up searchingly at the man, and tried with his shattered intellect to read the brown characters on his brown face. Was it really a shattered intellect? Was it a foolish face? Were those black eyes really insane and without intelligence? Were they like the eyes of a deer, beautiful but soulless?

Nick Whiffles looked down upon the upturned face as well as he could in the light of the white rays which fell obliquely across it. The man of the gun and trip was at fault. During his short stay at Kinnmouth's, he had instinctively taken in the idea that the boy was weak, and not to be noticed. But there was now a vague thought in Nick's head that the youth ought to be noticed.

"I'm a fool!" said Archibald Roe.

"So am I," quoth Nick Whiffles. "I'm an older fool than you be, though. That's the difference between us, boy."

"Are you a natural fool?" asked Archie.

"Partly natural, lad, partly by my bad conduct," answered Whiffles, in a kindly tone. "We're all fools, more or less. There's One," he added, lifting his old cap reverently toward the bright moon, "in whose sight we're all fools. We live, but a little while, you know, boy; but Him as lives above lives allers, and never dies."

"I have heard of Him," said Archie. "He makes bugs and beetles."

"He makes nighabout everything," answered Nick.

"Did he make war?" asked Archie.

"I allow he didn't," replied Nick. "Wicked and ambitious men make war. God makes peace."

"He makes Union, too, don't he?"

"Alters Union!" said Nick, in a voice somewhat suppressed.

"Perhaps," continued the lad, hesitatingly, "He'll unite the disconnected thoughts in my head. The thoughts are the things that hurt me; they make my brain go round and round." He rubbed his forehead slowly with his right

hand. There was an intellectual consciousness in his air and attitude, which Nick perceived.

"I shouldn't wonder," Nick said, softly.

"It was the books, you see—it was the books that did it. Let books alone, if you want your brain to be clear. My head is crowded with books. But there's room there for a little cunning. I can outwit the Confederators. I can blind them with my bugs and my beetles. Bah! Who cares for bugs and beetles, butterflies and long-legged straddlers, with pins through their backs?"

"You're a singular boy!" said the man of the mountains.

"Come," said Archie, "let us go."

"Go where?"

"To track the trackers; to find the finders, and to learn what we can. Alick Barker won't be easy. The hangers and killers need watching. I should like to stick them on a card with my bugs. This way."

Archibald began to walk, and Nick followed him. Presently he turned aside from the road.

"You can come," he said, "and see what I am going to do. I can trust you, because you are brave and hate the Confederators."

Full of curiosity, Nick kept closely to the boy's heels, who went some distance through a dense thicket. Finally, plunging into a swamp of vines, he dropped on his knees, thrust his hand into a hollow log, and drew out a small Wesson rifle.

"I take this when I go for bugs!" he said, cunningly. "It loads at the breech, and I can put in the cartridges right fast."

He put his hand into the log again, and took out a handful of metallic cartridges. Nick looked on in silent wonder.

"Nice thing for specimens, this," added Archie, putting the cartridges in his pocket, and rising to his feet. He held up his weapon with something more than childish delight. There was something deeply serious in his expression; a contraction of the lips and brow, a steady purpose in the eyes.

"Do they trust you with this?" asked the trapper.

"I trust myself with it!" said Archibald, dryly, and with a quietness and self-assurance that put the old woodsman in utter doubt.

"There's been fools in my family," he muttered; "but they wasn't this fashion of fool, by lightnin'! One such fool in a family would make fools of all the rest on us. Rotten difficulties in the head was common among us, but draw the double sights on me, if ever I see a fool that knowed more nor wise people, afore! Foolish folks oughter be rydickerous and luddickerous, and not worth the listenin' to. But here's a youngster who's stepped out o' the common trail o' folly, and set up, as 'twere, for himself. Here's a natural on his own hook! And not a natural, neither, by a long shot; for

if he was, he wouldn't know it. A fool that knows he's a fool, is a strange sight. My grandfather, the great historian, oughter met this boy in Centril Afriky. Let me look at that little gun, lad!"

"You can look at it as much as you please," said Archie, touching a spring which threw the breech end of the barrel from the stock, presenting a clear, bright, winding tube to the eye.

"It goes on a hinge, I swear to gracious!" Nick exclaimed.

Archie slipped a cartridge into the shining tube, and sprang the barrel back to its place in an instant.

"Quick done!" remarked Nick, reflectively.

"I never happened to run across one o' them ere, up in the mountains. It'll do for squirrels, I s'pose."

"It has done for more than squirrels," replied the boy, calmly, and without a trace of weakness.

They walked back to the road silently. Archibald Roe led on again. By and by he stopped, and turning suddenly to Nick, said, in a sane and steady voice:

"You will keep my secret?"

"Your secret?" repeated the trapper, dubiously. "If I know it, I'll keep it. I ain't certain I know it; but it seems to me there's a little light streamin' in at the northeast corner of my head. As it says in Scripiter, I see some'at like trees walkin' afore me."

"Others I may deceive," resumed Archibald Roe, speaking in the same intelligent manner; "but something tells me I cannot deceive you; therefore I throw off the mask. In future, when we are together, as now, I shall show as little folly as possible, and be to you what I really am."

Nick didn't speak for some time; he deliberated; he scanned the boy from head to foot, and helped his mouth to some tobacco.

"How old be ye?" he asked.

"Past seventeen."

"You look younger."

"Because I am dressed like a boy, and I am small of my age. Take off this round jacket, and put me in a frock, and I should look different. My youthful appearance is, in some measure, my protection."

"Good!" said Nick. "How old is the gal they call Kitty?"

The blood flushed up to Archibald's face in a moment. He stood speechless and paralyzed.

"Don't hurry yourself," added Nick, placidly.

"About sixteen," stammered the youth.

"Petticoats!" muttered Nick, sagely. "All right, lad! All right, by mighty! Don't be ashamed on't. Older boys nor you have followed a petticoat. You've taken a strange trail, sonny, and it may be a long one; but if your mind is set on't, why, track on, and I won't

be the man as puts ye at fault, or leads the game through rannin' water. As the world goes, you've done well to trust me. But I wonder that this brown old face o' mine should invite your confidence."

Archie didn't answer, nor did he dare to meet the fixed gaze of the trapper.

"You watch the gal by day, and spy out the doin's of the rebels at night, I reckon?"

"I deny nothing," said the youth, in a low tone, moving forward.

"The gal is fair, and the cause is good. But the country fust, and the gal arterwards, if ye can; leastways, give as faithful service to it as to her. I've but one love, now, and that love is my country. But you're young, and it's different. Count on me, youngster; count on Nick Whiffles as one as will be your friend. I like your pluck, by mighty!"

"I thank you from my heart!" responded Archibald Roe, reaching back a hand to Nick. "You understand me but too well. Unlike you, I have two mistresses; you have named them both: One I silently adore; the other I secretly serve."

His voice was low, but it did not falter.

"You haven't told her?"

"Never!" exclaimed the youth, with energy. "Is it not enough to be near her, to see her?"

"Sens'ely enough!" said Nick, quaintly, shutting one eye, as if he were taking aim at something. "I should want more nor that if I was a young man on the trail of a gal. I should want a peecolyar cast o' the eye, and a touch o' the hand, and a taste o' the lips. O Lord, yes!"

Nick laughed in his silent way.

Archie sighed, and quickened his pace.

They soon came within sight of the cabin where Kitty had delivered the note to the Confederate colonel.

"Wait here for me," said Archibald; and going forward softly, he looked through a crevice into the cabin.

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. KINMOUTH'S LETTER.

Archibald Roe saw a Confederate officer sitting near one of the narrow windows of the cabin, holding a white ostrich-feather in his hand. The youth had seen Mrs. Kinnmouth wear such a feather in her hat. The man was about thirty-five years of age, with a white bald track running over the top of his head. He kept saying to himself:

"Charming! charming, indeed! So young! To be the wife of such a man! One can hardly credit it!"

"Mrs. Kinnmouth has been abroad again," thought Archie. "Another mysterious ride. Another conquest."

Blackmer kissed the snowy plume, and put it in his bosom. While he was buttoning his coat, a letter slipped from his pocket, and fell to the

floor. He was so much absorbed with the remembrance of his fair visitor, that he did not notice the circumstance, and arose and left the window without knowing his loss.

On a little pine table, on which burned the dimmest of lamps, lay his sword and pistols. He buckled on the sword, and put the pistols in his pocket. Humming a tune, he opened the door. Archie crouched in the shadow of the cabin, and Blackmer passed out. If the letter had not dropped on the floor, the colonel would not have escaped thus easily.

"Go!" muttered the youth. "I can find you again."

Before the colonel's footsteps had ceased to be heard, Archie was in the cabin, and had the letter in his hand. Nick came up hastily, and met him.

"I heard some one walking," he said. "Did anybody leave the cabin?"

"A Confederate colonel," replied Archie.

"A Confederate colonel!" repeated Nick, eagerly. "Why didn't you tell me, youngster? We could have taken him easy enough."

"But he left this," said Archie, holding up the letter.

"Ah!" exclaimed Nick. "That's what she carried."

"Has she been out to-night? Did you see her?" asked the lad, still thinking of Mrs. Kinmouth.

"Yes," responded Nick; "she's been out. You, who see night about everything, ought to have known at that time. 'Twas a golden opportunity, lad."

"I've watched her enough," answered Archie, shaking his head, his mind yet on Mrs. Kinmouth. "I wish no ill to her, but those who are leading her on in this rebellion shall, sooner or later, hear from Archibald Roe—the poor lad who has gone mad over books, the harmless collector of bugs."

"Then you know her to be disloyal?" said Nick, with surprise, thinking of Kitty.

"Between you and I," answered the youth, in a low tone, "there can be no doubt of it."

"You're mistaken, my man; I doubt it," returned Nick, musingly.

"You?"

"I?" quoth Nick. "I talked with her this very night, and, in my opinion, she means as well as the best on us. She may be quick in her feelin's, and fickle, as 'twere, but I don't believe there's any o' the 'pison seesh in her, by mighty!"

"She's anything but quick and fickle. She is deliberate, and constant to a purpose. She's too adroit for you, my friend."

Nick looked at Archibald wondering.

"And yet you love her?" he said.

"Love Mrs. Kinmouth?"

The youth laughed at the absurdity.

"Oh!" muttered Nick. "I've been speakin'

of the gal, not the woman; the darter, not the mother."

"Kitty?" cried Archie.

"The same. It was her that brought this letter, so perfumed and dainty."

Archibald Roe grew white about the mouth. His faith was staggered, and nothing save the downright honesty of Nick convicted his judgment. It was a moment of pain and doubt. Had Kitty adopted her mother's habits? Was she, too, in league with the conspirators? Did she go forth on midnight errands, to inform and betray?

Nick took the letter from his passive hand, and carefully opened it.

"We've a right to see what's in it, at any rate," he said; "for I reckon it concerns us or our cause. Don't be down-hearted, lad; for the gal'll clear herself, I'll warrant. 'Twas her plottin' mother that dragged her into't. There's a heap o' power in that woman, with her smiles and soft ways. She can have her own will with most folks, without any diffikilty. You've got sharp eyes; read this here writin'."

"You read it," said Archie, recoiling from the proffered paper.

Nick read as follows:

"COLONEL BLACKMER:—I am desirous to direct my communications to you. There is a tall, gaunt, tawny fellow stopping with us to-night, who is undoubtedly the veritable Nick Whiffles, whose doings and sayings, up in the Northwestern trapping-grounds, have made such a stir. He is a Union man, and has come here to make trouble for us. I'll manage, by one way and another, to keep the old fool here until to-morrow night, if you'll send some men to take him. Don't be afraid of sending too many; for they say he's a dangerous man, and always on the look-out for tricks and traps. To capture the leader of these new enemies from the mountains would be no mean achievement. There has been a terrible scene at our house to-night, and I trust you'll take measures to prevent its recurrence in the future. They came very near hanging my lord and master from one of his own windows; and that, too, after I had expressly stated that I wouldn't have him hanged for any money. If I help you catch Lincoln's henchmen, you must, in compensation, protect my household. I am sure if I had come home and found him dangling from the window, I should have gone into strong hysterics."

"I am watched; and will either send this to you or come myself. If I knew I was going myself, I would not write so much in detail; but even in that event I shall not be able to stay to converse with you a single moment, so fearful am I of discovery."

"I have just returned from a similar errand, and received cold and suspicious looks when I came in. I was eyed in a way I didn't like, especially by that tawny Nick Whiffles, whom I found comfortably installed with the family. I can deceive my worthy Kinmouth, but this fellow looks deeper than I like."

"If you can come, give a line to Alek Harker to drop into the hollow tree that he knows of, informing me of the hour when I may expect a visit from those monstrous bushwhackers!"

"Yours, for the cause, ABELA."

On the back of the sheet was written, in pencil, by the colonel, showing that he had read its contents, the following memoranda:

"Mem.—Must not forget to see Alek Harker, and arrange about the trapping of the grizzly bear from the mountains."

"Mem.—Must remember to charge the bushwhackers not to let their guns go off accidentally, and kill him; which would save the expense of a rope and other little matters, and is not to be thought of."

"Mem.—Not to hang old Kinmouth, unless absolutely necessary, on account of his pretty wife."

Nick read all this calmly, and with unruffled temper. He went on slowly but surely, stumbling now and then, but making all right presently. He folded it quietly, put it back in the unopened envelope, wet it with his tongue, and re-sealed it.

"An uncommon neat piece o' composition!" he observed, with a comical squint at his young friend. He looked like a person who is confident of self-preservation, and could see his way out of almost any difficulty.

"It's a harmless-lookin' bit o' paper, but it's some't like a cat-asleep. 'Tall, gaunt, and tawny! That's me. Parsonal, but to the p'int. What do you think o't, lad?"

"I don't wish to think of it," answered Archibald, gloomily. "It is heartless; it is wicked; but it is the bitter fruit of this rebellion. Do not condemn her too much. She means better than she writes."

"So she does, my man," said Nick, encouragingly. "Sartain! But she don't quite understand the difference between life and death. To live, is to move about on the flat of the airth; to die, is to lay mighty flat under the airth. To trap the tawny Nick, is to shoot or hang him; and atween shootin' and hangin', and movin' about, alive and hearty, there's quite a odds to me. Oh no! She ain't so very bad! The right and the wrong has only changed places! The cart's got afore the hoss—that's all! But that's nothin' agin the gal, Kitty!"

Archibald Roe moved about uneasily, and did not find it very easy to reconcile the extremes of Nick's philosophy. He appreciated the kindness of his new acquaintance, but felt entirely unable to decide how much irony he meant to attach to his remarks. The man's eyes first twinkled with humor, then lighted up with something sterner.

"You'd better take this letter," added the mountaineer, while Archie was yet deliberating, "and put it back in the identical place where you found it. The Confederate critter 'll miss it, and come for't, most likely."

Young Roe took the letter and mechanically obeyed, thinking all the while of Kitty.

"Do you know where that holler tree is?" asked Whiffles, when the lad joined him.

"No, but I can find it."

"Tell me how?"

"I'll find Nick Harker, and in finding him, I shall find the tree."

"In findin' him you'll find the tree," repeated Nick, thoughtfully.

"I mean that I will not lose sight of him for the day," returned Archie, with confidence.

"Do you know the lurkin' places of the mean skunk?"

"I do," said Archie. "I've walked these bluffs too much to be unacquainted with his haunts. Return to Kinmouth's, Mr. Whiffles, and trust the mad boy."

Roe smiled, and trailing his little rifle, began to move away.

"You feel sure?" queried Nick, earnestly.

"It might make a condemned little diffikilty, if there should be any mistake about this business. We want to know when the 'pison critters are comin'; arter that, leave it all to me. I know how to deal with sich. I wasn't born yesterday. A portion o' my life has been spent among savage bein's and danger. Though existence is a brittle thread, I've spun it out till now; and you see me afore ye, Nick Whiffles, alive and well, ready to grapple with any diffikilty that may turn up."

Archie came back, and putting his hand on Nick's arm, answered:

"You are right: you were not born yesterday; neither was I. I am young in years, but I am old in looks and in thought, and—"

"In love!" interposed Nick.

"And since these difficulties commenced," continued Archie, not heeding the interruption, "and since I saw her, I have spent most of my time with my rifle, in the woods, here and there, and everywhere, on the banks of this river. I have watched the coming and the going of these disloyal men and women, and I can track them to their secret places. Yes, I am sure that I shall find Harker; and if I find him, I shall find the hollow tree, and whatever may be placed in it."

"All right!" responded Nick. "You've got the grit and the wit to back it, I allow. I'll tell 'em you've gone to your bugs and your beetles, your hoppergrasses and your long-legged straddlers. And, what's better, I'll speak a good word for ye to the pretty Kitty. I know how to do them things, my little bug-man. A woman's man, I be. The lively critters can't look at me without laughin'. O Lord, no!"

"I'm off!" said Archibald.

"Good luck to ye!" responded Nick, with a wave of the hand. "I'll take care o' things at the house."

Young Roe quickly disappeared in the woods, while the hunter returned to Kinmouth's.

CHAPTER XIV.

A NEW SNARE

Nick knocked gently at the door, which was opened by Mountain Max. The house was quiet. The family had retired to rest, while the athletic Californian kept watch below. A few words passed between the two men; then Nick stretched himself on the floor and was soon in a sound sleep, forgetful of plots and counterplots; treachery and danger.

Max, attentive to every sound, without or within, remained wakeful. He would not have slept had there been no need of watchfulness; for Clari was in his imagination, keeping him restless. Clari was equally sleepless. She could not understand why Kitty should remain so long with her mother; but she did have something more than a vague suspicion that Mrs. Kinmouth had betrayed the man whom she had befriended, into the hands of his enemies. That some new scheme was afoot, she thoroughly believed; and she longed to say to Kitty

"Beware of your fascinating mother!"

Long before the return of Nick, she was several times on the point of knocking at her step-mother's door; but she feared that that would be intrusive, and might serve to put her more on her guard, and make her more adroit than ever in the hidden course she was pursuing.

Clari, as she walked thoughtfully to and fro in her slippers and wrapper, caught the sound of the opening of a door. Her own was ajar, and she stepped across the threshold. Some one was softly coming up the back staircase. It was a woman, for she could hear the rustle of her garments. She drew back, and saw Kitty come up, cross the upper hall, and steal to her mother's chamber.

Clari sat down, full of curiosity and conjecture. By and-by, Kitty appeared, in her usual attire.

"Where have you been?" Clari asked.

"I have been a fool!" said Kitty, deliberately.

Clari mused a moment. She had never heard such an answer, in such a tone, from the gentle Kitty.

"I did not ask you what you had been, but where?" added Clari.

"No matter! I am going to bed and to sleep. I hope to wake up with a few grains of your wit. Sit where I can look at your good face while I am dropping away."

Kitty went to bed, and Clari, quite mystified and troubled, held her little white hand until her eyelids drooped and she slept.

But Clari had no thought of slumber. She heard Nick's knock, light as it was, and the opening and shutting of the door, but was afraid to go down to learn who entered. When she had combated this timidity a long time, she stole down stairs, and, to her confusion, saw Mountain Max keeping guard and Nick Whiffles sleeping on the floor.

Max was thrilled by the vision of Clari, all in white. He looked, and was lost. She was pale and calm, and her beauty indescribable. He managed to mutter:

"All safe, Miss Kinmouth!" and then was sorry that he had broken the spell. She smiled, nodded her head slightly, and fluttered out of

sight. She came and went, a fair and bewitching creature, his benefactress, his heroine, his ideal woman.

The morning came, as if the night just passed had been one of the many and common nights that had come and gone. Mrs. Kinmouth appeared at the breakfast-table, placid and friendly. To Nick she was condescending, to Max she was kind. She observed his words, his manners, with close attention. His manly beauty charmed the charmer. The impression made the previous night was deepened that morning. She resolved that the man she knew by the simple name of Bosworth, should feel and own her power, acknowledge her supremacy, and bow to her will. She watched Clari, and she watched Kitty, lest their counter charms should prove attractive to this mountain Apollo.

Of course, she did this in her own way, without awkwardness or observation. Max was well bred. He said but little, and that little was to the purpose. He avoided politics, and showed his good sense. He resolved to be amiable and skillful with an amiable and skillful woman.

Clari was somewhat constrained. She kept her eyes on her plate, and conversed only with Kitty, who was strangely assured and at her ease.

"Ah!" thought Kitty, "what would mother say if she knew that this man whom she is doing the agreeable to is the veritable Mountain Max, whom I am sure she betrayed to that horrid Barker! But I must say nothing. I can only think, for I am a cat's-paw, and not a girl. Cat's-paws are convenient. What will be done when I have ceased to be a cat's-paw? Will the chestnuts remain in the fire? No, no! Mother won't let 'em burn. She's too deep for that. Ah, what a glance she gave him then! I'll do that before the glass, when I go up stairs. I can practice on Archie, and when I have a chance, try it on mother's admirer—Colonel Blackmer. He's got her feather, at all events. I wonder how she'll extricate herself from that?"

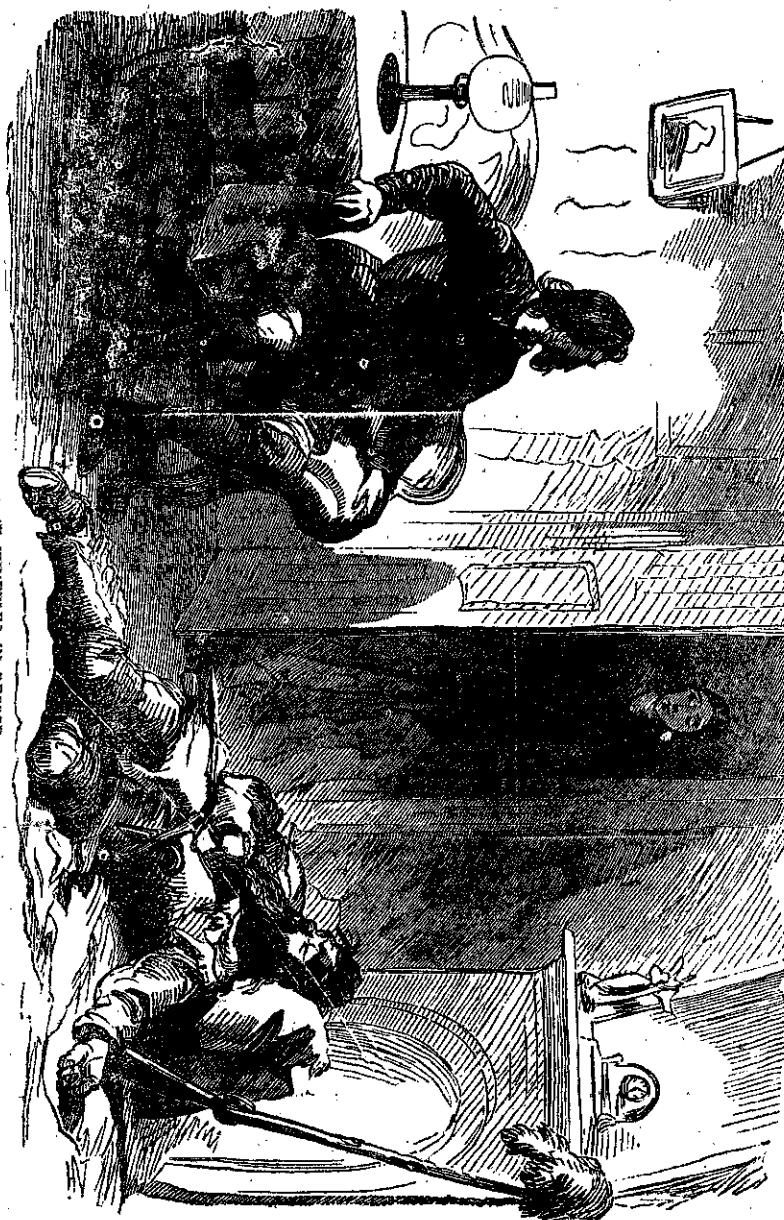
Kitty threw a furtive glance at her mother. That glance caught a tender expression on her face.

"She's going to cut the hair of this rural Sampson," said Kitty, mentally, and she was partly right.

Mrs. Kinmouth strictly avoided the exciting topics of the hour. She did not ask Max whence he came, or where he was going, or his business. All that, she knew, would come in good time. She talked freely with Nick, making many inquiries about life in the woods, flattering him whenever she had an opportunity.

Nick was not tardy in conversation. He kept pace with her; he told comical stories. She laughed at his dry humor, and informed him that he was really refreshing, he was so natural.

NICK WHIFFLES IN REPOSE.



She pressed him to remain with them a few days. She owned it was selfish, because in such a disturbed state of affairs his presence would be really a protection, to say nothing of his company and his amusing adventures.

Whiffles received these courtesies with unshaken equanimity. He replied readily, yet so ambiguously that even the quick-witted Mrs. Kinnmouth was led into a state of doubt in regard to his real character. At one moment she was inclined to think him a simple-minded man of the woods, and at the next, a cool and skillful person, ever on his guard and ever suspicious.

"Terrible things happen now-a-days," said Mrs. Kinnmouth, with a sigh. "I slept none for thinking of the frightful visitors of last night."

Mr. Kinnmouth moved uneasily in his chair. He said not a word; he gave no sign of distrust. He looked at Clari and Kitty, and sipped his coffee.

"Kitty has told me about it," Mrs. Kinnmouth resumed, calling to her aid all the powers of her will. "You and your friend," addressing Max, "came very opportunely; I may say, providentially. They took away the unfortunate fugitive, did they? I wish you could have saved him, too."

Max looked up with a start of surprise; then he remembered that he had been introduced as Mr. Bosworth, and not as Mountain Max; and that he was, by common consent, sustaining a false character. A deception had been put upon Mrs. Kinnmouth for his safety, and as a piece of pardonable policy. The man whom she had betrayed was sitting at her table, and she was talking with him freely and easily, pleased with him, and anxious in turn to please. The situation was certainly peculiar. Clari and Kitty, and indeed all but the subject of the deception, felt the strangeness of it.

What was to be done? Nothing, of course, on the part of any member of the family but the careful head of it, Robert Kinnmouth, and he was yet in doubt what course to pursue in the future. For the present, and until he could shape out a settled line of conduct, he was satisfied to let matters remain as they were, and take whatever policy circumstances might give them. He felt sure of his wife's guilt, but still had less proof of it than he wished. The letter he had seen, though bearing so strong a resemblance to her handwriting, might possibly be made to appear an ingenious forgery. Yes; there might be a faint hope of that. So Mr. Kinnmouth clung to straws, and resolved to be magnanimous and slow to condemn; while, at the same time, he feared there was no hope of her innocence being shown. But he had no heart to make a sudden exposure. The thought of confirmation startled him. He preferred to put off the evil day, when, to the minds of

some others, the whole truth was as clear as sunlight.

This was the status of affairs at the house on the Bluff on the morning after the visit of the bushwhackers.

Mrs. Kinnmouth kept a vigilant watch that day. She knew she was standing on slippery ground, but would make the best of it. Clari was quiet and cold; while Kitty was inexplicable. The latter had evidently got an idea into her head, but her wise mother could not determine what it was.

Max Bosworth walked about the grounds with her husband, and talked seriously with him. Of course, the subject concerned the Rebellion, and the difficulties that surrounded loyal people.

Nick Whiffles—they called him Swingfoot—related a few comical stories, and with his rifle on his shoulder, disappeared. Mrs. Kinnmouth watched his tall figure down the Bluff road, and slightly contracting her fair brow, muttered to herself:

"He will come to-night. He has left his horse."

CHAPTER XV.

THE MOUNTAIN MEN.

Nick Whiffles did not follow the road far. He struck off into the forest. He walked rapidly, but his moccasined feet made little noise; not because he made particular effort to go softly, but more from habit. He heard the dry leaves rustle under the pressure of heavy feet. He stopped, and stood behind a tree. After a short time he saw a man hurrying through the woods toward the river. He passed quite near Nick, who recognized him. It was Alick Har-ker.

"I wonder where the critter's goin'?" mused Nick. "On no very good errand, I'll warrant. There'll be a cussed little difficulty, I allow, sooner or later!"

He did not stir, but continued to look after Alick. Presently, he saw another figure, smaller, and moving silently. It was Archibald Roe, following the bushwhacker. A smile of satisfaction on passed over the old trapper's lips. He watched the youth till he was out of sight.

"The boy has a light step and a steady eye," he said, with a pleased air. "He'd soon learn the ways o' the woods. He tracks that clumsy bear like a trained and sagacious dog. Love has sharpened his faculties. He has the will of a tiger, and the cunning of a cat. That mean secession skunk'll have to go faster n'r he does now, to get out the way o' that youngster."

With this audible expression of his thoughts, Nick moved on briskly. He went far, and through lonely places. His only guide seemed to be his intuitive sense of the points of the compass. Whatever faculty or curious knowledge directed his course, he did not err, but went straight to the spot he wished to find;

which was the rendezvous of his men from the mountains, many of whom had arrived. There were no white tents to mark their little encampment. They were men who could roll themselves in their blankets and sleep on the ground. If the earth was saturated with recent rains, they cut boughs from the trees and made the wet places dry. They were hardy fellows, who did not fear common dangers. The gleam of a bayonet, nor the crack of a percussion-cap, nor even the music of flying bullets, startled their steady nerves. They were not raw recruits. They knew how a rifle should be held and fired. They knew when the bullet out to strike, and what it ought to do. No feather-bed soldiers were they.

Some fires were burning, and groups of brave fellows were cooking over them, in their own peculiar style. The appearance of Nick was hailed with rough but hearty salutations. Their leader was evidently popular among them, and was looked upon as a "game chap", brave, shrewd, and equal to all the emergencies of the warfare they were about to engage in. He had to answer many questions, and to ask a few in turn. They were loyal men, and impatient for action.

"I'll soon have some at for ye to do," quoth Nick. "The people hereabouts are terribly put to't by the traitors. The critters called bush-whackers are up, and hard at it. They don't mind robbin', whippin', and hangin'. They'd larn, I allow, if 'twasn't for the trouble o' collectin' firewood. All this diffikilty comes of a few rotten dimigogs, my lads. How on airth are we goin' to put down the rebellion while all the black critters are stayin' to home, raisin' food for the rebel army? All the able-bodied men go to war to destroy the Government, and the old men and women stay on the plantations, to boss the blacks, and grow corn and bacon for 'em. That's the way 'tis, and no mistake. But we ain't goin' to find fault with nobody, my mountain eatamunts; we're goin' to fight for the best country the world ever see. And we're goin' to sail in in right down airnest, too. We'll be marceful to the marceful, and just to the cruel. We'll perfect women and children, and make quiet and peace along the banks o' the old Miss'souri. We will, I swear to gracious!"

This speech was received with cheers—vociferous cheers. There were cries of "Go on!"

"I ain't no talkin' man," said Nick. "I'm a fightin', not a talkin' man. We've got political critters among us, up towards the North, that can't do nothin' else but talk. Let 'em go it on that, by gracious! We don't go in for sich gammon. It's the hard knocks only that'll knock down this bloated secession ox."

"That's so!" assented a score of voices. "And that ox has been fatted at the public crib, too."

"So he has, my bully boys! And all sorts o' grain they tacked into him while he stood in the public crib. I told 'em they must muzzle him, or dock off his feed. Now we've got to slaughter him to keep from bein' gored to death. But we'll make a diffikilty with 'em. We will, I swear to gracious!"

"We'll do that!" said the mountaineer.

"I want some of ye," continued Nick, "to go with me on special service. I'll tell ye what 'tis in due time."

Nick selected a dozen stout fellows, and named a place of meeting, near the bluff, at a given hour. After talking with them a long time apart from their comrades, he stalked away as he came—with his long rifle on his shoulder.

CHAPTER XVI.

CROSS PURPOSES.

Meantime, Max improved his time. He not only walked with Kinmouth about the grounds, but he walked with the fair mother and the fairer daughters. The more he saw of Clari, the more he was captivated. He had reached the superlative degree of love by night. Mrs. Kinmouth seemed as much pleased with him as he was with Clari; but we say this with a mental reservation, leaving a suitable margin for that lady's love of conquest. Max, though not sensible of the gentle interest he had inspired in the heart of Mrs. Kinmouth, tried his best to conceal the tender sentiments that Clari had awakened. The circumstances under which the two had met were so romantic, that Mrs. Kinmouth was fearful that something might naturally grow out of it, even before she began to observe the parties themselves; when she commenced to watch them, her fears speedily ripened into strong suspicions. There was Kitty, too. Why not Kitty as well as Clari? She inwardly owned there might be danger of that. Kitty was pretty, but a child. She had not the character and stability of her step-daughter. She might please the handsome stranger, and excite his admiration; but Clari, only, could fascinate him entirely, and attach him to her for life.

Such were the rebel lady's feelings; and it must be confessed that they approximated to the truth. She said to herself, looking at Bosworth:

"This man is a very fine animal. Who knows but I may turn him to account? No doubt his politics are bad; but if I can bring him to my feet, I can convert him. I will make a good rebel of him, in time."

She was not conscious of danger to herself, but to him. She knew her own power; and this calm, strong man from the woods should be tamed and subdued—providing her plans were not interfered with.

Kitty liked Max at first sight, and was willing that Clari should like him, too. She soon guessed how matters stood between them. The affair had commenced so strangely, so thrillingly, that

she wished it might go on, and was inclined to accept it as something providential. There must be destiny, she reasoned, in such a meeting, and the startling things that followed; and Kitty was ready to assist destiny in the right direction. She resolved to bring the honest mountaineer under the full influence of Clari, whom, in her sisterly fondness, she believed no human masquerade could withstand.

She suddenly remembered that she had things of importance to tell her mother concerning the previous night's adventures. She thought it was a good time to set up the business of woman on her own responsibility. The "charming cat's-paw" would try her velvet paw in a different way from what it had generally been used. They were at that moment walking in the garden. She pulled her mother by the sleeve, and whispered:

"I must talk with you, mother. Fall back, and let Clari go on with that overgrown rustic."

Mrs. Kinmouth glanced quietly at her daughter, to see if her expression was right, and that there was no irony at the bottom of that remark. The young face was calm and clear. She paused to dally with a rose, and Clari and Max walked on.

"Well?" queried Mrs. Kinmouth. "What is it, Ross?"

Her tone was not quite patient, and she continued to look after the two figures that were moving on.

"They look finely!" muttered Kitty.

"Who?" asked her mother, sharply.

"The roses," said Kitty, innocently.

"So you delivered the letter?" said her mother, presently.

"Yes," replied Kitty; "and was complimented very highly for my beauty."

"You should not have listened," said Mrs. Kinmouth, frowning.

"But I was acting for you!" returned Kitty.

"For me?"

"For you?"

"Explain."

"I was supposed to be my own mother at the time. I was flattered for you, made love to for you. I caught that pretty trick of your eye very well, I think."

Kitty was both demure and arch.

"So you personated me?" said Mrs. Kinmouth, quite startled.

"To the best of my abilities," answered Kitty. "He had heard of Mrs. Kinmouth—the rebel colonel's girl. But she—that was me—was much younger and prettier than she had been described. The half of my loveliness had not been told. I—Mrs. Kinmouth—might have fair daughters; but he should bow to the mother, and ask her colors to wear on the field of battle. You know you have a coquettish toss of the head, rather like this." (She gave an imitation.) "So I gave him that!"

"Charming little counterfeit!" exclaimed Mrs. Kinmouth. "I really did not know that you had any art. But girls come on so rapidly; they are on the stage of the world before we know it. I wonder, my dear, that you staid to hear his folly." Mrs. Kinmouth's face flushed a little.

"It was not for myself; it was for you."

"Well, I thank you all the same!" laughed her mother.

"What was in that letter?" asked Kitty, absently. "What business have you, my mother, with rebel colonels?"

"Hush! Speak low!" said Mrs. Kinmouth, quickly. "Your imprudence terrifies me. You should know nothing of rebel colonels. These matters are not for you. We must have safety; and to have safety, we must have friends; and to be of use, our friends must be powerful. The Confederate leaders can protect us."

"They have shown but little disposition to do so," replied Kitty, dryly.

Her mother was embarrassed.

"We must placate them," she stammered.

"Not in the way you do it," said Kitty, gravely.

"What would you have? We must be kept from having our throats cut!"

"Mother, beware!" answered the girl, slowly and meaningly. "You stand on the brink of an abyss; the next step may plunge you into it. Will you take that step or draw back? If you pause, there may be hope for you; if you go on, you fall—fall from all that is dear and honorable. Now, mother, which are you going to do?"

Mrs. Kinmouth grew pale; her lips were white; her breathing was momentarily suspended. She turned upon Kitty; she took her by both shoulders with her hands; she looked into her face some time in silence.

"It is the mistake of mothers," she said. "I have treated you as a child. You have grown a woman before I was aware of it. The mistake was mine, not yours. So it seems that—that—"

"That I am somewhat acquainted with your way of thinking," interposed Kitty.

"Possibly, you do not know the deeper under current of my thoughts."

A new thought occurred to Mrs. Kinmouth. She paused and asked, in a low, unsteady tone:

"Did you read the letter?"

"I did not."

"You did not?" she repeated, eyeing Kitty sharply.

"Mother, I have not spoken a lie, nor acted one," she replied, with firmness.

"Ah! I see how it is! Even doves have sharp eyes."

"You mean that a girl may be young and innocent without being a fool," said Kitty.

"No matter what I mean," answered the

lady, after reflecting a moment. "You will not betray me."

She compressed her lips and tossed her head.

"I do not think I would; but people sometimes betray themselves."

"True; yet I owe to nothing of all this you have been saying. On the contrary, I deny everything. Do not try to cope with me, Kitty."

"Cope with you? Oh no! I would help you out of this terrible situation, if I could. I am your friend—your daughter, and not your enemy. I will not be brought into antagonism with you. And yet, I will help the Union cause and Union men. I will save life rather than destroy it. I will set no traps."

Kitty spoke earnestly. Her mother had never seen her so firm, so fearless before. She shivered and drew back, like one who looks off a dizzy height. She began to feel her peril.

"Soon, mother," Kitty went on, "it will be too late to retreat. In a day, it may be in an hour, you may be lost to us all."

"Be silent!" said her mother, warningly. "Clari and the mountain-man are returning. They seem wondrously friendly. See how he looks at her! Isn't that admiration, Kitty?"

"Clari is handsome," said Kitty, absently.

"Yes," sighed her mother, "I fear she is."

This was murmured rather than spoken. She was greatly troubled by what Kitty had said. She was the victim of suspense and fear. That a discovery of some kind had been made, she could not doubt. But what was it? How much was she compromised, and to whom?

Bosworth and Clari came up, and she joined them with a smiling countenance; but her heart was beating painfully.

"Will your friend with the singular name return to us to-night?" she asked, carelessly, turning to Bosworth.

"Without fail. He keeps time like a watch," answered Max.

"Keeps time like a watch," repeated Mrs. Kinmouth. "A very good idea. This Swing-foot seems to be the shrewdest of his class. Isn't he an expert in woodcraft?"

Kitty watched her mother's face while she was speaking. She studied it well; its mask was very perfect—its hypocrisy a thick veil that few could penetrate. The girl wondered if Mountain Max had learned anything concerning her midnight journey, or the letter, from Nick Whiffles. She marveled at his calmness. He was standing face to face with the woman who had betrayed him, and knew it; yet his clear eyes dwelt on her mildly.

"How we deceive each other!" thought the pretty little woman.

"I may say, madam," returned Max, in an easy manner, "that he has not his equal with the gun and trap this side of the great Red

River of the North. As an enemy, the rebels cannot have a worse man."

"He has come to us at the right time," observed Clari. "I hope he will be able to hold the bushwhackers in check. We call these midnight prowlers, bushwhackers, Mr. Bosworth. They are not engaged in regular warfare, but are, in fact, predatory bands of banditti."

"I will trust the trapper and his mountaineers against these robbers and assassins, with perfect confidence in the result," answered Bosworth. "These men do not waste powder when they fire."

"You are on the right side, I see," said Mrs. Kinmouth gravely.

"I hope so, madam. I'm on the side of the Government and Liberty."

"Do you intend to take arms in the defence of the Union?" asked the lady, quietly.

Bosworth received a warning glance from Kitty. He took the hint and gave a different reply from what he had intended.

"Such a thought has been in my mind, I confess," he said; "but I shall be guided by reason and my calmest judgment. What should you advise, madam?"

This question took Mrs. Kinmouth somewhat off her guard; but she was not one to be long embarrassed.

"Precisely what you have said you would be guided by," she replied. "I commend your moderation. Many are hasty. Haste is not always expedient. One should think twice before taking an important step. There are two sides to every question."

"And we cannot take both of them," interposed Kitty.

Mrs. Kinmouth tossed her head and laughed.

"What a wise juss! She is becoming a sage!"

"The young lady is right," said Bosworth, with a smile. "The country has but two parties—its friends and its enemies. Great, indeed, are our responsibilities. We are accountable to all the future."

Mrs. Kinmouth turned toward Kitty, and her red lips curled with incredulity. She believed in the Confederacy.

"Do you like Yankees?" she asked, with affected good-nature.

"No," said Bosworth, dryly; "I like Americans."

Mrs. Kinmouth looked serious, and said:

"Let us go to dinner."

So they went in, with a wide, wide difference of thought between them.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WARNING.

The day passed on. Archibald Roe did not return. Nick Whiffles appeared before sunset, and spent an hour in various attentions to his horse. It was observed by Kitty that he was rather uneasy, and walked to and fro, as if in deep thought.

"He seems to be expecting some one," she said to herself. "I wonder where Archie is? That Archibald Roe is a strange youth. It's a pity that study crazed him. Yet he has singular flashes of lucidity. There are times when his handsome eyes make me tremble; they penetrate my heart; they look into me."

Kitty said this to her own pretty selfhood, thinking no one heard her; but the fair and stately Clari was near enough to catch every word.

"Repeat what you said," said Clari, quietly, looking at Nick Whiffles, and following the direction of his eyes with her own.

"This Mr. Swiftfoot seems to be anxious," answered Kitty, not consternated, but embarrassed.

"Has he reason to be anxious?" asked Clari.

"How should I know? The question is singular, Clari."

"Where did you go last night?"

Clari spoke resolutely yet kindly.

"So you missed me! You had better not ask questions. Guess at everything and let it pass. Be assured that it will not occur again. I have learned wisdom. I had no settled opinions yesterday; to-day, I have. I am for the Union—for the Government—for Liberty—for the Constitution and the old flag! Is not that a long speech for a cat's-paw to make?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Clari. "Something has touched you. Something has awakened you. You speak as I like to hear you."

"The less you say about it, the better I shall feel. There are reasons why I don't wish my actions scrutinized. Talk of something else, sister Clari."

"There is enough to talk of, Heaven knows," returned Clari. "And there are some things," she went on, "that must be met bravely. Let me ask you one thing, Kitty: Do you think mother knows who yonder man is?"

She pointed to Nick, who was standing in the rear, a few paces distant.

"I do. The deception is as plain to her as possible. You need have no doubt about that," responded Kitty, promptly and positively.

"Then I know very well what will come of it," added Clari, emphatically. "I have noticed that a singular fatality follows Union people who in any manner come in contact with us. That man will be betrayed! Betrayed? He is betrayed already, if what you tell me is true. Your midnight ride had something to do with it."

"I haven't a doubt of it," replied Kitty, shivering. "But what can be done? We cannot go and inform him that—"

The girl checked herself, and her face grew red.

"Names need not be mentioned," said Clari, earnestly. "Go to him and say: 'You are not safe here. Go away at once. Save yourself! You can do this, and compromise no one.'"

"I will do it!" exclaimed Kitty, with firmness. "Where is mother? Keep guard over mother."

The girl was moving off.

"Stay!" said Clari, detaining her. "Is it not singular about this Mr. Bosworth and Mrs. Kinmouth?"

Clari often called her step-mother "Mrs. Kinmouth."

"She is going to please him," quoth Miss Kitty.

"I cannot imagine how you missed her about his identity. I hope you told nothing more than a white lie? But sharp people often take the hook with avidity. It was the man's good looks that blinded her. Had she not seen him, she would not have been so easily misled. His handsome face, his dark hair, his fine eyes, his manly physique dazzled our fascinating mamma."

"Beware, Clari, or she'll take him away from you."

With these warning words, Kitty hurried to Nick Whiffles. She passed him, and as she passed him, she said:

"I want to speak with you, Nick Whiffles. Follow me."

"Sartain! To the end o' the world, if you asked me to," replied Nick, and walked slowly after her.

They went along the Bluff Road a little way, toward the river, not taking any notice of each other.

"You had better go away from here," began Kitty, by-and-by, when Nick was near enough to hear her. "I don't think you are safe with us."

"Don't be scared," answered the trapper, with composure. "I've lived among difficulties all my life. If you should take the difficulties away of a sudden, I should be out o' my elements, and shouldn't know what to do."

"Do not delude yourself," returned Kitty, earnestly. "You are not dealing with the simple-minded savage now."

"Simple-minded!" repeated Nick, shaking his head. "Nobody is more cunning nor an lugin. Don't talk to me about white folks down in the States!"

"As soon as it is dark," resumed Kitty, adhering closely to her purpose, "go out quietly, take your horse from the stable, mount it, and join your mountaineers. Your horse's name is Swingfoot—isn't it?"

"I allow 'tis, little woman."

"Can he go fast?"

"He can swing foot some, I should say," quoth Nick, with pride. "If he hadn't been a speeder, he'd never got that name, I reckon. You'd ought to see him eat the ground; he devours it with them leaps o' his'n, which he'll make faster'n you can count. He's a hoss, he is! You wouldn't think that that was the reg'lar old Suggestion—should ye? But 'tis, by mighty! I turned him out to pasture, you see, for a few years, and he come up wonderful. He used to be all bone; but the trouble is now that he's runnin' all to muscle. Never seed a quadruped with so much muscle as he's got at the present speakin'! Used to think I'd rath'er have an animal with nothin' but bone; but now I'm jest as set 'tother way, and want nothin' but muscle."

"Use all that muscle as soon as you can," advised Kitty.

"I can reconperate any hoss on airth," Nick went on, fairly launched upon the inspiring topic of horse-flesh. "Don't care how old he is; not a tall. Jest slip off the saddle and bridle, and turn him loose on the pastures, and arter a half a dozen years spent profitably in grazin' the grass, and drinkin' the clear waters that flow down from the mountains, and he'll renew his age. Have knowed 'em to shed their teeth and grow new ones, by gracious! I've sometimes wished that old women could be turned out in that way, and ketch'd up ag'in young gals."

"I don't care a snap of my finger for old horses or old women," said Kitty, impatiently. "And as for your stories, I shan't believe all of them. I have heard that you tell whoppers."

"That was a brother o' mine," said Nick, placidly. He was a lawyer, and that comes of havin' a liar in the family. So you want me to skedaddle—do ye?"

"If that means to go away, yes."

"Be hanged if I do!"

"You'll be hanged if you don't!" said Kitty, testily.

"Not while I have my senses, miss. I've made up my mind not to go out of this world kickin' at the air. A rifle-ball is the thing for me. Give me a rifle-ball, gal, right between the eyes, when I go under. That's neat and quick, and right in my line. I wouldn't thank nobody to go to boostin' me up to a tree. The airth is so good a friend that I can't leave it, even to oblige the p'ison secession Confederators. The flat o' my foot or the flat o' my back must allers be to mother airth. O' Lord, yes! Don't bring no ropes for an old trapper. Ropes is for the highly-civilized city critters. I wouldn't kill a dog with a rope, I wouldn't. When I rub out an enemy, it'll be with lead or steel, no matter what his crimes be."

"Will you take Swingfoot and go?" persisted Kitty.

"No, little gal," answered Nick, in a thoughtful manner. "I won't take Swingfoot and go, to-night. But I thank ye for your forethought and good-will. Your counsel is well meant, and you haven't said a word that I haven't appreciated, or that's been lost to me. You're a brave little woman, and somehow you make me think o' that strange lad Archie, every time I look at ye. Archie ain't a natural fool—is he?"

"No!" retorted Kitty, sharply. "He is a kind of a fool. He overworked his brain, and his intellect hasn't got settled yet."

"I thought it might be some of that kind," said Nick, reflectively. "I've seldom or never seen an interstiner locust. His eyes are like your'n, by mighty! And his face is high on't as fair. He knows enough to keep out o' fire and water—don't he?"

Nick looked at Kitty with seeming honesty. The girl's face flushed with anger.

"Archie! Archie! he's a scoundrel of treachery. He's a wonderful favorite in our family, and not the driveling and pitiful creature that you think him."

"You don't keep him shut up thy, do ye?"

"No!" exclaimed Kitty, very curtly indeed. Then looking up to Nick, she observed that there was a mischievous twinkle in his eyes. Her petulance passed away in an instant. She was startled. Wonder mingled with her secret fear. Strong curiosity was awakened. What was in Nick Whiffles' heart? What was he coming to? What did he know, and how did he know it? She said to herself: "This man is very penetrating. His simplicity must not be trusted. His quietness is shrewdness."

"I will go back to the house now," she said. "I don't like to be treated as a child."

Nick considered her with a benevolent smile.

"Have faith in me, good gal; have faith in old Nick Whiffles, and fear not. Sleep calm, as the innocent should sleep. Providence will care for thee and for me, for Archie and for all."

Strangely affected by this interview, Kitty hastened back to the house.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ANSWER.

Mrs. Kimbrough found herself in an embarrassed position. She could no longer trust Kitty, and she felt very sure that the latter would refuse to perform any more mysterious errands. She wished to hear from her note to Blackmer. She dared not leave the house to visit the hollow tree, where the answer was to be left; and yet it was a thing so delicate, that she could not intrust it to another. Folly was not to be thought of for such a service, while Splay-foot was equally objectionable as a messenger; for she wished the hollow tree and its uses to be known to herself and those legitimately in the

THE SECRET MEETING.



secret, only. So Mrs. Kimmouth grew nervous as the night drew on.

She appeared at the tea-table quite pale, and with a bad headache. She bade her guests good-night, and retired to her chamber early, on account of her indisposition.

Nick experienced a feeling of relief when freed from her watchfulness; and, indeed, a weight seemed lifted from the spirits of all at her departure. No one but Nick, however, mistrusted why she had that headache. He was very well assured that she would steal silently from the house, and go for Alix Harker's answer. He would have gone out, waited for her appearance, and watched her to and from the tree which he believed she would visit, had she not been a woman, and had not his faith in Archibald Roe been unwavering.

Nick was right in his surmises. As soon as it was dark—now impatiently she waited for that darkness!—Mrs. Kimmouth put on an old dress, which had, at some past time, belonged to the wardrobe of Sally Dowse, and, in this disguise, went stealthily down the back-stairs, out at the back-door, and thence, like a shadow, across the open shrubbery into the nearest thicket. She had, of course, but a single object in view, and that was the response to her betrayal of the tall, thin man, whom she believed to be Nick Whiffles. She groped her way through the bushes; she went straight, by a sort of instinct, to the tree.

She paused an instant to gather strength, then, stooping, thrust her hand into the hollow. A figure rose up silently and grasped her arm. She shrieked with terror.

"Who are ye? What do you want here?"

It was Alix Harker that spoke—she knew his voice.

"Unhand me, Harker! Don't you know me?" re-monstrated Mrs. Kimmouth, excitedly.

"I ought to know the voice, but hang me if I know the outside!" answered Harker, gruffly. "I ain't goin' to stand no tricks, you know."

"Look at my face!" She threw back her thick veil. "I am Mrs. Kimmouth. I have come for the paper."

"I am damned if you didn't deceive me! Thought 'twas some interloper that had got hold of our secret in some way. Come to the post-office, eh?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Kimmouth. "You need not hold my hand any longer."

"It's a nice little hand to hold," returned Harker, laughing. "I don't know of any face I'd rather see than yours. We're all right, you know."

Mrs. Kimmouth drew back a little; she did not like the manner of the bushwhacker.

"I left a paper here three-quarters of an hour ago, and went away," said Harker; then I thought something might happen to it, and came back, and have been on the watch ever

since to prevent mistakes." He put his hand into the tree and took out a folded paper. "Here's the document. I can tell you all that's in it, but you'd better take it, so that it shall be before you in black and white. Between two and three, people sleep the soundest; and that's the time fixed on. But you can read it at your leisure, when you get home."

Alix stopped; but there was evidently something more that he wished to say.

"How strange that we should meet here! Really, Mrs. Kimmouth, you are better looking than Clari."

Harker tried to be insinuating; but to the rebel lady his smile was a grimace, and the tender glance of his eye an ugly leer.

"This is no time for jesting, Mr. Harker," said Mrs. Kimmouth, dryly.

"I swear I'm in earnest!" protested Harker. "You are more bewitching than your girls. I'll hang Kimmouth. Damned if I don't!"

He threw his arm about Mrs. Kimmouth's waist. She disengaged herself in an instant.

"You are a fool, Alix!" said she. "You've been drinking whisky. Be thankful if I don't report you."

"Report me! You won't be so cruel," said the ruffian, in a wheedling tone, still continuing his advances.

"Go and get sober!" exclaimed Mrs. Kimmouth, angrily, and striking him upon the mouth with her hand, she turned and ran toward home as fast as she could. Alix staggered after her a few steps, ran against a tree, stopped, put his back against it, swore badly, and said:

"For that I'll make you suffer, my lady! I'll persecute your daughters; and if your husband don't come to grief, it'll be through no fault of mine."

Meantime, Nick waited for Archibald Roe. He did not allow his anxiety to be apparent. He became uncommonly communicative. He talked continuously to the girls. He told stories of his uncles and aunts; and was never more characteristically Nick Whiffles. It happened that he was dealing with unusually bright people. The calm eyes of Clari looked through all his humors, and saw expectancy and solicitude beneath the surface; while Kitty, being prepared for something out of the ordinary course, was not much deceived by Nick's fluctuations.

Mountain Max sat near the trapper, and the young women observed that, within reach of his right hand, leaning against the wall, was a heavy rifle, which they had not seen before. They wondered where it came from.

There was no fire on the hearth, for the nights were warm. A single lamp burned on the mantle, lighting the room but dimly. There was a light, quick footstep without. The latch was lifted, and Archie came in. He entered with more spirit than usual, and less abstraction of

manner. They all noticed, with surprise—that is, the members of the family—that he had some kind of a fire-arm in his hand. It was small, and peculiar in its make; and, in the scarcity of such articles, they wondered where the lad picked up such a prize. Nick and Max exchanged glances. There was an immediate lighting-up of the countenance of the former.

Kinmouth scarcely noticed the boy; Clari turned her eyes on him for a moment only; but Kitty watched him closely. He had been absent since the previous evening—an evening which they could not forget; a time startling and memorable. His coming could not but produce inquiry and conjecture.

"Ah!" said Nick. "Here's the bug-boy. What kinds of insect have you got now? Bring that pop-gun here and let me look at it."

"Who are you?" answered Archie, stopping suddenly, and staring vacantly at the mountaineer. "What do you come here for, when there's so many places to go to, and so many people that know you better. You want to see my gun. Do you know how to handle guns?"

"Someat!" said Nick. "I'm straight from the woods. That bit o' iron is mine."

He pointed a tawny finger at his rifle. It was a dark, greasy-looking weapon, with a strap at the stock, with which to sling it across the shoulders.

"That's been fired a good many times, stranger," answered Archie. "You can take mine in your hand, but be very careful, or it will go off."

Archibald approached Nick, and held out his little rifle. Nick took it, weighed it in his hand, noted its calibre, shook his head, and smiled distrustfully.

"Too small!" he muttered. "New-fangled consarn. Not fit for service, I allow. The barrel goes on a hinge. Loads at the wrong end—don't it?"

"Touch the forward trigger, underneath," said Archie, stealthily pushing Nick with his knee.

Nick gave him a look of intelligence. He pulled the trigger; the breech rose up, and the muzzle was depressed. Nick looked into the winding tube, and saw a twisted bit of paper. He drew it out, concealing it in the palm of his hand. This was done dexterously, but the attentive eyes of Kitty had followed his movements. She saw the protruding fraction of paper, and she saw him manipulate it into his horny palm. That, to her, meant something. If it meant something, the meaning must be from Archie to Nick; and if there were such a meaning, the youth must be more than usually lucid. Anything that concerned his sanity or insanity, interested her; for she had detected more coherency and sense in his conduct than any member of the household. She had oftenest surprised his eyes upon her, not in a fixed

and vacant stare, but full of light and intensity. Archibald Roe had gradually become to her a perplexing problem; a baffling study; a continual enigma. Wisdom and folly, quickness and stupidity, simplicity and adroitness, were so mingled in his character, that everything like analysis, on her part, had been frustrated.

She resolved to see the contents of that twisted slip of paper. She went directly to Nick, and while pretending to look, with girlish curiosity, at the little rifle, cunningly insinuated her small hand into Nick's, and before he was aware of her purpose, drew away the paper.

"Don't be alarmed," she said, in a low tone. "I am not going to be kept in the dark always. I mean to be in your secret, whatever it is. You shall have me for a confidant whether you will or not. Trust me, or I'll stand in your way."

"Come, gal, don't bother me!" answered Nick, coaxingly, holding her gently by the wrist. "You'll git me into a cussed little difficulty, fast thing you know. Give it up, and I'll take ye into partnership. I will, by mighty!" "You may as well let me alone," persisted Kitty. "You can't get it from me. For once, I am going to have a will of my own."

This conversation was carried on in an aside tone.

"A compromise," proposed Nick. "I'll read it fast, and then—"

"And then you will put it into your pocket!" interrupted Kitty, very quietly.

"She's in earnest, I swear to gracious!" muttered Nick, smiling at her pertinacity, yet quite uneasy.

Archie watched her countenance with eager interest.

"Well, gal, have your own way. Read it; there's anything in it to read, and give it back to me," added Nick, submitting with the utmost good temper. "I don't believe, arter all, it could fall into safer hands. But you're a sharp one, you be. Your eyes are quicker'n an Injun arser. You connect cause and effect right smart."

Kitty Kinmouth didn't wait for any farther concession, but keeping her back turned upon the rest of the company, untwisted the paper, and read it. It was written in a neat and scholarly hand. At the top it said:

"(Copy of the Answer Found in the Tree.)"

"A strong party will surround the house between the hours of two and three. I will see that my men are posted so that there shall be no possibility of failure. You are right about its being Nick Whiffles. It was him who saved your worthy husband from getting a turn out of the window, last night, and also prevented justice being done on the body of that fellow called Mountain Max, whose whereabouts you made known to us. If we could bag both these creatures at the same time, we should think ourselves particularly fortunate. This Max is a pupil of Nick's, and is a great brawny chap, with strength enough for two, and rather decent-looking. He's dangerous, and must be got rid of before he has a chance to do mischief. Expect us at the time herein

named, and don't be at all alarmed at any disturbance you may hear in the night.

"Yours, for the Institutions,

"BLACKMER.

"P. S.—I came near losing a certain note; but returning to the cabin, luckily recovered it, so that no harm came of my carelessness. Your kindness and the white plume are remembered. If I show the white feather to the Federals, it will not be in the usual manner."

"B."

The young girl having read this, understood everything. The whole truth flashed through her mind. She perceived the purport of the letter she had carried. She felt ill-used and humiliated. At first she was angry with her mother; but that feeling was of short continuance; sorrow came after it, treading upon its retreating shadow.

She handed the wrinkled scrap of paper quietly and sadly to Nick. The latter had good eyes; he glanced compassionately at the girl, then slowly mastered the writing, which was not quite so plain to him as the trail of a Choctaw. He slipped it into his pocket, saying:

"Never mind, little woman, never mind! It don't trouble me an atom. All these things is in our lifetime. Brighten up! A heap o' good may come out on't. You wanted me to mount Swingfoot and be off, thinkin' I'd be taken on-awares. Now that was kind in ye, and marvellous, as 'twere; but you see I weren't unprepared for s'prises. O Lord, no!"

During this time, Kinmouth and Bosworth were earnestly engaged in conversation; but Clari was left to amuse herself, which she did by watching Kitty and trying to penetrate this by-play. She thought she perceived that some secret matter was being canvassed; but she had so much faith in her sister, that she was sure of knowing all she ought to, in due time.

Max left his host and joined the little circle.

"I've got the details, my boy," said Nick. "Don't be afraid o' the gal; she's in the ring, now, and knows as much about it as I do. I'd kept her out, on account of her feelin's; but she's rather breachy, and in she jumped! Nick looked at her so kindly, that she began to love him. He put his brown hand on her browner curls. "She's a Unioner, Max, true Unioner. Her good mamma will come round right, one o' these days."

"Don't make me like you!" murmured Kitty, gratefully. "I don't want to like anybody."

"Sooner or later, by-and-by, now or then, in the course o' natur, in the happenin' of circumstances, there's one as you'll come to like; and the name o' that one shall not be herein mentioned by me. O Lord! no. Not whatsoever. Not by no outspoken language o' mine, although my nat'ral eyes has been on that individual, and seen all the treasures of his love for somebody; which somebody may be a thousand miles from here, for anything I shall say to the contrary."

Guilty or not guilty, Kitty's eyes drooped. Her long lashes quivered, opened, shut, and her cheeks flushed strangely. She did not really seem to know what caused her perturbation.

Archie had produced from some depository on his person, a card of recently-stabbed bugs, that were yet writhing on their respective pins. Their feeble wings fluttered in the pangs of crucifixion. Hearing Nick go on in this way, the card slipped from his fingers, and dropped at Kitty's feet.

The mountain-man drew up his shoulders, and the smile that came to his comical lips was as pleasant as a woman's.

"What a condemned world 'tis!" he muttered. "There's difficulties in't, but the difficulties git straightened out, arter a while. There wasn't never nothin' so crooked that it couldn't be straightened. You can look through providence like the double sights of a gun, if you only know how to lay your face to't. Don't let nobody's heart be troubled."

Nick stopped. "Matters are workin'," he added, nodding to Bosworth. "The bushwhackers are comin' to take us, presently. Perhaps they'll have an easy time on't, my son!"

Kitty Kinmouth stood staring at the mountaineer. She wanted to be angry, but she didn't know whom to be angry with, nor what about; so she gave it up, and pouted.

Max found opportunity to glance from her to Clari.

"You don't act like one as is to be hanged at three o'clock," said Nick, with quiet humor. "Instead o' perparin' to leave the airth, you seem to be fixin' your mind more on't." Then to Kitty: "Come, little woman, take your sister and leave us. Don't borry no trouble. Sleep as peacefully as if there weren't a bushwhacker within a hundred miles."

"We'll go," answered Kitty, "but not to sleep. We won't sleep while our defenders watch. Clari is brave. You can trust Clari and I. She shall know all. I hope you won't allow yourselves to be taken. I'm sure you won't. Keep as much from him"—she glanced at her father—"as you consistently can. I don't want him to be shocked; because her eyes may be opened, you know, and she may, when she sees clearer, regret all this."

"My friend understands you," said Max. "Though brave as a lion, he has a heart like a woman."

Kitty bowed gratefully, and, in turning, met the eyes of Archibald Roe. She never had seen them so bright and handsome. They gave her a strange thrill—a sensation divided between pleasure and pain.

The girls left the room together, and the eyes of two persons followed them with adoration.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOW TO SAVE HIM.

Mrs. Kinmouth reached home in a state of trepidation. She was breathing hurriedly when she opened the door and went up to the chamber. Sally Dowe was somewhat on the move that night, and Mrs. Kinmouth ran against her in the dark upper hall.

"Who is it?" cried Sally, holding her fast. "It's Dinah, or Rose, or Folly, I'll be bound! I won't have no so't walkin' in this house. Go in' to your mis'ress' room, wasn't ye, to steal something? Down stairs, you baggage, or I'll call your master!"

"It is me, Sally! Let me go," said Mrs. Kinmouth, much annoyed. "You know better." "Beg your pardon, ma'am!" muttered Sally. "You took me by surprise, as 'twere, for I couldn't hear ye any more than if a mouse was comin'; and the clothes you've got on don't feel like them you usually wears. Shall I strike a light, ma'am?"

"No!" answered Mrs. Kinmouth, curtly. "I want no assistance. When you walk about the house at night, I think it would be well to carry a light, that you may not run against people. I dislike to be pushed."

The lady felt her way into her room, in no pleasant frame of mind. She shut the door and sat down to rest before taking off her disguise. When she had grown calm, she drew the paper from her bosom, struck a light, and read it. She changed color when she came to that part which had reference to Mountain Max.

"So that plan failed!" she muttered. "But why have they deceived me about it?" Her eyes hurried on; she read the lines that followed. "A great, brawny fellow!" she repeated, quite startled. "A great, brawny fellow, and decent looking!" If this Blackmer acknowledges that he is decent looking, he must be handsome; and if he is handsome, the man they call Bosworth is the person, and I have been tricked. Why was it? Because they disturbed me. If they disturbed me, that distrust came from some cause. Perhaps my absence made them suspicious. At all events, I have been hoodwinked. My mountain Apollo is the man I betrayed!"

She crushed the paper in her hand, and, for a few moments, was overcome by the discovery she had made.

"It is the first time they ever deceived me effectually," she said, in a smothered voice; but I have deceived them many times, and will again! The question is, shall I save him, or let him perish with the other? 'A pupil of Nick's', she went on, still quoting. "Firm friends, of course. One will not desert the other. What can I do?"

She arose, and removed her disguise, and threw it into a dark closet. She put on a wrapper, thinking intently all the while.

"They are too good friends to be parted," she said, by-and-by; "so I'll not trouble myself about them. Let them go to the tender mercies of Alick Barker. There! That settles that!"

She thrust her feet into some embroidered slippers, smoothed her hair, took up a book, and drew an easy-chair to the table. She was going to read, and forgot Mr. Bosworth. Her eyes rested on the open pages about five minutes, with some steadiness; then they began to wander; and finally paused on the mirror opposite, in which her whole person was reflected. She looked well. She was charming, and she could not help having a consciousness of her own attractions. She was more fascinating in that simple costume than she had been that day. She wondered what Max would think of her, were he to see her then?

The book dropped from her hand into her lap, and slowly slipped to the carpet. She was beginning to suffer. She looked into her heart, and saw that the brawny mountaineer had taken a deep hold of her feelings. She was astonished at her own weakness. She read, with pale cheeks and pent-up breath, the new and strange hand-writing. It was a revelation she had never anticipated. She was jealous of Clari: she was jealous of Kitty. She trembled at the thought of what might happen. She was shocked to think she had betrayed him! Death, after all, is no light thing. She reversed her decision; she would save Max. But how was she to do that, and leave Nick to his fate?

She thought of a score of expedients, none of which proved practicable on examination. It was easier to save both than one. But that was not the object to be compassed. She instinctively felt that Nick was her enemy. They had naturally and instantly arrayed themselves in personal antagonism.

After three quarters of an hour of mental contradiction, Mrs. Kinmouth resolved what she would do. She arose, opened the door, and looked for Folly. She found her asleep in the hall; for she haunted that region at night, that she might be within call. By common consent, this girl had become common property. She waked her, by dint of much pushing and shaking.

"Glory, missus!" said Folly, rubbing her eyes.

"Get up, and be sure that you are awake!" replied Mrs. Kinmouth, quietly. Folly got up drowsily, yawning to the last stages of heaviness.

"You know whom you are, and where you are—don't you?" asked Mrs. Kinmouth. The latter had discreetly taken her riding-switch in her hand, and, by way of quickening her sensations, gave her a smart blow across her bare shoulders.

"My soul's marchin' on, missus!" protested Folly, but little discomfited by this sharp reminder.

"I want you to go down, girl, and tell Mr. Bosworth—the large man—that I wish to see him a few minutes. Conduct him to my chamber."

"John Brown's body!" exclaimed Folly, making a comical face. Mrs. Kinmouth turned on her sternly.

"Tell him what I have told you in a low voice, and without attracting anybody's attention. Don't blunder, unless you want a whipping to-morrow."

Folly started off instantly. She paused at the top of the stairs, and, looking back at her emphatic mistress, said:

"Lays moulderin' in the grave! Glory, hal-lalujah!"

The lady raised her switch, and the black face disappeared. Mrs. Kinmouth waited near the stairs till she heard a man's footsteps in the hall below; then retired to her room, and arranged herself very prettily in her easy-chair.

A heavy, firm step came up, and the form of Bosworth presently darkened her door. He bowed, and looked at her. His expression was:

"Madam, you have sent for me. What do you wish?"

Come in, Mr. Bosworth. Excuse me for sending for you. Be seated, sir. I would not have troubled you had not my reasons been special. I receive few visitors in my chamber."

"No apologies to me, madam," responded Max. "A woman's wishes I have always respected."

There was a touch of severity, the lady thought, in his voice.

"We had better come at the truth at once," she said. "I am aware that you are the person pursued by the Secessionists last night. For some reason, my family tried to mislead me about your identity; but I am a woman not willing to remain deceived. I take it for granted that you have a natural love of life."

She lifted her eyes to his quietly and calmly. They were like Clari's, but more fiery.

"You are right," answered Max, thrilled by the beauty of the woman. "I wish to live a long time."

He was thinking of Clari when he said that.

"In that case," replied Mrs. Kinmouth, "you will leave this house without loss of time. Being a stranger in this part of the country, you probably do not know the character of the desperadoes called bushwhackers. They tried to kill you last night, and failing in that, they will return with additional numbers, and accomplish their purpose. Your safety lies in instant flight."

"I ought to thank you for your warning," said Max, considerably wrought upon by the gracefulness of Mrs. Kinmouth. "I ought not to ask you any questions about the source of your information. I am greatly honored by this mark of your friendly interest. Although

an inhabitant of the Western wilderness, I am not without sensibility. Your lips, I am sure, ordinarily have power to control me; but if you will allow me the hospitality of your house, I will remain. If you bid me forth, I will wrap me in my blanket, and sleep soundly under the nearest tree."

He spoke modestly and gently, but he looked in earnest.

"Under the nearest tree you will be but little safer than here. I am not going to turn you out of doors," returned Mrs. Kinmouth, with a bewitching smile. "I am interested in the preservation of your life," she went on. "We all have our peculiar notions and sympathies, Mr. Bosworth."

For the life of him, Max could not help thinking of her betrayal of him to Alick Barker.

"Our notions sometimes change," he observed, smiling.

"Most true!" answered the lady, coloring. "We are often transformed. I confess to it personally. Will you not oblige me? Will you not leave this house at once? Or, at least, within the hour?"

"For the purpose of safety, no!" said Max. "I will not desert a comrade, though a score of bushwhackers were at my heels."

"Remember," resumed Mrs. Kinmouth, earnestly, "that the tall man below is not in danger."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Bosworth, looking keenly at Mrs. Kinmouth. The latter was disconcerted.

"It was you they sought yesterday, and they will seek you again to-night. Of what political importance is the person below? Of none, whatever. He seems to be a simple hunter, not above the average of human capacity. The Confederates want little of him. Let him sleep in peace; but go you to a place of security, if you know of such."

"No!" said Max, shaking his head.

"I entreat you to go!"

Her voice was full of persuasive earnestness. "Pardon me, madam, but I must remain," answered Max, seriously. "If the bushwhackers intend to visit this house to-night, I mean to be here to defend it. I know how to receive such gentry. I was betrayed into their hands last night, and had it not been for your heroic and beautiful daughter, I should have perished."

Mrs. Kinmouth's heart throbbed painfully. Despite her secession faith, she felt guilty and criminal before Bosworth. His composed and honest face was a terrible rebuke of her treachery. She began to feel miserable. Her self-respect was every moment growing less. She was in a net, the meshes of which were tightening around her. She felt that there had been a leak somewhere in her plans. Some of her secrets had mysteriously escaped. She asked herself why she inwardly trembled before this

mountaineer. What has his presence brought to affect her so much? Something said to her, "You love him"; but she tried not to hear it.

"Can no persuasion shake your resolution?" she asked, in a gentle tone.

"Yours. I am sure would, if it were possible," replied Max, gallantly.

"Give me no hollow words!" retorted Mrs. Kinmouth, arising. "Give me not mockeries in return for the wish to preserve you. It is possible that we are political enemies; but I did wish to save you. You are obstinate. You repay my kindness with dogged firmness; which is not the proper coin for a lady. I leave done my duty. Go, sir, and remember, when it is too late, that Helen Kinmouth would have saved you."

That was a critical moment for Mountain Max: for, as she stood before him, she looked more like Clari than ever. Her graceful dignity, too, pleased him; and, more than all, he was flattered, as he had good reason to be. When a man feels flattered, he is half won. Had it not been for the thought of Clari, Bosworth would have fallen at her feet. The image of Clari stepped between them, and that image was a shield. The stalwart figure of Max experienced a momentary tremor. His purpose bent like a willow-ward in the wind. The glorious eyes of Helen Kinmouth magnetized him dangerously.

He stepped back. He brushed his hand across his forehead, and its shadow, passing over his vision, shut out for an instant, the beautiful woman, and his resolution sprang back again. He took her hand without daring to look in her face.

"Your last bidding, madam, shall be obeyed," he said. "I will go from this chamber, but not an ungrateful nor an unflattered man. I own your power; and were it not for one recollection, and for one face, I would cheerfully obey your slightest wish, and deem myself happy in being your slave."

He felt her hand tremble in his, and he relinquished it with nervous haste.

"I am glad to leave you," he continued; "for I would not trust myself a moment longer in your presence, with any thought or expectation of keeping the purpose which I have formed, and which you wish to change. Woman never wrung such a confession from me before."

Mrs. Kinmouth's face lighted up resplendently. A deep thrill of pleasure went quivering through her. She had half conquered the mighty man of the mountains. He was nearly ready to take the oath of eternal allegiance.

"That recollection and that face?" she murmured, softly, touching him with the tip of a white finger.

Max breathed hard, and glanced around, hopelessly, for the door.

"Why do you press me?" he exclaimed, trembling. "Both are not far from us! Both remind me of you!"

"It must be Kitty," thought Mrs. Kinmouth. "Kitty looks like me. Clari has no right to look like me."

"Under this roof?" she said, faintly. Max bowed. He looked down silently, and encountered another danger—Mrs. Kinmouth's small slippered foot. Bosworth shut his eyes, turned, and groped for the door. His strong limbs shook. He heard a sigh and a sob as he went out.

He did not look back. He hurried down stairs and out into the night-air, panting and nervous.

Nick Whiffles came out presently, and found him walking about in an abstracted manner. They conversed in low voices; then Nick went away, and was gone half an hour. When he returned, his countenance wore its usual serenity of expression.

CHAPTER XX.

A VISITOR IN DISGUISE.

When the mountaineers re-entered the house, Nick extinguished the single lamp that burned on the mantel. They bolted the door, then lay down quietly upon the floor, with their weapons within reach. Kinmouth occupied a small room on the same floor; and, wearied by the distracting thoughts of the day, and trusting to the brave men who had so tacitly taken charge of his dwelling, was soon asleep. With the exception of the servants, he was the only one who slept well that night. The House on the Bluff had watchful inmates.

Clari and Kitty sat with clasped hands, listening to every sound, thinking the night terribly long. If either dozed an instant, she started up, thinking it must be two o'clock; but on consulting Clari's watch, found that she herself dragged heavily.

Mrs. Kinmouth, when left alone by Bosworth, was, for a time, quite disturbed. Her interview with him had increased her love for him without accomplishing her purpose. There was satisfaction, however, in knowing that she had deeply moved, if she had not conquered him. She solaced herself with the reflection that the strong man had become weak in her hands, and had fled from fear of himself. Was it a hopeless thing? She thought not. But that "recollection" and that "face" haunted her. If these meant her Kitty, what could she do? If they meant Clari, she knew what she would do. She would be artful. Not that she wished to harm the girl, but because her infatuation hurried her on.

In the midst of this flurry of thought, there was a knocking at the outer door; not a timid and uncertain summons, but a vigorous and continuous demand for entrance. She opened the

door, which she had purposely left ajar, and crossing the narrow hall, leaned over the banister to learn what would follow. Where were those men—Bosworth, Nick, and her husband? Were they watching below, or had they gone to bed? She had wished to know this during the whole evening, but that indisposition of hers had worked against her desires; for her worthy Kinmouth should believe her in bed, with Kitty beside her, and with napkins to her aching head, and all the little medical accompaniments of such an illness.

She queried whether the person who knocked would be admitted, with or without questioning. She was surprised to see the bolt slip back, and the door open, without a word being spoken. That, she was sure, was unlike Kinmouth. There was a large interrogation-point in her mind. Did this ready opening of the door indicate a want of wit, or a great deal of it? Some one came in, and the door was shut and bolted before anything was said. Then she heard Nick Whiffles say:

"Rather dark here, mister. Don't run agin things, but keep still, and I'll have a light in a minute. Glad I hadn't gone to bed. No friend to feather-beds, I ain't. Prefer to sleep on the floor, anytime, or on the ground, for that matter. And not on the ground, nyther, but on the boughs of trees, if we can git 'em."

A feeble light streamed up, followed by a sulphurous odor. Nick had struck a match and lighted the lamp.

"How are ye, Kinmouth?" said the person who had entered. "It's a long time since I seen ye."

"I allow 'tis! Shouldn't known ye if I hadn't seen ye. Darned if I know ye as 'tis!" responded Nick, with perfect nonchalance.

"That's odd! Used to go to school with ye when ye's a boy. No; hold on! You don't look like the same chap, neither," said the man who had entered, doubtfully.

"No more I ain't. Take a seat, stranger. I'm doin' the honors here at the present speaking. You're welcome, fur as I'm consarned."

"Thank ye!" said the late visitor. "Don't keer if I do."

There was another door ajar besides Mrs. Kinmouth's, and there were other ears that listened. Kitty was on the alert. She knew the voice at once; it was Blackmer's; disguised as it was, it did not deceive her. A new interest was immediately thrown about the stranger. She fitted, with light footfall, to the top of the stairs, and was not much surprised to find her mother there. They glanced at each other, and said nothing. There was but little light in the hall, and that streamed through Mrs. Kinmouth's door, or flickered up faintly from below.

The man, after glancing at the quiet figure of Max on the floor, and into the corners of the

room, sat down.

"Where are you from?" asked Nick. "Well, stranger, I'm from the different p'int o' the compass," replied the man, readily. "It don't matter much whar I come from, I guess, if I'm all right. I'm tryin' to rally the boys, hereabouts."

"You're Union, I allow?" said Nick, eyeing the disguised rebel sharply.

"If I be, I ain't ashamed on't. I know whar to go, I do, and what kind o' folks to come amongst. Kinmouth ain't no traitor, he ain't. If you know what he is, you know what I be, pooty much. Don't be skeered, mister."

Kitty, listening with her mother, heard this, and said, inwardly:

"Let me see if you will deceive Nick Whiffles, gallant colonel!"

"I'll try and be ca'm!" said Nick. "I'm rayther a skittish animile. I sometimes shy, like a yearlin' perario colt. Be moderate, stranger. What do you most ginerly come to dinner by?"

"Eh?" queried the colonel, quite mystified, at first, but what was meant presently worked into his wise noddle.

"Oh, I see! Bart Bramble, my name is. You've heard of him, if you've been long in these parts."

"Bart Bramble. That's the application, is it? I have heard o' him, and not much good of him, nyther. They say he's a p'ison Lincoln adjutant."

Kitty smiled. Mrs. Kinmouth wondered what they were coming at.

"I'm a Federal boss!" said Blackmer, belligerently. "I'm a Union alligator from the Swamps! Do you want to be chewed, stranger?"

Blackmer looked very grimly at Nick, who received his glumness with characteristic indifference.

"I'm a p'ison serpent!" he said, in a mild voice. "I'm a Secession copperhead from the cypress brakes! Don't tread on me, Fed'ral! I ain't quarrelsome, but am rayther squeamish 'bout havin' my head broosed."

Kitty should have seen the men scrutinize each other, but she was obliged to be content with the sense of hearing.

The fictitious Bramble was disconcerted. Here was a difference that he had not calculated upon. He had thought that to be a savage Unionist would be the highway to the hearts of these people.

Max, with closed eyes, heard what was passing, but gave no sign of wakefulness.

"You let me alone, and I'll let you alone," said Blackmer, softening. "I ain't goin' to tackle a man that's pertected by Kinmouth. I'm some in a tussel, but I don't spring on nobody without shakin' my rattles."

"That's kind and meganimous! Would

secretly thought that of a Federal loss! Don't kick 'bout layin' down your ears, I s'pose?"

Nick was very quiet indeed. He had observed his visitor well. His tattered garments, and dirty face, and red wig, did not prove invulnerable. He had penetrated his disguise in two minutes after he had lighted the lamp. He knew the man was an impostor. His name and rank he had no means of knowing, but he was certain that he came for no friendly purpose.

Just then Archibald Roe appeared. He seemed to come from some dark corner of the room. The visitor was a little startled at first, but after studying his features for a moment, ceased to notice him.

Archibald walked to and fro, talking to himself. Nick stealthily followed him with his eyes. His mutterings were incoherent, and he made meaningless gestures. He passed before and behind Nick, and finally up and down between Blackmer and the door. This continued for some time, and Nick talked to the stranger.

"Many Unioners in this district?" he inquired, with much simplicity.

"Heaps of 'em!" said Blackmer, not pleased with the part Nick was playing. "We'll clean out the whole rebel consarn, soon."

"Alick Barker and his bushwhackers 'll have a word to say 'bout that," retorted Nick.

At that instant, Archie paused behind the visitor. He held up a broad strip of paper, on which was written, in large letters: "Colonel Blackmer." Nick read it, nodded slightly, and the writing disappeared. The youth resumed his walking and his muttering, and the mountaineer had now his subtle enemy at an advantage.

"Whar's the women-folks?" asked Blackmer, by-and-by, his audacity increasing.

"Whar honest folks ought to be, I rayther 'magine," answered Nick. "But we'll call 'em right out o' bed if Squire Brainable wants to see 'em! I don't think they couldn't refuse nothin' to a Lincoln Federal. O Lord, no!"

"I don't like your tone, mister!" muttered Blackmer, scowling.

"Which on 'em 'll you have? The old lady or the gals?"

Kitty gently elbowed her mother. Clari, too, was now among the listeners; but Kitty only, of the three, held the key of the mystery.

"Mrs. Kinmouth is the one I must see," answered Blackmer, keeping up his assumed character wonderfully well. "I'd thank ye to be a trifle more respectful, stranger, partick'larly when speakin' of your betters, and females at that. I s'brung up to be polite, mister."

"If you hadn't told me, I wouldn't believed it! Come to eritikise you agin, you do look like a well-bred critter, by mighty! There was a perlitte cuss in our family, and he was hung, finally. No offence, stranger. That's no sign you'll be hung. No hurt in mentionin' the

fact, you know. Do they raise much hemp in these parts?"

There was a provoking expression on Nick's face.

"They raise a good many o' these here things!" exclaimed Blackmer, pulling a revolver from his ragged coat, and leering fiercely at Nick. "There's heaps o' these jokers, my brown copperhead, atween here and the North pole." Then to Archie: "Youngster, go and tell Mrs. Kinmouth that a gentleman wants to see her."

Archibald walked up to the disguised colonel with a slow stage step, and favored him with a steady stare.

"Well, that's interestin'!" said the wily Confederate, sticking grimly to his character. "Come, foul, will you go? Do you see this critter?" The man shook his pistol at Archie, who began to go backward toward the door, lifting his feet very high, without withdrawing his eyes or changing countenance.

"Confounded solemn owl!" muttered the colonel, putting the pistol in his pocket. "Dammed if sich eyes as them don't skeer me! Fell into a den o' nat'rais, I guess." Then to Nick: "Come, you Secession copperhead! you tati, gaunt, thin, lathy, yellor scesech snake! Ain't you goin' to offer a feller-critter some'at to drink? I'm drier nor the Red Sea was, when Pharaoh and his Hebrews went over on dry land."

"You're quite a sensible Lincolner, by gracious! Thought the Fed'rals never tasted nothin' stronger nor water. Here's some'at in my canteen that'll work down into the hollow of your legs, if you'll put your lips to it in earnest. I don't give it to you because I love ye; but I'd give it to an enemy on the field, by mighty, if I found him wounded and thirsty, faintin', moanin', and groanin' on the red ground. Enmity should cease, in every brave breast, with wounds, and pain, and helplessness."

The man of the gun and trap spoke seriously. His voice was subdued yet earnest. He passed his canteen to the man who had come to betray him. It was not an empty vessel. The Confederate gaged its contents by its weight, for it was heavy in his hand. He held it, looking questioningly at the mountaineer.

"Tisn't poisoned," quoth Nick, in an injured tone, slightly frowning. "Sich a thought is beneath a Root Digger Engin'."

Impressed by something in Nick Whiffles' voice, Blackmer unscrewed the top from the canteen, and without a word, drank deeply. Nick received it from him when he had finished his heavy draught, and followed his example.

"No underhanded business for me!" muttered Nick. "I'll meet my foe fairly and squarely, and face to face. He that draws a bead fast through the sights is the luckiest feller; and God help 'tother. That's my style,

and if you don't like it, stranger, you must go further and farg worse."

Blackmer was silent a few moments. He looked at Nick pretty thoroughly.

"That isn't so bad as it might be," he answered, slowly, and with confusion. "There's a good deal in that, by ——" He let off a strong word. "You're more of a trump nor I thought you was. I wish you'd played a better hand, to begin with, for friend or foe, you hold some of the best cards."

The doughty colonel looked up, and saw a lady entering the room.

CHAPTER XXI.

KITTY HAS A POOR MEMORY.

The lady who came in, had a shapely figure, a graceful carriage, a handsome face; but she was totally unknown to Blackmer. Impelled by natural politeness, he arose and bowed. It was a more courtly bow than he should have given in his character of Bart Bramble. After he had thus acknowledged her presence, he looked at her, quite at fault.

"Where is the gentleman who wished to see me?" she asked, by no means favorably impressed by the shabby appearance of the person before her.

"At your service," said the colonel, with another genuflection of the body, and heartily wishing Nick Whiffles at the other end of the Confederacy.

"I don't quite remember you, sir?" said Mrs. Kinmouth.

"I axes your parding, ma'am, but I never had the pleasure of seein' you afore."

"Who sent for me?"

Mrs. Kinmouth addressed this question to Nick with a toss of the head.

Nick pointed to his new acquaintance, and said, briefly:

"Him!"

"There's a mistake," stammered the colonel, as the eyes of the lady flashed on him contemptuously. "I wanted to see Mrs. Kinmouth."

"I am Mrs. Kinmouth," she said.

"You?" exclaimed Blackmer.

"No other," added Mrs. Kinmouth.

The gallant colonel was confounded. His eyes ran over the shapely figure again, and dwelt particularly on the comely features. There was certainly, in his view, a strong resemblance to Mrs. Kinmouth; but there was a discrepancy somewhere. His Mrs. Kinmouth was without doubt younger than this one. She was prettier, too; for youth has a strange beauty of its own. He did not care to dispute her, neither did he desire to believe her. But there was the identical toss of the head. That he remembered without effort. Perhaps it was the hat that had made her look younger and more charming. The soft moonlight, also, might have favored her beauty. Her voice, he

thought, was less musical than on that occasion. It didn't ripple as it did then.

What could he do? Nick Whiffles was in the way. He sat there, listening and watching. The amorous colonel was disappointed and embarrassed. He winked and blinked at Mrs. Kinmouth, hoping that she would, in some manner, recall his features; but these signals, added to his dirty face, tattered coat, and red wig, only served to mystify and repel her.

Nick Whiffles enjoyed this scene.

"It's all right, ma'am," he said, willing to increase the mutual difficulty. "He's a Federal, and come to see your husband."

"Then I am not wanted!" said Mrs. Kinmouth, coldly. "If this man has no other business, you had better show him the door."

"We've met before!" protested Blackmer, desperately.

"I am sorry for it!" responded the lady, dryly, curling her full, red lips at his wretched figure.

"If I could speak with you a minute in private, ma'am," stammered the colonel.

"Spare me that honor!" retorted Mrs. Kinmouth, haughtily.

She went up stairs without waiting to hear more.

Blackmer was left in great perturbation. He was a victim of the doubtful and the ludicrous. Nick Whiffles, perceiving his bewilderment, tapped his forehead with his fingers, and looking mysterious, said:

"A little tetch in the head."

"Eh?" queried the other, eagerly.

"Crazy as Bedlam!" said Nick. "Magine herself Mrs. Kinmouth, most the time."

"She does, does she?" exclaimed the officer, beginning to breathe more freely. "Who is she?"

"By name, Sally Dowse; by profession, housekeeper," answered Nick, promptly. "It's a thousand pities that she goes on in that p'ison way. She's crazier sometimes nor she is others. She's partick'ly on her hobby-horse to-night. The family allers humors her in her sing'lar notions. There's times when she's straight enough, and carries a smart hand with the nigger help."

"Any related to the family?"

"Mrs. Kinmouth's own a'ut; and that's why they put up with so much of her flambergaster."

"Observed she acted queerly. Didn't know what to make on't. Never was so dumbfounded in my life, sen'cely, knowin' Mrs. Kinmouth to be a good 'eal younger woman. Well, that puts it in another light. 'Bleeged to ye, old boy! Give us another tetch o' that canteen."

"Sartain! Drink hearty, boss!"

There was no need of this last injunction for the Confederate officer took a startlingly long pull at Nick's flask.

"Mere shells, ain't they?" quoth Nick, look-

ing curiously at Blackmer's legs. "Guess if you's to shake 'em, I allow I could hear the whiskey swash."

"No more holler nor your'n!" said Blackmer, with a grin. "But I do hold a right smart sprinklin' o' rum, mister." The colonel cast his eyes incidentally to the door, and beheld a sight that thrilled and exhilarated him more than the last installment of whisky. It was the incomparable Kitty herself.

The Confederate for an instant forgot his disguise. He mustered into service all his blandishments. He smiled and bowed without the least regard to Bart Bramble, or to that person's ragged coat or filthy face.

Kitty was, at first, inclined to laugh at this ridiculous pantomime, but she governed herself, put on a dramatic expression, made an uncertain step forward, and stared at the man with the greatest pertinacity.

"Mrs. Kimmouth, I am delighted!" said the colonel, in a low tone.

"I cannot recall your features, my good man," replied Kitty, gravely.

"No wonder!" thought Blackmer, remembering how he was disguised. My mother wouldn't know me."

"Your face is—is—"

"Yes," said Blackmer, thinking she was coming at it.

"Dirty!" added Kitty, maintaining her seriousness wonderfully.

The colonel's hope fell like the stick of an exploded rocket.

Nick Whiffles grinned a humorous grin that stretched his comical mouth to its greatest width.

Blackmer swore an inaudible oath. He secretly cursed disguises and situations. Here was a woman whom he wanted to adore, but could appear to her only as a species of human swine. The question was, how could he reveal himself to her, without making the same revelation to Nick, with whom his secret would be less safe. That his Mrs. Kimmouth was quizzing him, he could not doubt.

"If you please, I will send for some water," said Kitty.

"I won't trouble you, ma'am," answered Blackmer, quite at his wits' end. "Water don't agree with me, either for external or internal use."

"'Twould make a pison diffikitty with his stomach, if he should, by any accident, git water into't," remarked Nick, squinting cunningly at Kitty. "But he'll put hisself outside a pint o' whiskey quicker'n a telegraph. He's the condemndest critter on that as ever I see, by mighty! Them legs o' his'n isn't nothin' but shells, ma'am. They're holler as coffins inside, and when he tips up a canteen, the old Bourbon runs right into 'em. There isn't no marrer in his bones."

Ridicule was the colonel's vulnerable point. His old Adam broke out against Nick. He whipped out his revolver again, and on this occasion he cocked it. The sharp click terrified the girl, but the mountaineer was not in the least intimidated.

"Put it up," quoth Nick. "You'll skeer the lady. Women folks don't like gunpowder over and above well. If you should fire, you'd never pull trigger ag'in. You'd fall in your tracks, pierced by a bullet that isn't fur off."

Kitty involuntarily followed the covert direction of Nick's eyes, and saw Archie with his rifle, aiming at Blackmer. The latter also turned, and with a shudder, perceived the fixed and deadly tube covering his heart. With a smothered imprecation, he put back his revolver; while Archie Roe slowly lowered his weapon.

"A singular fool!" he thought, and he could not refrain from expressing the thought. "There's method in that young man's madness," he said, frowning. "Are there any more fools and lunatics in this house?" Then, thinking of his divinity, and what politeness required, he added: "I beg your parding, Mrs. Kimmouth. I'm sometimes irritable. I'm afraid you don't know me? Remember the white plume, ma'am."

Kitty shook her head, in utter innocence of what he was talking about.

"What does this man mean, and why is he here?" asked Kitty of Nick. "He has evidently escaped from some asylum. I think you had better put some restraint upon him, for he is obviously unfit to be at large."

"The letter!" whispered Blackmer, edging up to Kitty.

"Don't let him come any nearer, Mr. Swing-foot!" she exclaimed, in affected terror.

"The cabin in the wood!" added the colonel, in the same sibilant manner.

"Do take hold of him!" persisted Kitty.

Nick seized him by the skirt of his ragged coat, and drew him back.

"You'd better watch him till morning," she added. "If he offers to go, shoot him through the head."

There was nothing quizzical in her last injunction; it was earnest; it was serious. The disguised man felt it to be so, and began to realize that his position was perilous. But there was something in reserve to sustain him. The simple discharge of his pistol would call a score of men to his aid. He abandoned himself to the course of events. He sat down quietly, put his feet on the back of a chair, relapsed fully into his ruffianly character, leered at Nick, and said, with admirable nonchalance:

"Give us a chaw, Seesh!"

Kitty shrugged her shoulders, and disappeared. When Blackmer glanced that way again, the pretty girlish face was not there.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SIGNAL.

"Well?" said Clari, when Kitty came back. "Matters are curiously mixed up now, I should think. I heard all you said down there, and so has Mrs. Kimmouth. I should say this house is pretty well stirred up. So that is your colonel in disguise?"

"It will be seen that Kitty had made a confident of her sister."

"Yes," said Kitty. "He came to betray, and is betrayed."

"Did you betray him?"

"No. It was Archie Roe."

Kitty looked down.

"Archie Roe?"

Kitty nodded, but did not raise her eyes from the carpet.

"His pursuit is bugs," mused Clari. "I am surprised. I don't know what to think of this youth. How can he be mad, and act sanely?"

"He has lucid intervals," said Kitty, blushing.

"What are you blushing for?" asked Clari, steadily.

"I didn't blush. It was the red glare of that lamp."

"Has he ever been lucid enough to—"

Clari stopped.

"To what?"

"To nothing."

"I guess not," said Kitty.

Both were silent a moment.

"I wish you'd have that rent in the wall repaired, where you hid your man," added Kitty.

It was now Clari's turn to blush.

"My man! You are as full of venom as a wasp. Come now, what is Mother Kimmouth going to do?"

"I cannot tell you what she will do, but I know what she has done," replied Kitty, thoughtfully. "She has fallen in love with your fugitive. She has lost her cat's-paw, and she is miserable to-night. O Clari, what can we do?"

"Let things take their course. Nick Whiffles is prepared; Mountain Max is prepared; and father is sufficiently in the secret not to be taken by surprise. I tremble at the situation. There will be a struggle, and lives will be lost. If the mountaineer should not have men enough! Or if they should not come at the right moment!"

Clari shivered.

"I have thought of that. I am thinking of it yet," sighed Kitty.

"This disguised man below is armed; and a single shot, you know?"

Clari sighed more profoundly than the other. "A single shot would make you miserable, for it might kill Bosworth. Own that you love him."

"I do!" confessed Clari, in a suppressed voice. "Why should I deny it? Heaven seem-

ed to send him to me for that purpose. I am jealous of our mother."

"You are younger and handsomer than mother, and she only wishes to dazzle. She has power, and likes to show it. You know she can be charming."

"That is what troubles me. I cannot use my eyes as she can. She is so adroit! She would draw him to her to make him a rebel, if for no other purpose. Her conduct frightens me. This dreadful war brings disunion and ruin to our household. The house is divided against itself. Party spirit is as bitter and rancorous as death. We shall soon be separated; and this spot, which was once the abode of peace and happiness, will be charred by the fires of the incendiary torch."

They listened, and heard Mrs. Kimmouth walking to and fro in her chamber. They joined hands, and waited in silence the development of events.

It was one o'clock. The night was quiet. They heard no sound but the mellow murmur of the river. The sky was obscured by clouds that drifted over it continuously, like columns of smoke. If they looked from the window, they saw nothing but a dim curtain let down from the heavens. Their lamp they had extinguished long ago, so as to give no mark to a concealed foe.

Matters did not change much in the lower part of the dwelling. Blackmer and Nick had ceased to talk. The colonel's last endeavor at conversation had proved a dead failure. He was moody, and Nick curt. Max breathed with the regular respiration of a sleeper. His stalwart figure, with all its perfection of muscle and form, rested quietly.

The lamp burned out. Occasionally some faint beams of moonlight flickered in at the windows. Blackmer's eyes wandered magnetically to a certain corner of the room. He fancied he saw something there—a dark object that did not stir. He would have concluded that it was a house-dog, had he not seen the burnished mountings of a rifle shining in the darkness. The dark object was Archie Roe. The colonel wondered if he were asleep, and sometimes imagined that he saw two eyes gleaming upon him.

Two o'clock approached: it came. The disguised rebel knew that Allick Harker, with fifteen or twenty men should be within hearing, ready to rush into the house at a preconcerted signal. But things were different from what he had anticipated. At that hour he had supposed that the inmates of the house would be wrapped in profoundest slumber; that Nick Whiffles and the handsome giant would be comfortably in bed, dwelling among dreams and their idle creations. It was not so. Those he most dreaded were near him—one wide awake in his chair; the other, perhaps sleeping, per-

haps watching. This was a state of things that he could not understand. He grew distrustful. He doubted whether this *status* was the effect of accident. It seemed to him that these men were in expectation of something. Many times he glanced at the dim face of Nick; many times he contemplated, with secret apprehension, the quiet form of Mountain Max. His hand stole toward his revolver, and wanted to give the signal (which was the discharge of one cylinder), but shrank from making the experiment.

Nick dozed; at least, he appeared to, after a time. Blackmer thought he would get up and walk softly to the nearest window. He arose, but with the first creak of his boots, Nick's eyes flew open. He seized his rifle, then pretending to discover the cause of his alarm, said:

"Oh, it's you, is it, Bramble? Set down, Bramble. Make yourself to him, Bramble. You're welcome, as the spider said to the fly when it flew into his web."

"I'm somewhat cramped," faltered Blackmer. "Fact is, I am used to settin' in chairs. Allers been in the habit o' dampin' right down on the ground, or on the floor. Must stretch my legs a little, any way."

"Stretch 'em, but stretch 'em kinder keerful, stranger. Too much noise 'll make a cussed little difficulty between us! Did you ever have any difficulties, my Federal boss?"

"Don't know as I take your meanin'," answered Blackmer, quaking with apprehension.

"Can't swear that you do, by mighty!" said Nick, anxious to increase the perplexation of the Confederate. "If you ain't rayther car-campspost, something may happen, I allow."

"I'm lost!" thought Blackmer. "This man is suspicious of me. If I give the signal, he will shoot me."

He returned to his chair and sat down again. "Say, mister, where's Kimmouth?" he asked, presently.

"Abed and asleep!" replied Nick, gruffly.

"Want to see him," added Blackmer, un-
-easily.

"Be quiet! How can I sleep if you keep talkin'?"

"Look here, mister, I should like a bed," persisted the colonel, growing every minute more nervous.

"Can't give ye no bed, but can 'emmodate ye to a floor. Flop right down, if you'd like to. Don't stan' on ceremony 'mong friends."

Nick drew a revolver from some part of his person, cocked it, laid it across his knees, and settled back in his chair, as if for a snooze. These proceedings were not at all reassuring. The man was in a quandary. He sat still and tried to resign himself to the situation. He wished over and over again that the bushwhackers would spring through doors and windows

without any signal. But a signal had been agreed upon, and they were waiting for it.

Nick appeared to doze off again. Mountain Max turned upon his side, tossed his limbs, and breathed more quietly. The dark object in the corner did not change. There seemed no remedy for Blackmer's embarrassments. The night hung on his hands heavily. He would have exchanged places with almost any wretch that he knew of. The hurrying misery of suspense increased. His imagination went to work with a will; it played horrible tricks with him. Perspiration broke from his brow, and streamed down his face. He had heard of the cunning of Nick Whiffles, and now he had a proof of it. He wished somebody would do something. If Nick's athletic pupil would spring up and assume a hostile attitude, he thought it would be a relief to him. If the mad boy, lying in the dark corner, would level his rifle at him again; or if Nick would come at him, to give him the requisite incentive to desperate action, he would be glad. He was ready to hail almost any interruption to break the painful monotony. He was becoming so flurried, that he could not endure it much longer. The crisis of mental excitement was coming. It came. He sprang to his feet, upset his chair, cried out in the excess of his nervousness, and fired his pistol; then, with a strong instinct of self-preservation, fell flat to the floor. As he was falling, a bullet from Archibald's rifle struck off his wig, and made a slight furrow along his skull. He was somewhat stunned, and lay still.

"Good!" exclaimed Nick. "Retribution follows fast."

Mountain Max was on his feet in an instant. Simultaneously doors and windows were assailed; doors gave way, windows were shattered. Men tumbled in.

Nick Whiffles gave a war-whoop; a tremendous one, that gushed out through the broken panes like the shrill whistle of a locomotive. It was answered by responsive yells that made every rafter sing. Now there was work to do. Nick Whiffles was suddenly fired with the concentrated energies of half-a-dozen men. He flew at the bushwhackers. The pupil was worthy of the master. Clubbing his rifle, Bosworth hurried to meet the incoming foe, who found unexpected resistance. Two men fell, and there was a momentary hesitation.

Archibald Roe was no longer in the dark corner. His little rifle crackled with wonderful pertinacity; one shot following another with incredible rapidity.

The front and rear of the dwelling were assailed at the same time, and Archie, by his continuous firing, held those in the rear in check. Blackmer, seeing how matters were going, began to fire at the youth; but fortunately his hand was too unsteady to admit of a deadly

aim. The bullets flew around him, but they did not hit him. Kitty was praying for him above. Nobody thought Kitty was praying for him, for Clari was thinking of Bosworth, and so was Mrs. Kimmouth, while Nick was thinking of the flag of the Revolution, and of his duty.

Kimmouth, started from brief repose by the sudden din, ran into the danger bravely, remembering Abek Harker and the proceedings of the previous night.

Just then that loud yell of the mountaineers shook the roof of the Bluff House, and amazed all its inmates. The entering bushwhackers felt themselves seized and torn backward, or beaten down with blows, or wounded behind; and there was consternation among them. An ear-splitting shout of "Nick Whiffles and the Union!" arose, and the conflict was soon over. The bushwhackers either ran, sank down wounded, or were captured; or, at least, Abek Harker, Hugh Bramble, and Colonel Blackmer were among the latter.

It is impossible to describe the sensations of Mrs. Kimmouth during the short and decisive struggle. She was a woman of firmness. She had resolved to abide the results, whatever they might be. She did not mean to be intruded upon; she locked her door, and in her resolute determination to adhere to her purpose, wheeled chairs against it. She heard the reverberations of the pistol-shots; she heard the immediately following commotion; she heard menacing shouts; she heard blows, well laid on; she heard the startling yells of the mountaineers, the crack, crack, crack of Archie's little gun, the onset that ensued, and then the comparative stillness. That stillness was appalling. That man was either living or dead. If he were living, it was well; if he were dead, she had killed him. She threw herself upon her bed, which her fair head had not touched that night, covered her face, and was hot, feverish, and unslipping.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TWO MRS. KIMMOUTHS.

By-and-by Kitty knocked at her mother's door. Mrs. Kimmouth asked, faintly:

"Who is there?"

"It is me," said Kitty. "I am terribly frightened! Let me in."

"What has happened?" asked Mrs. Kimmouth, arising.

"There has been fighting below, and several persons are killed," answered Kitty. Her mother wheeled the barricade of chairs from the door, and opening it, let in Kitty.

"Is he killed?" asked Mrs. Kimmouth hurriedly.

"Is who killed?" said Kitty.

"Kimmouth," responded her mother, briefly; but she was thinking of Bosworth.

"Not dead, but wounded," answered Kitty. "Clari is with him. The bushwhackers made an assault. They burst in at the windows and doors. Bosworth, and Mr. Swingfoot, Archibald Roe, and father, fought them."

"I heard a steady firing," continued Mrs. Kimmouth, excitedly. "Were either of our guests injured?"

"Bosworth was shot through the—"

"The heart!" gasped Mrs. Kimmouth, shivering from head to foot.

Kitty looked at her mother sharply, and began the sentence again, and finished it.

"Bosworth was shot through the arm with a buck-shot. Swingfoot and Archie are unharmed."

"Away with your hypocrisy, Kitty! Talk no more of Swingfoot; call him by his name. Call him Nick Whiffles. I am tired of falsehood. You have put two deceptions upon me within twenty-four hours."

"They seem not to have been deceptions," said the girl, slowly. "They were not deceptions to injure people. We deceive sometimes for good, sometimes for evil. But I hate lies, whether acted, told, or implied."

"You were once a sweet little girl," responded her mother, in a suppressed voice, "but you are fast becoming dreadful. I am afraid of you. You have ripened too suddenly. I don't understand it."

"As well as I understand you, mother. We are both unknown to each other, I think. Though mother and daughter by relationship, we turn out strangers by nature. You have become a plotter of treason, and the dupe of rebels; while I am for the Union, and Liberty, and the whole constitution of Federal stars that adorn the national flag. So you see that we are about as far apart as we can be."

Mrs. Kimmouth sighed, and shook her head sadly.

"Come, let us go down and see more of the beauties of secession. We have had one lesson, you know?"

Mrs. Kimmouth followed her daughter down stairs, a subject of anything but calm thoughts. She was surprised to find the lower part of the house thronged with strange faces; tawny, long-bearded faces. She supposed, at first, that they were bushwhackers, but a second look discredited the supposition. They were mountaineers, of the Nick Whiffles type. Was their presence, at a time so critical, the result of chance? It was difficult to think so. The web of circumstances was closing closely about her.

She saw them carrying out some bodies. The light casually revealed their ghastly visages, which startled her. She was shocked at the spectacle of death. She asked herself if those men would not have been living if the letter had not been sent.

The mountaineers made way for Kitty, who,

with her mother, approached a central group, composed of the more important figures in the picture. In charge of some sturdy fellows were the three prisoners. Mrs. Kinnmouth noticed them at once. She could not but remember her last interview with Aliak Harker. That interview had left no favorable impression on her mind. The more she thought of it, the less she liked him. The swarthy villain was glad to see her. Through her influence he hoped to escape. If she refused to save him, he resolved to compel her to it by his knowledge of her complicity with the Secessionists, and especially with this particular raid, which had resulted in his capture. His courage increased at sight of the rebel lady. He watched her with the utmost interest.

Some of the mountaineers had been talking of ropes and hangings, and his blood had grown somewhat thick. It began to flow again. Blackmer grew equally hopeful; for he believed he could now make himself known to the charming bearer of the letter. The coming of the ladies brought him inexpressible relief. He made gestures to attract Kitty's notice; she did not appear to comprehend him. He managed to get near her, but his guards pushed him roughly back. Several of the mountaineers cried out: "Hang 'em! String 'em up! They hung our men. Let 'em see how they like it." Others responded:

"That's so! That's justice! Bushwhackers ain't soldiers, nohow."

"We are soldiers," said Harker, "and we want to be treated like prisoners of war."

"Soldiers don't attack private dwellings, and rob and murder quiet citizens," said Bosworth.

"No use to talk to him!" growled Hugh Bramble. "He's the chap we chased last night. We'd got him, if it hadn't been for her." He pointed to Clari, who, having bound up her father's wounds, was now a quiet spectator. "She was plucky; damned if she wasn't!"

"No hangin'!" said Nick Whiffles. "Hangin's are for sheriffs and jail-yards. We all want to be shot when we go under, boys. Let us do as we'd be done by."

"Shootin' is too good for traitors," said a burly fellow, with a heavy California rifle. "Traitors sin ag'inst people of every country; because Ameriky is a place o' refuge for the oppressed of the whole world."

"You are right," quoth Nick. "Treason is a p'ison sin. It carries death to a thousand firesides; mournin', also; poverty, likewise. O Lord, yes!"

Nick sighed profoundly.

Blackmer stood, trembling and fearful. He did not fancy the turn the conversation had taken. The character of Bart Bramble might do for a night; but he could not afford to die for it. He besought Kitty with his eyes, but she was insensible to his silent appeals.

"Mrs. Kinnmouth, is it possible you do not remember me?" he asked, as a last resource.

"It is very possible indeed," answered Kitty. Mrs. Kinnmouth, thinking herself addressed, answered:

"I am sure I never saw you till to-night."

"I did not speak to you," said Blackmer, early, glancing at the latter. "I spoke to Mrs. Kinnmouth." He bowed to Kitty.

"I am Mrs. Kinnmouth," said Mrs. Kinnmouth.

"You must perceive, madam"—he continued to address the daughter instead of the mother—"that I am not here in my true character?"

"There are no true characters here, I think!" replied Kitty, sarcastically.

"If you have anything to say to Mrs. Kinnmouth, say it to me," interposed her mother, anxiously.

"Allow me to proceed!" entreated the colonel, who felt that every moment was of importance. "You saw me last night?" he added, addressing Kitty.

"I tell you, sir, you are laboring under a singular delusion," persisted Mrs. Kinnmouth, who now began to fear that some compromising secret might transpire.

"If I am laboring under a mistake, I choose to persist in it," said Blackmer, briefly.

"Madam," he went on, looking earnestly at Kitty, "if I could but speak a few words in your ear, only, you would understand my position, and be able to assure these men that I am not what I seem."

"Whoever you are," cried Mrs. Kinnmouth, "let me warn you to prudence!"

"Miss Dowse —"

"Miss Dowse!" repeated Mrs. Kinnmouth, quite bewildered. "I am not Miss Dowse! This girl is my daughter Kitty. The blunder, first your own, has been encouraged. If you are the person I begin to think you are, you have been hoaxed."

Mr. Kinnmouth was not near enough to hear this conversation, and it was carried on with more boldness on the part of Mrs. Kinnmouth than it otherwise would have been. The man in disguise looked dubiously from mother to daughter. There was certainly a strong resemblance. He was drifting toward the truth. He recalled, sentence by sentence, his description of the Kinnmouth family. He remembered that he had represented Kitty as the charming cat's-paw of her charming mother; that he had described her as a creature of impulse, weak and fickle. Even in that moment of danger, he realized that he had made himself ridiculous.

He turned to Aliak Harker, and asked:

"Which is Mrs. Kinnmouth?"

"That one," said Aliak, pointing to the mother. "Your own eyes ought to tell you that."

Kitty could see the colonel's face reddening through the stratum of dirt. He was angry.

THE COMPULSORY ERRAND.



"I have been trifled with and betrayed!" he muttered. "Madam," he looked at Mrs. Kinmouth, "you have played a double game. There has been damnable treachery."

The rebel lady was on delicate ground. There was danger of an immediate *exposé* of her conduct. There was need of skilful tactics and rapid movement. She now knew that the tattered man was Colonel Blackmer, and that it was necessary that she should speak to him.

"Stand away, brave fellow!" she said, touching one of the mountain-men on the shoulder. He fell back, and she passed him and approached the colonel. No one interrupted her. Her dignified manner forced respect and immunity from interference. She said to Blackmer, in a whisper:

"Trust me, and I will save you. Don't betray me! Call me a vile Lincolnite, and I'll retort in character."

Hope arose from the dead ashes of his despair. He recollected what this woman had done, first and last, and his belief in her began to return. Possibly it was the false Kitty who had wrought the mischief. He resolved to hate her from that moment, and to act up to the very spirit of Mrs. Kinmouth's instructions.

As she was turning from him, he commenced the hypocritical lesson.

"Leave me, woman!" he exclaimed. "Do not hiss your venom in my ear. Taunts do not become your sex, though they may befit your detestable cause."

She gave him a grateful and commendatory look—a look, the meaning of which flashed on him like lightning. He thought he could feel the firm ground under his feet again.

Nick and Max stood quietly near. Both were willing that the lady should save herself from the shame and disgrace of a *dénouement*. For the sake of her daughters, they hoped she would find some avenue of escape. Bosworth beheld her with emotions of tender compassion. She had flattered him with her preference, and she stood in an interesting relation to Clari. He admired her spirit and courage; and, looking at her after she had whispered to Blackmer, and he had retorted, he perceived, with inward satisfaction, that she had proved equal to the occasion.

Nick smiled knowingly, and Kitty said to herself:

"I will save mother!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

NO!

Kitty Kinmouth, although profoundly regretting her mother's wily policy, was yet extremely anxious to shield her from its consequences. Her desire to punish Blackmer for his audacity and impertinence had hurried her farther than was entirely prudent; but Mrs. Kinmouth's skill, exhibited at the last moment, had put a

hopeful aspect on the affair. Knowing well that her mother would need assistance, Kitty followed her to her room.

"Which of you is it?" that lady asked, turning sharply to her daughter.

"Which of us is what?" queried the girl, with more force than grammatical accuracy.

"In love with Bosworth!" said Mrs. Kinmouth.

"You, I think," answered Kitty, naively.

"I did not mean that," retorted her mother, with considerable embarrassment. "I meant you and Clari."

"Clari or me!" repeated Kitty.

"But I have eyes," resumed Mrs. Kinmouth, thoughtfully. "Why do I ask questions? I know it is Clari, for I have watched her."

"Granting it to be Clari, what then?"

"I am in a perilous position," continued the lady, speaking with unusual seriousness. "Those three men below must not be harmed—they must escape."

"I see that they must. If they do not, at the last moment they will betray you. Did you observe the villain Harker? His countenance kindled at sight of you. His native audacity came back. He expects you to extricate him from his present peril," replied the girl, with equal earnestness.

Mrs. Kinmouth involuntarily recalled her nocturnal interview with Harker at the hollow tree. His insolence had shocked her. The more she thought of it, the more her pride was wounded. She was mortified to think that such men should be numbered among her friends. Her eyes were beginning to see matters more clearly.

"There is not much time to lose," she added, "for the mountaineers are now deliberating, and the fate of the prisoners will soon be decided. The captors are likely to be unanimous in their views."

"Remember, mother, how the Secessionists of the Alick Harker stamp have outraged every sense of justice, and put Union men to death," interposed Kitty. "Recollect what happened here last night!"

"It was frightful!" said Mrs. Kinmouth, with a little shiver. "If the mountain-men have their way, those three persons will be shot or hanged. We must produce delay, and trust to circumstances. The man called Mountain Max must be influenced. Clari can do that."

"Yes," responded Kitty, "Clari can do that—or you either, mother. But Clari is the one. I should think she might wind him round her finger, Clari is so bewitching!"

Mrs. Kinmouth colored, and breathed hurriedly.

"If Clari can manage to make delay, and get the men up somewhere in the house, guarded by one or two of Nick's fellows, I believe we can find means to get them clear. Let them

tie them hand and foot, if they choose, and we'll find a way to liberate them, if there is any cunning in women."

Mrs. Kinnmouth kissed her daughter, and said:

"Good Puss! brave Puss! Here is Clari. Let her fly at Bosworth as soon as you can; but explain to her as little as may be."

The last words were said in a whisper; but Clari heard them, and said:

"I want no explanations. I have come to ask if I can do anything to aid you. I think I know, Mother Kinnmouth, what troubles you. We won't speak of the past. I will prove that I love you."

"I thank you, Clari," murmured the lady, with an involuntary start.

"Are they in earnest below?" asked Kitty.

"Fearfully in earnest!" answered Clari.

"They say that the blood of murdered Unionists calls for retaliation. There are stern faces around the prisoners."

"How looks Bosworth?" continued Kitty.

"Sternest of all," answered her sister.

"And Nick Whiffles?"

"Calm and silent. The decision is death, and the present debate is the manner—whether by lead or cord."

"Go down, Clari," said Mrs. Kinnmouth, firmly. "Go down and try Bosworth. Persuade him to put off matters till morning. You can do it."

"I greatly doubt it," faltered Clari, flushing to the forehead.

"Go and try!" cried Kitty, earnestly, pushing her from the room.

"I will!" returned Clari, resolutely. "I will do my utmost for mercy and delay. I wish I was certain of success. Come, Kitty, you must be near me. You shall see that I am faithful to mother Kinnmouth."

Clari went down stairs, and steadily to her work; while Kitty followed, for moral support. The remarks that greeted her ears, when she entered the room, were not encouraging for her mission. Nick's men were about equally divided on the question of hemp and rifle-balls. The extreme penalty was a foregone conclusion.

Clari approached Bosworth, who stood a little apart from the others, leaning against the wall, with his arms folded upon his chest, and his eyes cast downward. Hearing the rustle of her dress, he looked up, and guessed her purpose. His expression was firm to rigidity.

"Mr. Bosworth," she said, in a low tone, "I have come to ask mercy for these men."

"I wish, Miss Kinnmouth," replied the mountaineer, gravely, "that you had asked some thing within my control."

"You have influence over the minds of these hardy mountaineers. Exert it to save life," returned Clari, in a gentle voice.

"I have no wish to save these villains," said Bosworth, quietly. "Do you desire me to act contrary to my convictions?"

"I wish you to delay the execution of the prisoners till morning, at least," resumed Clari.

"I could not do it if I would, and I would not if I could," answered Bosworth, in a calm and unimpassioned manner.

Clari's face flushed somewhat. She looked at him. Her glance said:

"So you have forgotten that you lately sought mercy at my hands, and that I gave it."

Bosworth understood it thus. His tanned cheeks reddened perceptibly.

"I hope you will not misconstrue my feelings, Miss Kinnmouth," he hastened to say. "You saved my life but recently. If you needed mine to save yours, it would not be denied."

"Words, Mr. Bosworth," retorted Clari, doing some violence to her own feelings, "cost less than actions. I have always found them cheap."

"I cannot think your heart said that," he replied. "You have come to plead a cause, and you mean to plead it well. But the bushwhackers will die."

"You are less noble than I thought you, if you are actuated by feelings of revenge," observed Clari, true to her object.

"If I were the only person injured by Alick Harker and his crew, I would gladly overlook it, to do you a kindness; but the good of the community requires that such moral monsters should be summarily dealt with. Recall the shattered window, the noosed cord, and your father!"

Clari secretly owned the justness of his words and the hopelessness of her cause.

"One of the prisoners is a Confederate colonel," she replied. "He certainly must be held as a prisoner of war."

"He came among us in disguise. We have no right to know that he is a Confederate officer. We might, without straining matters much, call him a spy. Our lids wish to treat him as a bushwhacker. At the time of his capture he was not engaged in regular warfare."

"I perceive that I am an unwelcome suitor," rejoined Clari, coldly.

"Do not say so," answered Bosworth, much pained. "You forget that it is not mine to dispose of the lives of these persons. Nick Whiffles and the majority rule. The former, you observe, remains silent, and he will do the prisoners the mercy to give them powder and lead, instead of twisted hemp. For your sake, Miss Kinnmouth" (he spoke in a subdued tone), "I would compromise everything but my convictions of right; and should I do that, I should scarcely expect to win that respect from you which is dearer to me than any other consideration."

tion. These hardy and honest fellows" (he glanced at the mountaineers, who were standing in groups), "condemn the men, not I. Look at them, and see if an appeal to their compassion will do any good."

"No more than to you," said Clari, with affected displeasure.

"Now, indeed, you do me injustice!" exclaimed Bosworth, with a melancholy smile and a protesting shake of the head.

Kitty, who had heard all, and wished to push poor Max to desperation, pulled Clari by the skirt, and said, loudly enough for him to hear:

"Come away, Clari! This man has forgotten the hole in the wall!"

Max gasped for breath, and knew not what to say. He would rather have faced a Confederate battery than Clari's displeasure.

"Let us speak to Nick," added Kitty.

The young ladies approached the man of the trap and gun, but not without misgivings.

"We want to say something to you," whispered Kitty, putting her pretty face near his.

"Say it little woman," quoth Nick.

"We wish to speak a word for those men," she continued.

"Well, they need 'em. You can't say too many words for 'em," replied Whiffles.

"Don't hurt them," said Kitty.

"Not much," answered Nick. "We won't hurt 'em much, nor long at a time."

"Then you won't kill them?" queried the girl, eagerly.

"Well, I allow it'll nigh about amount to that in the end," responded the trapper, with tranquillity. "I s'pose my boys'll have their own way with 'em, and they'll be likely to find a condemned little diffikilty about breathin' afore long."

"Don't let them do it, Mr. Nick!" urged Kitty. "They are not fit to die."

"Nor to live, neither!" returned Nick, with more earnestness. "Do you s'pect they'll be any fitter to-morrow, or next day, or next week? Not a bit on't. They'll grow worse and worse. The diffikilty'll increase a hundred fold. Now's the time for 'em to go under. They've done about mischief enough. They'll never be good citizens till they're shot."

"But one of them is an officer," argued Kitty.

"I know it. I shan't harm him, but send him, as soon as convenient, to the nearest military post, where they can hang him, and afterwards try him for a spy. We don't kill nobody 'bout givin' 'em a trial, afore or afterwards; which is the beauty of republikin institutions."

"If you can save one, you can save all," persisted Kitty, taking possession of Nick's rough hand.

"Can't say I want to save 'em," muttered Nick. "They're p'ison critters anyway; and

we owe it to mankind to exterminate sich. They want to trig the wheels o' this Government, and throw the whole consarn out o' gear. But we mean to keep the machinery runnin', by mighty! It's no use talkin', little woman. Alick Harker and Hugh Bramble, so called, have got to go under, and no mistake. Don't ye hear my lads talkin'? Ain't they in earnest? Do the faces you see around ye look good-natured and am'able? Now, what you goin' to do with 'em? Can you coax 'em and wheedle 'em? I reckon not; although you could do it, if any live female could. So that's the long and the short on't. The thing's fixed and done. Them p'ison, bushwhackin' Confederators'll never hang loyal men ag'in. I should be a traitor and a villain to let 'em go. And whatsoever men may call me; and whatsoever may be thought o' me; and whatsoever may be printed about me in the newspapers, it shan't never be said of me that I'm not a true man to the centre o' my heart!"

Kitty's expectations failed. She had thought to find yielding material in Nick, and was much disappointed.

"You are hard and cruel!" she exclaimed.

"And you are soft and merciful," answered Nick, kindly. "I like your pity, but I condemn your judgment. What compassion yields justice condemns."

"Give them at least a respite till morning," entreated Kitty, seeing that only that hope remained.

"I'll think on't, gal. I'll try and earve ye, one way or t'other. Don't be afeared o' nothin'. I allow all will come right at last. There! Go up stairs. Women's counsel won't be needed here."

Nick arose.

"Where's Archie Roef?" he added, looking about the room, as if in search of him. "That bug-youth behaved handsomely in the skrimmage. He fired that little hinge-gun at the rate of fifty times a minute. For a spell, one would thought that a whole cavalry regiment was engaged." Nick laid his hand softly on Kitty's head, and said: "Let them as do evil reap the fruits on't. Them that do right has nothin' to fear. Go up, gal, go up!"

CHAPTER XXV.

ARCHIE HAS A LUCID INTERVAL.

The sensations of men guilty of great crimes, with a certain prospect of suffering for them speedily, may to some extent be imagined. When Hugh Bramble and Alick Harker saw the stern determination evinced by the mountaineers, both by their faces and their speech, they trembled for the result, notwithstanding the hope which the appearance of Mrs. Kinnmouth had inspired. They were astounded at the readiness with which their starry captors came to a conclusion. Their grave unanimity

surprised and terrified them. There were no dissenting voices respecting the severity of the punishment—the only subject of discussion being the manner of its infliction. Impelled by the instinctive love of life that dwells in every human breast, they protested against the decision, and followed up the protest by meaningless apologies and threats.

Blackmer remained silent. He relied on two things: one being a declaration of his rank; and the other, the promise of Mrs. Kinmouth.

After considerable discussion, it was finally decided that the culprits should be taken out in front of the house, and shot. The majority of the mountaineers wished the sentence to be carried out immediately; but Nick firmly overruled their purpose.

"Don't hurry 'em, boys!" he said. "Let 'em start fair and square by daylight. You can't see the sights now, I reckon. If they can think of anything to say to make their side look any better in t'other world, I'm willin'. Don't begrudge 'em the miserable fog-end o' time atween now and sunrise." Then looking at Blackmer, he added: "We won't touch this critter in the tattered clothes, because he's a Confederate officer, and no crime has been proved agin him. To be sure, he come here in disguise to make a condemned diffikilty, yet it don't appear that he's a bushwhacker, in the regular line o' pillage and murder. If sich he was, he should go with t'other two, and no mistake. We'll keep him till we find out more of his character, and if he's anything like a gin-wine soldier, we'll treat him as a prisoner o' war, and send him to the nearest military post."

The mountain-men were surprised to learn that one of their prisoners was a Confederate colonel, and most of them agreed that Nick's policy was good; but some few called him a spy, and pointed to his disguise as proof.

"There's truth in what you say," answered Nick. "He did come in a mean way, and on a mean errand; and we couldn't be blamed much if we should serve him as he'd have served us, if he'd been successful. He was a 'Federal boss,' a Union alligator, and all that flambegasser, hypocritically, to deceive us and spring a trap on us. But the trap has ketches his own fingers. As for these other two, they're worse nor Digger Injuns! Guard 'em two hours arter sunrise, then take 'em out and do as you like with 'em; and I hope the Master o' Life 'll have marcy on them as have had no marcy on others."

"I shall have no further use for these things," said Blackmer, snatching off his wig, and throwing it upon the floor; then taking off his tattered coat and trousers, he stood before them in a colonel's uniform.

"There! That ends that business; and a poor end it is! Boy, bring me some water." The last words were addressed to Archie, who

was standing near him, with his little rifle in his hand.

"Bugs and beetles, and long-legged straddlers!" said Archie, vaguely.

"Bring me some water to wash my face!" added the colonel. "I'm tired of this filth."

Archie Roe repeated his not very definite response. Nick quietly explained to the officer.

"Head's out o' order," he said. "Book-larnin' done it. Intellect got stunned with books. Sich things never happen, 'cept in the clearin's. There's a p'ison diffikilty in the reasonin' facilities."

"I didn't see any difficulty in his handling that rifle, a little while ago," answered Blackmer, suspiciously. "He did more mischief than any of you. That's a cussed Yankee contrivance, I s'pose? Well, they're a nation of mechanics. Let 'em keep at work; we shall want all they can make. A few more Bull Runs will supply us pretty well with arms."

"Little Mac says there's to be no more o' them," said Archie, very sanely.

"A very pleasant lunatic!" responded Blackmer, who was greatly reassured by Nick's decision to send him to the nearest military post, instead of treating him with the severity which he had reason to expect. While his life began to flow on naturally and hopefully, the spirits of his fellow-prisoners sank within them. Presently they were all consigned to a small upper room, and a guard set over them. Two armed men were stationed at the door, and two more outside, to prevent escape from the window, which, though some pains had been taken to fasten it, was not considered secure. These precautions, having been taken, the remainder of the mountaineers, with the confidence and indifference characteristic of their habits, stretched themselves upon the bare floor, and went to sleep, with the utmost forgetfulness of dangers, past or present.

These arrangements were, to Mrs. Kinmouth, matters of peculiar interest. It was now four o'clock; consequently but a few hours remained in which to act. But she solaced herself with the reflection that the mountaineers were weary, and that those hours were the sleepiest of the morning. The day would presently dawn, and she felt the necessity of rapid action. What was she to do? That was the very question to be determined. Whom should she trust for help? Kitty, of course. It had not been long since she had solemnly resolved never to put confidence in her more; but matters had so changed, that she was now compelled to receive her co-operation. While many others were sleeping, under that roof, Kitty and her mother were plotting—one for love, the other for safety.

"We must call in Archibald Roe," said Kitty.

"He's crazy!" returned her mother, quite

started at the proposition.

"He has lucid intervals," said Kitty.

"He will betray us," added Mrs. Kinmouth, beginning to distrust her daughter's judgment. "Whatever you do, never take a fool into your confidence."

"Archibald is no fool!" retorted Kitty, with spirit. "He fought the bushwhackers determinedly. He may object to assisting us, but he will not betray us."

"This is very singular!" replied her mother, musingly. "If the youth has so much sense and acuteness concealed under a garb of folly, he is a very dangerous person to have about."

"He may be dangerous to one who is not loyal. He knew which side to take when the bushwhackers came. If you are a rebel, mother, he knows it."

"You are a strange child!" said Mrs. Kinmouth, in a very thoughtful manner. "The House on the Bluff is not without its mysteries. If we go on in this way, the Kinmouths will become historical, and pass into romance and song."

Mrs. Kinmouth tried to look into Kitty's eyes, but she skillfully averted them.

Clara appeared at the door, with Archie. It was just what Kitty expected.

"Here he is!" said Mrs. Kinmouth, somewhat contemptuously. "I am compromised to you two girls, and things cannot be much worse; so speak to this poor boy, and let me see if you can make anything of him. My condition cannot well be more embarrassing. If those prisoners tell what they think they know, the Kinmouth house will be no place for me. They must escape, or I must. Matters are desperate with me, my children."

"Oh that you could recede!" exclaimed Clara. "That you could take backward steps! That you could return to your allegiance! That you could forsake and forswear secession here."

Clara took her stepmother's hand, and spoke very feelingly.

The rebel lady was silent some moments.

"It is too late!" she answered, by-and-by. "Alick Harker will not die without telling what he knows of me." Then to Archie, in a gentle tone. "My daughter Kitty wishes to speak to you, lad. How do you feel to-night? Does your head pain you?"

"I feel well, and my head is right," answered Archibald. "It turns around slowly, like a revolving lighthouse."

Mrs. Kinmouth looked significantly at Kitty.

"It must be very pleasant," she added, in the same tone, "to have your head turn like a revolving lighthouse!"

"It is very convenient," replied Archibald, gravely; "for I can see things without turning my body."

"That satisfies me!" muttered Mrs. Kinmouth. "I don't wish to hear anything more."

The 'lucidity' you have mentioned is not apparent to-night. I really don't think he is capable of taking care of himself. He ought not to be permitted to wander about the country, alone, as he is in the habit of doing."

Clara was studying the youth with her large eyes; while Kitty watched the three.

"Archie," said Clara, "we need help. Will you help us?"

"I'll get my little rifle," answered Archibald; "and then you can tell me whom you want hit."

"Stay!" said Clara. "You won't need your gun. You must help us by cunning, not by shooting."

"If you want cunning," replied the youth, tapping his forehead with his finger, "I have it here in quantities. It is cunning that takes care of me when I am away, and brings me back safe by day or by night. I learn cunning of the bugs, bugaboos, humbugs, and bugbears. You should see the specimens that I find in my travels."

Archibald gave Mrs. Kinmouth a glance that made her feel uncomfortable.

"I find specimens," he went on, "in by-roads and cross roads; in hidden paths, in secret ways; in old huts and cabins, and in hollow trees!"

Mrs. Kinmouth's uneasiness increased.

"There are bugs I call 'Seesh-bugs,' that I find mostly by night. They gather in woods and swamps, and show their lights in the dark, like the fire-bug. These are gray bugs, which crawl into their holes before morning. I shall class them as gray Confederates, and another kind that I have found, the blue Federals."

"This young person is very incoherent," observed Mrs. Kinmouth, singularly affected by Archie's remarks.

Clara looked at Kitty, and said:

"Come, Kit; bring him to his lucidity."

"I cannot work miracles," returned the girl, coloring; "but I will try to lead him to the point."

"Lead on!" said her mother, impatiently.

"Archibald Roe," began Kitty, looking the youth steadily in the face, "it is necessary for mother's safety that those three men should escape."

"It is necessary for the safety of many others that they should not," he answered in a straightforward manner.

Mrs. Kinmouth started, and kept her eyes fixed on the youth.

"I know that they are wicked and cruel," resumed Kitty; "but, for the sake of mother, you must help them away. If they escape from the mountaineers, they cannot escape from justice."

"Keep me steady with your eyes, Kitty; don't turn them away. They give me light!" said the youth.

"I think they do!" murmured Clari. "They cannot get away," Archie went on, clearly and consistently. "There are guards at the door and guards under the window. They cannot go out at the door or window."

"Unless the guards go to sleep," said Mrs. Kimmouth.

"They won't go to sleep," answered Archibald.

"If they cannot go through the walls of the room, they must go out at top or bottom," he said, presently.

"At top or bottom!" repeated Mrs. Kimmouth.

"That will be through the floor or ceiling," observed Kitty.

"Or up the chimney," said Archibald.

"He is indeed becoming sensible!" muttered Mrs. Kimmouth, with a glance at Clari.

"And you will help them—will you not, Archibald?" asked Kitty, in a persuasive manner.

"No!" responded the youth.

"For mother's sake, Archie!" continued Kitty, in a winning tone.

"No!" persisted Archibald.

"For my sake, Archie!"

She leaned a little toward him, and her voice was modulated to a softer accent. She took his hand.

Mrs. Kimmouth and Clari beheld this scene with increasing curiosity. They wondered that Kitty had power to lead the youth out of his mental darkness.

He did not say "No," but he shook his head slowly and discouragingly. There was a great "No!" in his thoughts.

"I am very sure," resumed Kitty, "that you have skill enough to aid them. I do not ask you to help them, because they are deserving of help, but to prevent certain things that will be disagreeable to another."

Archibald's face glowed, and his eyes sparkled. "It is too late to think of that," he said, with sudden fierceness. "Many people have felt disagreeable. The men Alick Harker and his bushwhackers have hanged, felt disagreeable! Death, in any form, is disagreeable. Mr. Kimmouth felt disagreeable, twenty-four hours ago, with a rope around his neck, and the ruffians ready to push him from the window. And the man in the wall! How felt he?"

He raised his arm and pointed at Mrs. Kimmouth while he was speaking. That lady grew very pale, and muttered, half aloud:

"This young man is not mad; if he is, it is a strange madness."

"Those who enter upon a long road, and walk in it, ought to know where it leads," added Archibald, in the same tone. "Those who betray, must, in turn, suffer betrayal. Good men die deaths fit only for mangy curs; and who grieves for it? Not the bushwhackers; not the

men in gray; not those who ride nights to carry letters full of destruction."

Kitty's color came and went. She involuntarily shrank from Archibald Roe. She thought of her midnight journey. Never did she feel so guilty, and never did the youth look so noble and so handsome.

Mrs. Kimmouth sprang from her chair, sent some swift and terrified glances at him, trembled, and sat down again. She was greatly troubled. Various emotions shook her firmness. Suspense and self-condemnation tortured her. She silently clasped her hands, and wished she was like Clari or Kitty—loyal at soul.

Clari, though still laboring under surprise, gazed at Archibald with a calm, lofty, and approving expression. She thought she could see the fitting figure of Love standing between Kitty and Archibald Roe. To her seeing, the young god smiled on both, and she marveled at her past blindness.

"I told mother," said Kitty, coldly, "that I could rely on you."

"So you can," he answered, "for anything that is right, but not to save traitors and assassins. I know what you fear. I am well acquainted with the strong motive that impels you to make a request so much at variance with your character. The motive takes away the criminality of the intention; and the intention itself falls to the ground a hopeless thing. If I were willing to risk my life, how could I save these men? Can I ascend to the roof, remove shingles and boards, and take the prisoners out? Can I go below and engineer through the floor, with a dozen mountaineers sleeping within a few feet of me? You see how impossible it is. Alick Harker and his two friends must help themselves, for I cannot."

"We can drug the men at the door!" said Mrs. Kimmouth, in a suppressed voice.

"You may do that," replied Archie, with a troubled look. "I will not! But I will be silent. For the sake of Kitty, and Clari, and you, I will be silent. Do what you will, and fear nothing from me."

"I, for one," interposed Clari, "hold you blameless."

Kitty said nothing, but glanced at Archie and sighed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

NICK VISITS MRS. KIMMOUTH.

There was a heavy step in the upper hall, and immediately some one knocked. Clari opened the door, and saw the tall figure of Nick Whiffles. He crossed the threshold, and handed a scrap of paper to Mrs. Kimmouth. On it was written these words, in pencil:

"Mrs. Kimmouth:—Alick Harker says he must see you. He is very urgent, and it will not be safe to refuse him. If these lines should reach you, do not fail to come to us."

BLACKMAN.

Mrs. Kimmouth read it very quickly, then passed it to Nick.

"Did you read it, Mr. Whiffles?" Mrs. Kimmouth asked.

"Not a word," Nick answered. "It was thrust under the door, and the prisoners begged that it might be given to you. The favor was so trifling, and they were so earnest, that I picked it up and brought it. Them as haven't long to live should be humored, when it can be done without much trouble."

Mrs. Kimmouth reflected. She took the paper from Kitty, and giving it to Nick, said:

"Read it."

He read it; but rather slowly, on account of the dimness of the lines.

"Do you want to see this Alick Harker?" he asked.

"No," replied Mrs. Kimmouth; "I don't wish to see him, unless—"

"Unless what?" queried Nick.

The lady's eyes searched Nick's thoughts before she replied. She believed it would be useless to say what she at first intended, and she discreetly answered:

"No matter. The fancy is past. I perceive that you are determined. Two of those men will suffer. Why should I trouble myself about them? I will tell you: I have a natural repugnance to deeds of violence."

"I know it," quoth Nick, dryly. "You wouldn't have nobody hanged for the world; especially the worthy Kimmouth. O Lord, no!"

Mrs. Kimmouth's heart gave a frightened thump against its fleshly bars. Some of that sounded like a quotation from one of her letters. Nick, intentionally, or otherwise, had touched her in a sensitive spot.

Kitty blushed. Clari looked grave. Archie moaned nearer to Kitty, and their eyes met. There was a recognition of something in each. What was it? Clari interpreted it, and whispered to herself: "It is love! I wonder if these two young people know it? How long has this guest been a dweller in our house? Deceitful Kitty! Cunning Archie! What are we coming to? Between mad youth and mountain men, we shall come to grief!"

So mentally said Clari to Clari.

Miss Sally Dowse popped in. Folly came, also, close at her skirts. She had a word to say.

"Then she isn't a natter like me," she hastened to affirm. "I'll hang 'em all, big and little, bag and baggage, horse, foot, and artillery."

"Jes' so," said Nick. "Hoss, foot, and artillery; particularly the artillery."

Sally glanced at him to see if he was quizzing her; while Mrs. Kimmouth availed herself of the pause to remark:

"Do as you please, Mr. Whiffles. I have very little pity for such wretches." Just then she was thinking of her last meeting with Har-

ker. His conduct on that occasion had well nigh soured her sympathies for rebels.

"I wish all the bushwhackers was as short-lived as them two," added Sally, with iron rigidity of manner.

"Come to look at ye, straight and steady," said Nick; "you mind me of a nateral ant o' mine, on my mother's side, who finally hung herself to a sour apple-tree with a skein o' yarn, on account o' being crossed in love."

Miss Dowse bridled up.

"She was an amiable critter, she was," resumed Nick, with a sentimental wobble of the head. "She was dreadful attached to cats and dogs, was my Aunt Cynthia. Had a house full o' that kind o' pets. Kept a regular canine and feline hotel. She hated humans like p'ison; 'cause, she said, cats and dogs lived up to their natures, and humans didn't. She had a artificial pond made for her pets to swim in. She learned the cats to hunt in couples. She was mighty fond o' Sketch terriers, 'cause the hair grewed the wrong way on their backs; and she knit up the woolly-poodles into stockings for the Saint Barnyards and the Newfoundlands."

Sally turned up her nose, and looked contemptuously at Nick.

"Glory hallelujah! My son's marchin' on!" chuckled Folly, who was delighted with Whiffles.

"This isn't no time for jestin'," said Sally Dowse, rebukingly. "For the life of me I couldn't joke when the country is layin', as 'twere, at the pint of the bagonet."

"People hadn't oughter be cheerful when they can help it, I know," replied the trapper. "My uncle, the traveler, would jest suited you; and I don't mean him, neither; but my brother, the Methodist gospeller, who had sich a bearin' down sense of the universal regeneracy and miserableness of this world, that he groaned with every breath he drewed. You'd calculate that he hadn't no appetite to his vittles, and was thin as a charity cut o' bread; but 'twant no sich thing; he'd eat like an anyeconda, and weighed nigh on't as much as a bull brawler. He was a sweet-tempered critter. 'Twould done ye good to hear him fetch a sigh, from the bottom of his boots up'ards, and sing pennyrials through his nose. He was a revivaller, he was, and had melfin' times with the sisters. O Lord, yes! He held scamp-meetin's in the woods."

"Oh, glory!" exclaimed Folly, unable to restrain her enthusiasm. "Lordy, Mars'r Nick! Wish you'd buy me."

Sally aimed a back-handed blow at her protégée, who dodged it without the least difficulty. "What you want me to buy ye for?" asked Nick.

"Cause I takes a shine to ye!" cried Folly, dancing up and down. "Never seen nobody I takes sich a shine to."

"Blegged to ye, by mighty!" said the trap-

per, comically. "But it's a kind o' property I hain't, as yet, put much money into. I've dealt mostly in peltries; but you haven't got much of a pelt, I allow. A beaver skin would fetch more in the market, I reckon."

"Laws, Mars'r Whiffles, could do ye heap o' good! Could cook for ye, and laugh at your stories. Glory! I'd die laughin'. I wouldn't live four years."

"I hain't got confidence," quoth Nick, turning his head slowly from side to side. "And I hain't the capital, nuther. You're a sort o' skedaderacy article that I don't know the vally on. You wouldn't like it much up in the mountains, scuttlin' hither and yon, ridin' a hossback, and campin' on the ground among native Ingins."

"Hold your tongue!" commanded Sally, catching Folly by the shoulder, and giving her a pinch that made her cry "John Brown's body!" on a scale of agony.

By this time Mrs. Kinmouth was calm, and ready to act with her usual judgment.

"Go to bed, Mr. Whiffles," she said, in a tone that seemed really friendly. "You have watched much, and sleep must be welcome. You need not be astir for some hours yet. Think well of me. We may see clearly, anon."

"I hope so," said Nick, fervently. "I'll take your advice, and go to bed. Gal," to Folly, "show me to a blanket and a pillow; them is all I need for a sound sleep."

CHAPTER XXVII.

FOLLY DOES A FOOLISH THING.

After Nick had retired, and Archibald Roe had disappeared in some part of the house, Mrs. Kinmouth, crossing the upper hall, and looking into a narrow and dimly-lighted passage, saw the two mountain-men keeping watch at the prisoners' door. She went back to her room, and sent Folly for some cool water. While she was gone, she took a bottle and some glasses from the closet, and turned from the bottle two large glasses of whisky.

Clari and Kitty observed her silently.

She next took a vial from a small case; it was full of a dark fluid, a quantity of which she poured into the whisky in the glasses.

"Be careful, mother!" admonished Kitty, quite terrified. "I'm afraid you'll do something dreadful."

"Be quiet!" answered her mother, firmly. "I know what I am doing."

"I protest!" faltered Clari. "There is danger in this."

"You treat me as if I were a child!" retorted the mother, proceeding steadily with her work. "Were I ignorant of the effects of this, I would not give it. It will stupify—it will not kill."

"An over-dose kills," said Clari.

"I am not going to give an over dose," re-

plied Mrs. Kinmouth. "Leave the risk to me." "Those who take the drug will incur the risk," remarked Kitty, who regarded this experiment with no friendly eyes.

Folly returned with the pitcher of water. Mrs. Kinmouth filled the glasses with it, added sugar and lemon, and stirred the whole thoroughly. She placed the glasses on a tray. Folly, fidgeting about, working her arms and elbows in every conceivable manner, watched these final arrangements with staring eyes and open mouth.

"Carry this tray to the two men in the passage across the hall," said Mrs. Kinmouth, addressing the chattel; "and tell them that Nick Whiffles sent it to keep them awake."

"Glory, missus! Should think it might keep 'em awake. There's a right smart half pint o' this yer, for 'em apiece," answered Folly, grinning with great good-nature.

"Take it along, girl, and remember what I have told you to say," added the lady, with severity.

"Sartin, missus! Members everything hears. Never forgets notin', I doesn't," asserted Folly, seizing the tray with an alacrity that set the glasses dancing, with some prospect of a slide to the floor.

"Mind what you're about!" cautioned Mrs. Kinmouth. "You know what you'll get, if you break these."

"Glory, hallelujah! I'll git that, I s'pect," said Folly, passing through the door, which Mrs. Kinmouth opened for her, and closed after her.

"There!" exclaimed the lady, sinking into a chair in an exhausted manner. "That is done."

"Perhaps!" murmured Kitty.

Meantime Folly crossed the hall very lightly, and without accident; but there, willed it, she met Splayfoot, who had, being showing her some attentions. He to talk with her a moment. She goodly set the tray down upon the floor.

"What's this yer?" whispered Splayfoot.

"Done gone if I knows! Whisky, I s'pect. Smells like it a heap," responded Folly, in the same tone.

"Whar you gwine with it?"

"In yer." She pointed to the passage. "It's for them mountainers. I'm to tell 'em that funny man sent it."

"Gorry mighty!" exclaimed Splayfoot. "Too much dis yer. White folks can't stan' noffin like it. Why I nuff dar for a black feller. Don't want to 'toxicate 'em, does ye? Now you're jes' fixin' yourse'f for a cuttin' up. We fust pour out some o' dis yer."

He shook his head, and looked very grave.

"Whar shall we pour it?" asked Folly, somewhat startled.

"In yer!" replied the inventive negro, opening his mouth wide, and stabbing at it with his finger.

"Laws! Never should thought o' that!" all their sympathies and prejudices to her safety. They believed in the Union; yet, to snatch her from exposure, they were remaining passive, when every feeling revolted at what she was doing. Ought not this to weigh something in the balance? She dared not trust her womanly impulses to answer; but opening the door gently, went out.

Both being of the same inclination, further argument was useless; so they first tasted, then drank. The unanimity was wonderful. The glasses were certainly not more than half full when they were replaced upon the tray. They began to warm at once. Folly wanted to sing "John Brown's Body", but Splayfoot had prudence enough to check her. They sat down beside the tray, grinned at each other and at the half emptied glasses.

"Never'll do to carry 'em dis yer little mite," quoth Splayfoot, philosophically. "Ain't 'nough to do 'em no good. Might as well finish it, an' git some more for them yer mountainers." With these instructive words, the negro raised the glass and drained it to the last drop.

Folly made a faint giggling, and whispered remonstrance; then snatching the twin glass, swallowed its remaining contents with much quaking and strangling.

The best plans fail. Human calculations fall short. That which is purposed with every augury of success, oftentimes never happens. The straight line of seeming certainty, running from cause to effect, through a series of events, is sometimes the most fallacious and unreliable of things. So it proved with Mrs. Kinmouth's experiment. The stupifying drug, by a most natural turn of affairs, went into the wrong stomachs, and threw two chattel-blacks into a deadly lethargy. Feeling the liquid acting upon them with great power, they arose and crept away to a dark corner, where they soon became unconscious.

Folly muttered "Glory, hallelujah!" and said her soul was "Marchin' on!" as sense and reason went reeling away.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE END.

Mrs. Kinmouth waited what she considered a suitable time; but that, though scarcely half an hour, was a very long time to her, in her nervous and anxious state. Her charming daughters slept, or feigned to sleep. The last was true, for they never felt less like the solace of slumber. They closed their eyes, their pretty eyes; but their thoughts were awake and active. They sat so close that their chairs touched, and their four hands were nestled to gether. The intriguing and crafty woman, reclining in her easy-chair, looked at them. The sight was not without its moral. Her heart was touched. These two girls, though entirely opposed to her in sentiment, were sacrificing

all their sympathies and prejudices to her safety. They believed in the Union; yet, to snatch her from exposure, they were remaining passive, when every feeling revolted at what she was doing. Ought not this to weigh something in the balance? She dared not trust her womanly impulses to answer; but opening the door gently, went out.

She walked directly to the little hall where the mountaineers were supposed to be keeping faithful watch and ward. No light was burning there; but the dawning day with its misty irradiation, made the men visible. They were stretched upon the floor, sleeping, their unconscious hands still instinctively grasping their rifles, which had lain beside them on many a prairie, and by many streams in the far-off wilderness.

She hesitated before advancing; then bearing their heavy respiration, glided into the passage. She stepped lightly over the slumbering men; they did not stir. She felt herself flushing and glowing. It was a moment of suspense. She bent to scan their faces; they were not so pale as she hoped to see them, but red and life-like, when they should have been white or leaden. She detected in the air no fume of whisky, nor the peculiar odor of the drug. She said to herself:

"This is suspicious; but all may be right. I am so agitated that I cannot judge calmly."

She turned from the mountaineers and unlocked the door. As cautiously as she proceeded, the bolt went back with a sharp click that made the sleeping watchers start. Mrs. Kinmouth gasped for breath, and stood painfully still. One of them rose upon his elbow, yawned, and fell back upon his hard couch.

The lady leaned against the wall, quite faint, but recovering herself anon, she grasped the knob, and with marvelous self-command, opened the door. She could see nothing, at first; everything was vague and dim within. The creeping light of morning came to her aid, and the forms of the prisoners became visible.

A gloomy group was before her. With their faces in their hands, Alick Harker and Hugh Bramble sat pondering darkly on the fate before them. She tapped softly on a panel, and they looked up with a nervous start. She beckoned to them. They arose at once, electrified at the thought of escape.

Blackmer, though in the least danger, was the first to move. The other two, however, were sufficiently alive to the situation. They approached Mrs. Kinmouth as their good angel. Was it not well to have a friend in need? Was ever anything more to their wishes? For a moment they felt the joy of reprieve.

They suddenly stopped. Mrs. Kinmouth felt a touch on her shoulder, and turning, with a shudder, saw the guards standing beside her, in perfect wakefulness, and her eyes wandering

involuntarily along the passage, fell on Nick Whiffles and Mountain Max.

"Fall back, men!" said Nick, calmly. "Come out, Mrs. Kinmouth. It has failed. It won't do, my lady! Mountain men alters sleep with one eye open. Your drugs has gone to the dogs; and not to the dogs, neither, but to your chancels. You've showed game, by mighty! but it's throwed away on these p'ison critters. If you like t'other side best, I don't blame ye for stickin' to't; but the mistake, woman, was in the choice."

Mrs. Kinmouth tottered from the passage. The last venture had come to naught. Mountain Max looked at her compassionately.

"Do not desert us!" cried Allick Harker. "You must and shall save us."

What the lady feared was at hand.

Those who had charge of the prisoners made an attempt to close the door; but they pressed against it and prevented them.

"Mrs. Kinmouth," exclaimed Blackmer, "and this time I believe I have the real Mrs. Kinmouth—what this man says is reasonable. He and his friends are condemned to death by these Lincolnites. You are no common woman. You are rich, you are accomplished, you are all-powerful in your own household. You can have your say and away. We hold you to your responsibility. We will not let you go. Your old neighbors appeal to you for mercy."

Mrs. Kinmouth trembled violently. Mountain Max, seeing her situation, supported her with a pitying arm.

"Yes!" shouted Harker. "We are old neighbors. Her daughter Clari was once my sweetheart."

"False! false!" said a voice from the background that sounded like an echo, and—and—like the voice of Clari.

A tremor shook the arm of Bosworth. Mrs. Kinmouth felt the thrill of his nerves, and knew what it meant. She knew that it meant Clari. She asked herself: "Will not Clari be better than to have him pass forever from my sight?" Her heart said "Yes!"

"Refuse to save us, at your peril!" threatened Harker, insolently, thinking that he held her in the palm of his hand.

"Tell him," whispered Max, with his lips close to Mrs. Kinmouth's ear, "to say his say, and do his worst."

She knew then where her safety lay. Those friendly words reassured and encouraged her. She knew that Bosworth knew all, and was ready to forgive all—for the sake of Clari—perchance, somewhat for her own sake. A revulsion that was sudden as the lightning passed over her.

"Is that the man who was going to murder my husband?" she asked, quickly, and with great tact.

"The same," said Nick Whiffles.

"How dare he speak to me!" she muttered.

For an instant, Harker was silent. He was confounded. His audacity soon returned.

"Once more, Mrs. Kinmouth, will you save us?"

His voice was hoarse with anger and terror. "Ten minutes ago," answered Mrs. Kinmouth, with spirit, "I would have saved you; but now, so help me God, I would not, if I had the power! You have threatened to betray me; but you shall not. I will betray myself. I will confess to these men that I have been a secret foe of the Union, and the willing instrument of traitors. I have performed services for them, at the remembrance of which I blush, thinking Secession to mean Liberty, and the Confederacy, Chivalry. I am disappointed in both. When men stoop to betray an ally, and that ally a woman, I doubt the justness of their cause, and repudiate it. I can and will tell more than you can reveal."

"I forbid it!" said Bosworth, putting his hand upon her lips.

"And I, also!" said Nick. "I do, by mighty! We know all we want to know, and we to him as tells us more!"

"You are deceived, you Nick Whiffles, and you, Mountain Max," cried Harker, vindictively. "This woman betrayed ye both."

"You're a treacherous hound!" retorted Nick. "If a pretty woman like that was to take up with my cause, and to help me as air-nest and faithful as she's done, I'd be dragged to pieces by wild perairie-hosses, rather than betray her when my neck is in danger."

"Ah! that is the right spirit!" murmured Mrs. Kinmouth.

"Letters and holler trees, midnight journeys and gals on hossback, are known to us as well as to you. So, you see, you p'ison Secesh, that your last chance is gone," said Nick Whiffles, in a tone of unmistakable satisfaction.

Mrs. Kinmouth felt two other arms stealing around her; her daughters were gently clasping her.

"He's right," growled Harker, fiercely. "It's the last chance. Damn the Yankees! Let's run for it, colonel. Come on, Hugh!"

The bushwhackers made a desperate rush, followed by Blackmer and Bramble. The sentinels did not oppose them. They pushed through the passage past Nick and Max, and gained the head of the stairs, when there was a sharp report, and Blackmer fell. The other two sprang down the stairs, gained the outside door, tore it open, and bounded into the open air.

"Saved!" cried Harker.

"Fire!" said a stern voice.

A half-dozen rifles answered this mandate. The fugitives leaped into the air, and fell on their faces, stricken by avenging bullets. They clutched the ground with their hands, writhed, struggled a few moments with Fate, and expired.

Nick Whiffles turned to Clari and Kitty, who were yet clasping Mrs. Kinmouth's waist, and said, presently:

"There are no such people on aith as Allick Harker and Hugh Bramble. My men have settled their account, which had run too long for the good of honest people. But this chap"—he approached Blackmer—"seems to be lively enough. He's aily wounded. It was Archie that done it. A quick eye that had has."

Then to the colonel:

"I say, mister, how fares it with ye? Got a condemned little gunsh t' diffikilty—haven't ye?"

"If being shot through the lungs is a little diffikilty, I have it," replied Blackmer, faintly.

"Ought to stand where you was, colonel," continued Nick. "You've run right into the danger you's afraid of. Howsomever, we'll do what we can for ye. Lift him up, Max, while I unbutton his coat."

Bosworth placed the wounded man in a more comfortable position, while Whiffles began to act as surgeon. Unbuttoning the colonel's coat, he found, between it and the vest, a white ostrich feather—once white—but now stained with blood. Kitty blenched it with a shiver of regret. Nick cast it aside, and was undoing the vest, when a letter dropped from an inner pocket. He recognized it at once, and so did Kitty. It was the same she had carried to the cabin in the woods. The trapper arose, and silently gave it to Mrs. Kinmouth, who received it with a sigh and a blush, and quickly put it out of sight.

Bosworth affected not to see this letter or movement.

"Matter, mother, whispered Clari. "There will soon be no witnesses of your brief treason."

"There'll be One!" murmured Mrs. Kinmouth, glancing upward.

"This former things has passed away, I allow," said Nick, with a serious air, and an approving nod at Katy.

"Don't touch the wound!" gasped Blackmer. "You would only torture me. I have thrown away my life. I was lured hither by that dog Harker—and perhaps, too, by those eyes."

He glanced furtively at Kitty.

"My folly costs me dearly. No more war, no more glory, no more love-making for me! Friends and foes, farewell!"

He straightened his limbs, closed his eyes, and did not speak again, although he continued to breathe for some moments.

"The last witness has gone, mother," said Kitty, softly.

The three women turned from the still and now lifeless figure, with subdued and solemn feelings.

The bushwhackers never prospered in that region after that night. Nick Whiffles and his mountain-men proved a scourge and a terror to them. These brave fellows are doing good service for the Union. Nick has distinguished himself in many battles, and had a great number of "condemned little diffikulties" with the Rebels. His name is a tower of strength in that section of Missouri. He occasionally turns a longing eye to the mountains; but no wandering thought can attract his honest heart from its devotion to Liberty and the Old Flag. The star that now directs his steps, by day and by night, is not the North star of the old trapping-grounds, but the pole-star of Freedom.

Max Boswell has never, since that eventful night, hidden in the wall. He has found a place of safety in Clari's arms; and when there is danger, she—she looks him in!

Archibald Roe has found a "specimen" that pleases him infinitely better than any he ever pinned on cards during his convenient and successful madness. It is a lady-bug called Kitty; and report says that there will be a wedding at Robert Kinmouth's in just about a fortnight after peace is declared. Meanwhile, Kitty finds his "lucid intervals" very entertaining.

All goes happily at Kinmouth's. Mrs. Kinmouth, if not a hearty Unionist, at least sympathizes with our cause, and sincerely regrets her former disloyalty. Her husband was easily hoodwinked, and does not know the extent of her complicity to this day.

[THE END.]

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"The murderers of my wife, seek my blood, they would rob me of my child!" said Arpiaka. "They had better put their hand in the nest of the hooded Cobra than seek my white brother among the Seminoles!" cried Chikika. "We will go half way to meet them!" The child Ona is stolen by one of the fishermen who turns traitor, and taken to Havana to Sonor Ribera, who is authorized to pay ten thousand dollars for it. Ribera employs an assassin to kill the fisherman after he departs from Ribera's house, and take half the gold for his trouble and return the balance to

Ribera. "He waited for the return of the assassin. He had not long to wait. In a very few minutes that individual came in and emptied out the gold upon the table which Pedro, the fisherman, had carried away, as well as other valuables found upon the murdered scamp, who had deservedly met death just when he has consummated his villainy and received his reward." There are hundreds of very beautiful scenes and historical incidents in this book that only such a writer as Buntline could so elegantly portray. Price \$0 25

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