

TALES
OF THE
SOUTHERN BORDER.

PART III.

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"SHOT IN THE EYE," "OLD HICKS THE GUIDE," "CHARLES WINTERFIELD PAPERS,"
"GOLD-MINES OF THE GILA," ETC. ETC.

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TALES OF THE SOUTHERN BORDER.

THE WILD GIRL OF THE NEBRASKA.

CHAPTER I.

THE WANDERING HUNTERS.

WE are off! and, far through the illimitable evening, are

“Flying an eagle's flight—bold and forth on!”

Swiftly the cities of men are left behind our daring way; and then, as we swing, flapping with tireless pinions through the mid-air—brushing fleecy edges of clouds away—the towns seem lessening into villages, and these are sown broadcast now, dotting the hill or river side, the forest, valley and plain. Now the little farms are scattered widely, and here and there a “settlement” flecks the unbroken wild, at broad intervals, with openings that let in the sun.

On! on! The forests darken—the hills, the river, and the prairies look more solemn. Here and there a hunter's lodge seems to crouch from loneliness beneath their shadows, and then the thin blue column of a camp-fire smoke soars upward.

Now there is a wide interval of dark and unrelieved repose. The shadows look as if they never had been crossed, so still are they upon the smoothly-gliding surface of wide, swift rivers—so still are they upon the rippling edges of broad, ocean-like prairies, whose green, flowery surfaces are bowed and lifted, wave-like, as the winds go by—so still are they,

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flung down from abrupt cliffs into the dim, hushed valleys—so still are they, laid across the brows of grim and time-stained rocks—so sombre-bright are they, dropped in golden chequer-work beneath the tangles of old forests—

“The nodding horror of whose shady brows”

had else been threatening—so dark, on the abyss of cataracts, flashing as they leap, that even the thunder of their fall is awed, and does not wake the ancient silence.

Now again columns of smoke pillar the clouds at far intervals; but they ascend from the fires of another race. By the bed of the great Missouri, and along its many arms, the Arabs of the South have planted their tents of buffalo-hide, and from their blazing fires ascend the streams of incense to HIM they worship as Manitou—the Great Spirit and essence of all things!

There they are!—half-naked, decked with dyed horse-hair, and feathers, bearing long lances, quivers, and short bows! They go scudding to and fro, like swallows on the wing, upon their swift and mottled horses—wild and tameless knights are they! Ho! for the Prairie Chivalry!

This is towards the south; but on the northern side of the terrible river the smokes of a different race ascend. They live in villages, and are wholly clothed in garments of dressed skins, and these are made most picturesque by long fringes and figures, worked with a rude art by the fingers of their swarthy maidens. Then their frightful necklaces of the claws of grizzly bears, their plucked crowns, with the long scalp-lock tufted in eagle feathers, and their paint-begrimed faces, remind us of the sterner and more ferocious North.

They, too, have quivers, bows, and lances, like their neighbours with the darker skins, but each is on a larger, heavier scale; and then they have the ugly war-club of the North.

They, too, have the white man's most terrible weapon, the rifle, here and there among them. They are horsemen, too

—but not such Centaurs as their southern neighbours are; for with them horse and man are one—alike agile, tireless, and fleet.

Here the Kansas river, after a long and weary way from out the sterile country of the Arapahoes, comes bounding on to meet the wild Missouri; and farther yet above, the cold and swift Nebraska is hurled, like a shining lance, down from the strange and snow-capped mountain tangles of the “Three Parks,” into that remorseless bourn.

Amidst these wilds we find a group of wanderers. It is composed of six in all, four of whom are rude, athletic men, who reveal at once that they are frontiersmen, hunters, and guides, by the incessant and restless habit of turning their heads to look in all directions as they advance. They, as usual, are armed in the old-fashioned manner, with the long-barrelled rifle and single-barrelled pistols; for, as a class, they have an unconquerable aversion to innovations of whatever kind in arms or equipment.

The other two, like men of sense coming out from civilization, had brought with them its most important improvements in weapons. Each carried a pair of Colt's revolving pistols at his belt, and a short steel-barrelled rifle, that told at nearly a quarter of a mile with fatal accuracy. This they bore before them, across the pommel of their saddles. The heavy and terrible bowie-knife, with its keen, broad, polished blade, hung, too, at their sides, in a leathern sheath.

Their dress was a strange commingling of the two extremes of civilized and savage costume. It consisted of the ordinary buckskin hunting-shirt, and trousers of gray cloth, but faced, or “foxed,” as the frontier term is, with the same material as the shirt—that is, those portions of it which were particularly liable to abrasion in the circumstances of their rough life, were covered by this stout defence, stitched on to the cloth.

They carried long lariats of plaited raw-hide, coiled and

hung by a slight thong to the horn of their Mexican saddles—across the deep seats of which the blankets that covered the riders at night were folded. A small bag of provisions was slung beneath them, pannier-like, on either side, and behind were tied a tin-cup and water-gourd. They were all well mounted, but he who led the party seemed superlatively so. The airy-necked and light-limbed mare that carried him stepped as if she were shod with wings.

The person at his side was a smaller figure, yet there was something exceedingly springy and cat-like in his alert bearing and gray, glittering eye. The face was what sentimental young ladies would call "plain," for there was nothing peculiar about it, except the mouth and eyes. The former was something wide for the size of the face, with thin lips, the upper one of which, even in profound repose, was curved in a perpetual sneer. The square under-jaw expressed immense and inexorable energy of will. Over all the face there was an expression that irresistibly attracted, while it left you uneasy and dissatisfied with the fascination.

"Carter, I am heartily tired of this whim of yours!" said he, pettishly.

"I am sorry for it, Newnon! But it is certainly a whim by which we have gained a great deal, for it has filled our veins with healthy blood, and made us stronger in every sense by a hundred-fold than we were before."

"Pshaw! I am not particularly emulous of the seven labours of Hercules, and do not care to be able to grapple hand to claw with a grizzly bear, or pummel a panther to death with my fists! I was strong enough already—so far as brute strength is concerned."

"Ah! but, Newnon, you are, as usual, uncandid. If we do not have literally to battle in brute strength with the seven labours of Hercules now, we shall have to do it intellectually with a far greater number—and we cannot escape the unfortunate accident, that the spiritual and physical lives

are so mutually dependent, that one must be toned by the other. So I shall regard you an ingrate if you do not pronounce, in the solemn presence of this vast prairie-wilderness, your infinite obligations to its free airs and rude accidents, which have renewed your lungs, your digestion, and your nerves, far beyond any previous capacity of either!"

"I do not need the lungs of a Camanche, the digestion of an alligator, or the nerves of a horse; for I only set up for a simple gentleman, and had, as I conceive, quite enough of all these before."

"But, Newnon, you must confess to having had the opportunity of letting off your spleen in several hearty fights, which I thought at the time you seemed to relish very much."

"Why, my good fellow, how you mistake me! I am no warrior, any more than I am an alligator. I consider the idea of chivalry to be most broadly burlesqued, in our firing at these poor naked rascals with our terrible and resistless weapons. I should never have brought myself to do murder upon them, but that I found, in the first camp we sacked, that they only carried parched wheat with them on their expeditions. I accordingly set them down as the primitive originators of all those Grahamitish sins of light diet which sent you out here an aimless wanderer, and, therefore, gave them my pistol-balls with peculiar relish. It is a ludicrous mistake, though, to suppose that there is knighthood or valour in fighting, at any odds, such a pitiable foe. It is vastly chivalric—first to see your enemy enfeebled by starvation, and then strike him because he is too weak to lift his arm!"

"I judge you will find out, before we are done with these 'naked rascals,' as you call them, that there is something sufficiently formidable and annoying in their enmity, to make them, if not 'foemen worthy of your steel' in the chivalric sense, at least worthy extermination in the common sense."

"Not a bit of it; I only shudder with apprehension for the poor wretches, since every time we meet them I expect

to see you 'spiritually moved' to deliver them a homily upon the sin and consequences of eating beef, and to find the tawny reprobates so exalted by your apostolic eloquence, that they will eschew the 'flesh-pots' forthwith, and make such a descent upon the gardens and granaries of civilization, as will quite astound your benevolence!"

"My benevolence or philosophy, as you choose, is not so easily astounded. I have eaten meat myself since we came out here, and should continue to do so if I had it in my power to use other food. I shall conform to the conditions of savage life so long as I have no means or power of elevating it; but what is morally and physically true of the life here, is not necessarily so of the higher life of civilization. It may be well enough for the warrior, whose trade is blood, to live upon the death of red-blooded animals; but for the philosopher, who deals with the lofty themes of pure intellection, to congest and fever the clear-eyed calm of his benignant purpose with such gross and bestial juices, is to me revolting. I am quite conscious that I live the life of a brute and a savage now, but that does not decrease my aspiring veneration for the highest possibilities of our development. The machinery of society is oiled by compromises, and this is one I am willing to make."

"Do you know, Frank, I pity you greatly. You have evidently been born too late. The time of the lawgivers, prophets, and reformers is long since past. You are not a Mohammed or a Moses—therefore you clearly belong to the modern type of fanatic, and it has so emphatically secured the derision of civilization, that I am not surprised that you should take refuge amid the unsophisticated stupidity of this savage life. You have some chance here, for you can at least preach to the deer and buffalo, provided they will condescend to stop and listen to you."

"Whether the deer and buffalo pause or not, I feel assured that 'Humanity' will at some time listen to this thought.

But, however, the dark is coming on, and here, in this green meadow, beside that stream, is a beautiful place for camping."

"Agreed."

Upon a swift and narrow branch of the arrowy Nebraska, this company of wanderers pitched their tents—or rather spread down their blankets—for the night. The shadows settle over them, and darkness rested there.

The night was spent, in many respects, like other nights, but the tired sentinels must have slept at their posts on the last watches, for, when the full morning came, they looked around in vain for their horses, which had been staked out to graze at a little distance about the camp. They gazed over the prairies until their eyes ached—they turned toward the forest, along the banks of the stream, but its dark shadows revealed nothing.

Poor fellows! Could it be! on foot in this vast and remote wilderness? What can they do? How can they ever get back to civilization? Mariners, left by their wrecked vessel on some desert island, would scarcely have been more desolate than they.

They rubbed their eyes—they stared and stared about them, but it was of no avail—the thing was done! Their horses had been quietly "stampeded" during the night, and were now far enough away, scurrying over the wide prairie before some band of Indian plunderers.

Our friend Clenny rages and fumes. It is an alternative he had never calculated upon. His contempt for "the half-naked rascals" was somewhat ameliorated, when he came to recognise fully the extent and amount of the mischief done by their silent prowess. The hunters had scattered in every direction in the bootless search, and the two young men were left alone in the camp in the chagrin of their solitude. They stood together on the border of the prairie, and looked out upon its blank and vast perspective with a forlorn and hopeless expression that was almost ludicrous.

"Frank, may the devil take you and your scatterbrain projects! Would I had been tied to the bed-post; and you to your grandmother's apron-string, before this silly expedition was undertaken! But for your eccentric babyisms, we should be comfortably secure now in our arm-chairs, with coffee and breakfast before us, instead of having the unrelieved prospect of some thousand miles or so, over valley, hill, and plain, on foot, with the sure alternative of starvation to console us."

"Good! good! I thought just now that these half-clad savages were in every sense too contemptible to interrupt, in the slightest degree, the calm equanimity of your life! The case is bad enough, I must confess, and we have the prospect of trudging back home on foot. But ho! What is that coming toward us, with such directness, out of the vague distance over the prairie?"

"It is some wild animal."

"No, no! It is my gentle and dear Celeste! She has escaped from the rude brutes, and is coming back to me!"

As the young man spoke, the beautiful mare came rushing past Clenny right up to him, and thrust her small head against his bosom.

"Beautiful Celeste," said the young man, as he gently patted the glistening neck of his returned favourite, "you would not stay with the greasy barbarians. Welcome, welcome! Come, thou faithful pet, we will go out into the wilderness again, and search for some means of rescuing our poor, forlorn comrades."

It required but a few moments to equip the willing animal, and then bounding into the saddle, Frank Carter gayly waved adieu to his disheartened friend, and darted off across the plain to search for help in any form.

For hours and hours his gallant mare kept on towards the west with speed that did not flag. The rider was even more weary than she seemed to be, and still they both urged on.

He had seen nothing yet that looked like hope, when out of the wide prairie he rushed beneath the deep shadows of a heavy forest, skirting a stream.

He now held up the pace of his mare, and as the last rays of the setting sun fell down through the great armed trees, he for the first time realized that he was lost. He had in his hurry become confused as to the direction he had been going, and now was utterly confounded with regard to the course back to camp. All the day he had chased the shadow of a vague hope, and now even that had vanished; not even the thousandth-and-one chance of meeting with some wandering fragment of a friendly Indian tribe remained, as it seemed.

All was unrelieved despondency and gloom to him. The gallant mare dragged her once elastic feet heavily along, as she slowly, and at random, threaded the aisles of the old forest. Here and there the solemn farewell of the day broke through in golden splendour, illumining the huge trunks even up to their summits and most minute twigs, and down to the delicate mosses and flower-bells at their feet. Though the young man was weary and heartsick, yet the glory of the fading evening fell across his spirit with a forlorn smile.

He had no craven fears; for, had he been capable of such, his arms made him secure against prodigious odds; but he was sad because his friends expected him to come back with help to them, and he could not go, since he was now as helpless as if a thousand miles intervened.

His beautiful mare walked with her fine ears drooping, and with an expression of utter weariness that entirely corresponded with his own condition. Ho! Her ears are pricked forward, and she starts with a bound and a clear, neigh. Her fine senses have discovered something friendly in the pathless forest. The young man spurs forward. There, beneath a grand old beech-tree, a young girl is mounted on a black and glossy horse, that moves as if inspired with all volatile es-

sences of grace. Our wanderer pauses, for a slight check will stop even the fresh impulse of his weary Celeste. This is a strange, extravagant sight to start from out the depths of the savage wilderness—yet it is real.

A young girl, with golden hair—and it is not less golden that the mellow sunset mingles with its glistening threads—sits easily on a shining horse, that goes quickly into shadow, and comes glancing into light again as it circles round the tree.

A strange attraction, surely, is that in the great tree, round which she circles on her horse, snapping her fingers, singing as she whirls! On a large limb a tawny panther crouches. Its ears are laid close back upon its head, its long tail is waving to and fro, and it is ready for the spring. Still that young girl gallops round and round him, disturbing the aim of its gathered leap by the swift movements of her beautiful horse, and taunts the hot glare of those fierce eyes, snapping her white fingers gayly in their angry gleam, as she goes by!

CHAPTER II.

THE ADVENTURE.

It was strange enough how that young creature came here—thus illumining the savage wilderness. Her presence, too, would have been strange enough anywhere, for it expressed, at a glance, all the wilful and bright tenderness of the young imbodied April.

But by what spell, yet stranger and more powerful, had such a being been made to start forth from this blank barbaric wild—mounted, too, like some oriental princess coming out of Dream-land, on a sleek steed, that glistened as if new sprung from a young poet's brain!

And then that strange, fantastic whim of hers! To circle round and round on her fleet horse, the spotted cougar crouching on the limb, taunting his heated eyes as she went by, with snapping fingers and her mocking song! No dreamer ever dreamed a dream of such wild, subtle daring, and yet our poor, forlorn Frank Carter looked upon the real from beneath drooping lids.

Hah! They drooped but for a moment with the overcoming weariness of his long ride and hopeless mood, but when he saw to realize the happy gay, audacity of that bright creature, his eyes flew open wide, and the gleam that lit them shot through all his frame, and caused Celeste to bound forward, sympathetically with all her morning springiness.

The young girl, who was intent upon her perilous sport, did not perceive him, even, although very near—when her black steed pricked his ears forward sharply, and gave her warning that either friend or foe was coming.

She did not turn her eyes from off those of the dangerous brute she was teasing, but, watching her chance, quickly urged her fiery animal, lifting him by the rein at the same time—one tremendous leap!—the circle was broken, and she was far beyond the reach of the cougar's spring.

She does not pause, but the black steed darts off with much longer and swifter bounds through the trees.

Poor Carter, whose life has suddenly been inspired, now perceives the beamy source of the inspiration to be vanishing through the shadows.

With her flying form goes all the hope of many things as dear or dearer even to him than life—the prospect of finding his friend and comrades again—of rescuing them from their painful position, and worse than even this—of losing from his sight the clearest, brightest gleam of beauty that has ever crossed his path!

He is utterly maddened by the thought, and wildly urges his exhausted mare. But Celeste has caught the fire of his

eager will—for her instinct teaches her that to follow that flying steed must lead her to food and rest, and so she bounds away as if with renewed wings, and needs not the hot urgings of his impatience.

Away they go, pursuer and pursued, down long aisles of the old forest, flying with speed across the deepening shadows. Now and then he perceives, far ahead of him, a glimpse of fluttering drapery between the trees, and this is enough to lead him.

It was vain for him to shout after her—for, in the stupor of his surprise, he had forgotten to do this until she was far enough beyond the reach of his voice.

Now she is gone—she has disappeared utterly—the last flutter of the drapery that guided him has met his aching eye—alas! poor Frank, how his heart beats!

The forest has suddenly grown more close with thickets of underbrush, and among these she has quickly glided, disappearing like some fleet white-footed vision through the gates of sleep.

"Curses! curses!" muttered the young man, from out the depths of his despair, as he checked up to look for the trail of her horse; "I have overrun her trail far enough by this time! Oh! accursed luck—or stupidity, rather! What shall I do?"

Then acting under a sudden impulse, he gave the reins to his mare, while he muttered—

"Her astonishing instinct has often befriended me before, perhaps it may now."

The sagacious creature instantly understood, and turned abruptly to the left of the course he was pursuing. Her pace for the last few moments had greatly fagged, as if she was discouraged by the knowledge that they were going wrong; but now she bounded on as buoyantly as at the beginning of the day.

Frank Carter had so often tested the sagacity of horses

under such circumstances of bewilderment to the rider, and felt such entire confidence in that of the high-bred creature he now rode, that the blood rushed back to his temples with a warm flush of reviving hope, and raising himself in the stirrup, he laughed aloud—

"Ha! ha! my vagabond Sprite of the woods!—we will catch you yet!"

A clear, musical laugh rang out in silvery gladness, close to his side. Celeste gave a desperate shy, that nearly threw him from the saddle.

He turned his head as quickly as he could recover his seat, and just in time to see the strange object of his wild pursuit vaulting her black horse in a tremendous leap across the deep, wide fissure cut down into the alluvion by a small stream which passed a few paces to the right of his course.

She drew up on the other side and turned, still laughing merrily.

"Your vagabond Wood-Sprite is not so easily caught, sir! Now follow my Black Hawk across that gap, if you can?"

"If I only had wings, I might; but my poor Celeste is leg-weary."

"Pity, for she seems a beautiful creature! But you, sir!—who are you? As you can't get at me, I will hold a parley with you, and want a few questions answered; you had as well be docile, and answer me in downright honesty—for if you displease me, I shall leave you to your fate—since I judge you to be lost, and it will be impossible for you to get across the deep cut of that stream, this night, to follow me; and besides, Black Hawk can beat your Celeste running, clear out of sight."

"Not so sure of that, my pretty chatterbox!" said Frank Carter, with a slight laugh, while his heart beat high,—for there was a musical freshness in that voice and in those bantering words that started his blood in career, though he could see her form very indistinctly through the deepening

shadows. "Give Celeste a few days to rest, and I will try the truth of your boast. But, to answer your first question,—I am a Southern planter, and, I hope, a gentleman! If that satisfies you, let us have your next question."

"You Southern planters, I suspect, are quaint gentlemen, then; see how you have illustrated them! First, you come suddenly and without warning, to interrupt the private amusements of an innocent young maiden; then, you chase her timid flight through the forest as furiously as if she had been some savage wild beast, upon whose thick hide you were emulous to wreak your chivalry; then, to crown all, you insult her by calling her a vagabond Wood-Sprite! Do you Southern gentlemen habitually deal in such hard names about young maidens?"

"Southern gentlemen are not frequently, I must confess, honoured, as I have been, by an introduction to such mysterious characters as Wood-Sprites—or yourself; therefore, I cannot undertake to say how their language would be guarded in speaking of them—particularly if they did not expect to be heard. But recollect, most merciless mystery! that you can be quite as witty at my expense when we are a little nearer together. I fear that sweet voice will catch cold, if you persist in sending it out on the night-air so far, and over this water, too!"

"Most tender solicitude, that of yours, my gallant Southerner! But you must first tell me how it happens, that you are here in this wild, dangerous region, alone; and then, if I am satisfied, I will take the case of your immediate relief from 'durance vile' into consideration."

"The tale is soon told. The horses of our party were stampeded last night, and every one carried off; but my faithful Celeste here would not stay stampeded, but made her escape, and came back at full speed to rub her head against my bosom. I came off on her to look for help at random, and got lost, as you conjectured; you know the rest,

for you can best explain how fate has made this dark day bright to me!"

"A very touching story, that—particularly the portion of it relating to the conduct of your gentle Celeste—for whose bright sake I must relent towards her saucy master. She must have comfortable quarters this night, and of course may bring you along—in spite of the sentimental twang you gave to the close of your piteous tale!"

"Any way!" said he, laughing; "I am willing to accept such patronage on any terms—only let me be nearer you, and I am content."

"Fie! fie! Hush! or I shall be compelled to make you carry Celeste instead of she you. But come on, and I will show you a crossing-place some distance farther up."

She started off at a gallop, waving him to follow with her hand, the whiteness of which showed through the dark which had now fairly set in.

He kept along the stream parallel with her for about a mile, in perfect silence, when she suddenly halted and exclaimed—

"Here, my chivalric friend! Here you can get across, if you are careful. It is a crossing-place for deer and elk, but its ups and downs are very abrupt and narrow. Look sharp for the path, and leave the rest to Celeste!"

This last caution he was by this time, if not before, wise enough to profit by. Horses see better in the dark than men, as he was aware, and after getting into the deep trace, he gave up the reins passively. The sagacious animal descended with great caution, and before she reached the bottom gathered her feet together after the fashion of mules in descending steep places, and steadily slid the rest of the way. When the water was reached, and Celeste paused to slake her thirst in the shallow but singularly rapid stream, he looked up, and perceived that it had cut the banks square

down some twenty feet. This would have been an ugly pit-fall to stumble into in the dark!

Now, by a desperate struggle of the gallant mare the ascent was gained, and he stood side by side with the enchantress who had led him so wild a chase.

"Gallantly done, my brave Celeste!" and she stooped forward to caress, with her white hand, the slight neck of the gentle animal. "You shall have a good night's lodging for that same feat! How silky her hair is!" she exclaimed, with a childlike expression of astonishment, as she ran her fingers through the wavy mane of the panting Celeste.

"The mare is well enough, but I, too, have silken hair; may I not claim some slight recognition as well?" said he, in a tone of affected pettishness.

"Upon my word, I did not know, sir, that your hair was silken—it is too dark for me to see; consider yourself, then, if you please, as recognised through the coincidence!"

"Accept my gratitude for the large honour."

"With pleasure, sir! But come! come! it is time this dear Celeste was stabled, and I suppose she must bring you, whether or no! Come, Celeste! Black Hawk and I are off!—bring him with you—you may!" and with a gay laugh she darted along the old trace, followed by Celeste whom she had so coquettishly dignified, and her laughing burden, our philosophical friend, Frank Carter.

For some distance, the trace was too narrow for them to approach sufficiently near for conversation—but then it widened rapidly, so that before they had passed from beneath the heavy gloom of the forest, the emulous Celeste had closed up alongside of the light-heeled Black Hawk—for she, too, had been inspired by the soft touch of those white hands—and of course brought along her depreciated burden with her "into position."

Frank Carter felt the strange, delicious thrill of a new joy passing into his life. His voice trembled slightly, with a

tender eagerness he could not control, but endeavoured to conceal under the affectation of humorous bantering.

"Ha! it becomes you, most wicked and incomprehensible of sprites, to remember that you are now in my power; and confess to me, on penalty of losing your wings, what sort of resting-place you expect to find in this wild and gloomy forest, to-night. I suspect it will prove to be some mighty Druidical work, amid the moss-draped boughs of which your light hammock swings—while Black Hawk is stabled at the hollow root! Will there be room, think you, for poor Celeste, in such narrow quarters?"

"Never mind, inquisitive sir, whether my house be on the earth, under the earth, or above the earth, so that Celeste be properly provided for; and, besides, supposing your supposition to be true, Black Hawk, I can tell you, sir, is a gallant gentleman—for I have not heard him call Celeste a single hard name yet, or threaten to cut her ears off with his teeth, as my wings were threatened once by somebody under the moon!—Black Hawk would surrender his stall, and neigh with delight at the opportunity of so honouring himself."

"Fortunate Celeste! you shall surely be embalmed, in honour of the interest you have excited, if I do not have the misfortune to die first of envy!" said the young man, in a dolorous voice, stooping to pat the animal's neck.

The merry girl bent forward, too, over her saddle-bow, in an ecstasy of laughter,—but it was subdued, like the soft twittering of an oriole singing in its dreams.

Now they emerged from beneath the deep shadows of the forest into the open prairie, and, as she raised her delicate face, the cold moon shone upon its white, laughing beauty, and was warmed amid the golden tangles of the curls that fell about it from beneath her close riding-cap.

"Well! well! be comforted, poor gentleman. I will

undertake, with the most disinterested pleasure, to officiate for you in the same capacity, provided such an event occurs. I should like myself to have you preserved as an extraordinary specimen of sentimental melancholy, and should label you, for the warning of future ages, 'Died of a broken heart.'"

And indeed, to have witnessed the rapt, ecstatic trance of gazing wonder into which our friend the enthusiast had fallen since the upturning of that face in the clear moonlight, one would have been justified in fearing some sentimental catastrophe.

If the partial glimpse he had obtained of that face at the tree had been sufficient to thrill the core of his life and urge him on through the desperate pursuit which followed, this clear unveiling of it held him in a sort of trembling awe that lulled his whole being into the mute reverence of worship of a God-revealed beauty, the presence of which was even now at his side!

His nature, electrically convulsed, was changed—utterly changed in one wild instant. The strong spell was on him. He had lived a century in the time of a few hushed breathings. The world was the same world, and went around on its old axle at the same appointed speed—but now, it had hurled its shadowy garments off through the dark space, and let in a new light, flashing over it—revealing itself to him so calmly glorious, that he marvelled whether he was not standing in a dream upon some starry paradise.

This glorifying light was in himself, though not the less real to him. The smouldering fires upon that sacred altar in the centre of his life, which he had so long and jealously guarded, had, at last, been lit by the searching spark, which, alone, could rouse them; and they had flamed up through all the senses, illumining the outer world through every portal.

Before the end of her last speech, the young girl had been

arrested by the strange intensity of his look. Her face sobered in an instant, while her voice, too, sobered with the conclusion. A bright light, that had shone from out her whole face, seemed to gather towards her eyes, leaving the rest of the face at once solemnly cold, and centring in them with a keen and glittering brilliancy that was almost blinding, dwelt steadily with those of the young man through some moments of profound and mutual silence.

That look! that look! as their swift horses sped on beneath the brilliant moonlight, and they with faces turned gazed in a flashing, still communion, into each other's eyes! One soul, at least, was born again!

Ah! that was a fearful moment—pregnant with all the purpose and the joy of one life, or of both! We shall see.

Frank Carter was mute; he forgot to make any reply, or that any was necessary. His life was stilled within itself, striving to realize the bliss of the new birth.

The strange, bright creature by his side was silent, too, as if she felt her being had been strangely startled; but then she urged her horse impatiently, until he had bounded many paces ahead of the weary Celeste. It seemed as if she were rushing away, utterly to leave them.

Poor Carter was stupified, and had not realized the danger, when Celeste neighed with such an agonizing, shrill, peculiar neigh, as can only come from out the chest of a noble horse, weary and starving, who trumpets the despairing alarm for help.

Black Hawk heard it and stopped. The young girl passed her hand quickly—as if confused—across her brow, and then wheeled the eager animal to return. She galloped back, and reining up close to the side of Carter, she leaned forward towards his ear, and said, with a musical shout—

"Ho! Hilloa! Dreamer, wake up! The lights of my father's rancho are in sight. We shall be there in a few

moments, and I would not have him imagine I have picked up some vagabond," and she lifted her finger, archly—"What shall I say—lunatic or genius? So wake up, and make yourself presentable, by self-possession, before a pair of eyes that read men mathematically!"

The trance was over with him for the time, for her levity shocked him out of it.

"Bah!" said he, "I have a contempt in general for minds which call themselves mathematical—those which are really so, never know it, and only express it in results—those who feel the want of this great poising central element of thought, always manage to get the reputation for it, through the noise they make to conceal their great want. However," said he, with a laugh, "understand that I shall be entirely prepared in meeting this mathematical father of yours to recognise him through the 'coincidence!'"

Frank Carter said this with more bitterness than he himself could have accounted for.

These young people were now farther apart than when they first spoke together, and yet neither could tell the reason why. It is one of the mysteries of the grand passion, which time may explain.

The lights which were in the distance now seemed close at hand, and as they came from the prairie into the edge of the skirting forest, all the sounds and sights peculiar to a rancho of the extreme frontier greeted them at once.

They dismounted amid the barbarous hubbub in which the lowing of cows, bleating of sheep and goats, the neighing of horses, the baying of dogs, and the jargon of Indians of all ages collected before the gates of the high, strong picketing, which surrounded the rancho, were mingled.

The arrival of their bright mistress was greeted with shouts by all the Indians, of every age, who were collected as if awaiting her coming. They gave up their horses to these

willing servants, though not until the young girl had given an imperative injunction to several with regard to the treatment of Celeste.

Turning now, they mounted the high blocks leading to the top of the picketing which surrounded the rancho.

CHAPTER III.

THE QUARREL AND THE BREAKFAST.

FRANK CARTER and his fair guide, on descending the stiles of the picketing, found themselves in the wide court of the rancho.

On the two sides of the square, as they advanced, were low ranges of huts, composed of smaller picket-posts, the interstices of which were filled with moss and mud. A buffalo-robe hung across each entrance, and served for a door—while the flat roofs were thatched with bulrushes.

The opposite side of the square towards which they were moving, presented a higher front, the upright posts of which were larger, while there appeared to be but a single entrance in the centre, which was closed by a wide, strong door.

The light streamed out from a part of its length, through small, square openings, like the port-holes in the sides of a man-of-war. The noise which heralded their approach, had evidently caused some commotion inside, and the lights were seen glancing to and fro behind the port-holes, passing rapidly along the whole length of the front. The lights shone for an instant through the port-holes of that portion of it which had been heretofore obscured, and then it was left again in darkness. All this Frank Carter observed before they reached the great door in the centre, for their way was absolutely impeded by the crowd of dogs composed of

"Mongrel grim,
Hound or spaniel, brach or lym,
Or bobtail tike or trundle-tail,"

which came thronging about them, smelling at the stranger, or bounding in rude gambols around the feet of their young mistress.

When they reached the great door, the young girl seized a string which hung outside, and jerking it sharply, caused a loud rattling within.

After the delay of a few moments, the bolts within were sprung, and as the heavy door swung slowly back, a mellow, manly voice exclaimed—

"What has kept you out so late?—this is dangerous, my daughter!"

A stout man, dressed in fringed buckskins, with a brace of pistols at his belt, stood in the doorway.

"Papa, I have brought my excuse for the delay along with me—here he is!" and she made way for Frank Carter, who had been standing in the shade behind her, to come forward and present himself.

The man lifted the large iron lamp he carried, above his head, and as Carter stepped boldly and quickly forward, he fell back with a gliding movement, while his hand, as it seemed, involuntarily moved towards his pistol, though it dropped quickly again.

There was no appearance of startle, or even surprise, in the face of this man, upon which the habitual smile about the facile mouth was unbroken. The gesture seemed to be rather one of habitual caution than of fear. His hair was as white as the driven snow, and but for the extraordinary contrast of heavy eyebrows, which were as black as midnight, and compelled the eye to dwell on them, it would never have been observed that a slight shade of vexation crossed them the moment his glance took in the whole figure of Frank.

The men stood facing each other, with steady regard, without speaking, for several moments.

The young girl came forward with a very demure look, and said—

"Papa, I found this *person* lost and wandering through the dangerous forest of the Black Walnut Bottom. His beautiful mare, Celeste, was nearly exhausted, and I knew they would both break their necks by stumbling through the dark into some of the deep cuts which cross it, so I took them under my patronage, and piloted them here for safety."

"You did right, my child," said the gray-haired man; and, bowing with a bland, benevolent smile, to Frank Carter, said, "You are welcome to the rude shelter and hospitalities of my rancho, sir. Walk in."

"Thank you, sir," said Carter, somewhat stiffly, and still pausing at the threshold. "The horses of my party were stampeded this morning by the Indians, and I was on the look-out for help for my comrades, when I was fortunate enough to meet this young lady."

"A very common accident in this region. But come, sir, walk in, if you please. We will first see to your own comfort, and then to-morrow we will concert measures for the relief of your friends;" and he turned, holding the lamp courteously, so as to show the way, and led the young man back through a passage formed of stout stockading, like the outside. At the farther extremity there was a door on either side, opposite. He threw open the door on the left, and handing the lamp to the young girl, said—"See to the gentleman's comfort, while I return to refasten the entrance." Then he bowed to Carter—"Enter, sir; and please excuse me for an instant. We find the precaution of bolts and bars is not to be neglected here."

He retired, and Carter followed the young girl into a square apartment, the sides of which were roughly plastered over the logs.

A fire blazed merrily upon the broad hearth at the farther extremity, and though Carter had not realized that the night was somewhat chilly, he now found its heat very pleasant as he approached.

The young girl placed the lamp upon a rough board table, and pointing to a side of the room along which a number of guns were ranged in racks, formed of buck's horns nailed against the logs, said—

"See, there is my father's armory. You can dispose of your rifle somewhere amid that array of antlered pride, and then be seated."

The young man obeyed, and deposited his rifle and other equipments, except his pistols, which he retained at his belt, as he had perceived that his host wore them within doors. The young girl, who was divesting herself of her riding-cap, said, with something like her former gayety—

"I hope, sir, although you may not find this home of mine quite so airy as the one you supposed me to occupy in the old Druidical oak, that it will nevertheless prove to be substantially comfortable after your exhausting ride!"

"Yes, I find all the difference to be in favour of the substantial reality. This place is singularly cosy, and promises, from the odours of the kitchen, something more than a 'sop of moonshine' for supper."

He turned as he spoke, and for the first time these young people confronted each other with heads uncovered, and in the blaze of a broad light, too. It was a decisive moment with them both.

A necessary consequence of the mutual revulsion which we have described as occurring directly after that extraordinary interchange of electrical sympathy during the moonlight ride, had been distrust of themselves and distrust of each other. They felt as if the astonishing and romantic circumstances of their meeting had unduly excited their senses and imaginations. That possibly the object of this excitement would

appear, under other conditions, to be a very commonplace and unattractive person; then these riding-caps had obscured that portion of the face, or rather head, which is instinctively felt to be the most significant of power, sentiment, and truth.

They now faced each other with those white fronts unveiled, which are the tablets upon which God's own hand has placed his immortal signet of the Spiritual.

It is beyond measure surprising what a difference in our first recognition of persons is sometimes caused by the simple act of lifting a hat or bonnet from the face. Both remembered this fact in their experience, and were, from the causes we have given, prepared to be shocked in some degree.

But, whatever the effect, there was but a moment left for its expression.

The young man saw her golden hair fall down, from its release, upon her neck like a shower of summer sunshine upon a bank of snow—he saw that in breadth and height her head expressed as much of dignity as her face had of gentleness, sentiment, and wit—and then the inexpressible presence of joy and beauty which had charmed and arrested his whole life!—it seemed now to be glorified by the strong light.

The young man had only time to see this in one timid glance, and to meet her downcast eye as it flashed on him for a moment from beneath the drooping lids—and then she turned away hastily.

They knew each other now, and had no more time for, or thought of, bantering that night again: at least Frank Carter supposed this to be so, and that her sudden turning off was caused by the sound of the quick approaching steps of her father.

The gray-haired man entered the room.

"Of course, sir, you are hungry. Child, see that the gentleman has enough of substantial comfort to-night, to make him realize that we do not intend to starve him, after all his fatigue and fasting since the morning."

"Yes, papa!" and she glided out through an opening beside the fire-place.

"Be seated, sir; our chairs are, as you perceive, constructed after a primitive model. The green raw-hide, stretched upon this frame, when once dried, holds it together like iron—and that, too, without nails."

"Yes," said Frank, as he seated himself, "I have observed that the Southern Indians make great use of the same material; their saddles are constructed in a like manner with your chairs, and are as firm as iron could make them, except under a long soaking in the water. But this is an extraordinary position of yours, so remote from civilization that I am surprised to find even common comforts around you."

"Oh! comforts, in the common sense of civilization, we have none of, but we dare to live here as boldly as men *dream* they can live—that is, amid plenty and without fear."

Frank Carter turned suddenly to look in the face of the man who could pronounce himself one of those who were wild enough to hope so much for the future of humanity.

"What!" said he, earnestly, "are you Utopian, and at your age, too? I thought young poets only had such visions. I should hardly expect to be forgiven, myself, for being guilty of the audacity of supposing that the time might come when every man would have enough to eat, and no one be compelled to wear pistols at his belt."

"What you say of 'pistols at his belt' would be witty enough in New York, but here it is too much an inconvenient necessity to be joked about. For certainly, if a prodigal Nature yields us a profuse abundance, the ingenuity of Colt has guaranteed us, in his revolvers, a secure possession thereof. I can only control the savage herd about me by the terror which the constant presence of this, to them, mysterious and really formidable weapon inspires."

"You seem to have been singularly successful in taming these wild Ishmaelites?"

"Yes! I have been a sort of providence to these you see gathered around me. I found them the forlorn fragment of a tribe that had been cut to pieces in a mortal and desperate feud with their distant neighbours, the Pawnees. I discovered they were remarkable, even among Indians, for their skill in trailing; and, as this is a very useful trait in the life of a frontiersman, I secured them to my service by presents, and have gathered them about me in the double capacity of herdsmen, and scouts."

"Do you think they can find my friends, to-morrow?" said Carter, eagerly.

"Not a doubt of it. They can take your trail back from where you dismounted this night, and follow it up through every turn of your wanderings, to-day, to the spot from which you started; and if your friends have been patient or sagacious enough to remain where you left them, we shall find them before sundown."

"You greatly delight and reassure me. But, if I may not be deemed intrusive, what do you propose to accomplish by a settlement so remote as this?"

"Oh! as to that, I propose to accomplish my own purposes, and to be out of the way of curiosity."

"A thousand pardons, sir!" said Carter, flushing up to the roots of his hair. "The question was idly asked. I mistook you for a philosopher, and supposed that your purposes here were beneficent and candid. I hope you will forgive the impertinence."

"Hold up, my young friend!" said the gray-haired man, laughingly. "The question was natural and pertinent enough, without being christened *im*-pertinent; my position here is sufficiently novel to excite curiosity in any one. I did not mean my answer to apply to you in particular—but merely to express that I came out here to live as I pleased, apart

from the insolent comments and saucy prying peculiar to the haunts of men. You evidently have enough of philosophy and a knowledge of the world in you to understand all this, without offence."

"Yes; I hope so. But pardon me, for I did not understand—but"—

Here the young girl came back, bearing the supper on a wooden tray.

Frank Carter was unsentimental enough to rather rejoice in the steams of the fat venison, though in her divinest presence.

She set the food on the table before him, and withdrew without a word.

Soon after a meal, which was enjoyed not the less for the fact that it appeared to have been prepared by *her*, Carter lay down upon a pile of buffalo-robies, at the invitation of his host, and slept, as only men who are profoundly weary can sleep.

When morning came, the first thought of the young man was, after the image of his enchantress, of course, that of purchasing horses and going to the relief of his friends. He rose soon after daybreak, and was promptly joined by his gray-haired host.

"You have horses for sale, sir, I judge, from the general character of your establishment?"

"Oh, yes; plenty of them; come with me, and look at them."

They went out into the fresh morning air, and passing through the picketing by a small gate behind the house, came into the "horse-pen."

Here were fifteen or twenty animals, sleepily leaning against each other.

Frank Carter instantly recognised, among them, the horses that had been carried off in the stampede from his camp, and turned upon his host with an inquiring look of startled astonishment.

The gray-haired man smiled mischievously, and said, with a slight laugh—

"You know those fellows, do you?"

"Yes!" said Carter, haughtily drawing up his person, and flashing his wide open eyes in interrogation, while his hand sought the handle of his pistol. "What den of common robbers or horse-thieves is this I have fallen into?"

"Hold! hold! my impulsive friend! I am not a horse-thief, nor do you understand, from what you see, half of what I have to explain to you."

But our impulsive friend, as the gray-haired man facetiously designated him, was not to be so easily restrained.

The fact, that the horses stolen from him in the morning were here openly exposed in the horse-pen of the rancho of his host, was instantly, in the mind of Frank Carter, associated with what had fallen from him during the conversation of the preceding night, with regard to the uses to which his Indians were applied, with all their remarkable skill in trailing.

Then, too, he remembered the pistols worn inside the fortress-like building—the cautious stepping back as he entered—the care with which the strong door was bolted and barred when he and the young girl had passed in—and now the cool and smiling impudence with which he had been shown into the horse-pen to look upon his own wrong. All combined to flash through the brain of Frank Carter the startling conviction that he had stumbled or been decoyed into the den of an audacious frontier robber, whose *sang froid* was probably proportioned to the sense of absolute impunity in crime which his remote position secured him.

This was a terrible blow to poor Frank! His first impulse was one of fierce indignation—and even a deadly resentment would have been the immediate consequence, but that the image of the singular enchantress of the preceding evening's adventure crossed his brain, from heart-wise, at this moment,

restraining his quick hand, to pause and listen for an instant.

"The facts speak for themselves—of what possible explanation can they admit? For, if not a robber or horse-thief, what are you?" said he, sternly, with his hand still resting on the handle of his pistol.

"Why," said the gray-haired man, smiling blandly, "I am simply an honest man, so circumstanced and surrounded that I cannot help the occasional dishonesty of those in my employ!"

"Pah! I should think your honesty might find a very effectual mode of protection from such little accidents as this, in not keeping thieves about you. How do you account for the complacency with which you offered me horses for sale as your property, of the mode of acquiring which you knew nothing?"

This was said with such a manner of lofty and insulting scorn, that it seemed as if it should have aroused rage in the breast of a canonized saint. But our acquaintance of the black eyebrows only elevated them with a more benevolent and friendly look than ever.

There was no exaggeration of kindness or friendliness—not even the shadow of a shade of what might be termed insincerity, much less derision, that could be apparent to an uninterested observer of the acutest discernment, in that look, or in the mild, open smile which accompanied it—yet it aroused to the utmost degree the already angry mood of Frank Carter.

He had been abominably outraged—had expressed with proper emphasis his sense of it—had even assumed an aggressive posture, and yet this insolent bandit, as he now thought him, presumed to smile in the face of his wrathful common sense, or rather of a deep instinct of aversion, which now possessed him entirely.

"Insolent wretch!" said he, furiously, interrupting the

other as he was proceeding in a deprecatory tone of mildness with the explanation he had promised. "You shall not add the personal indignity of a taunt to every other outrage. I have unfortunately partaken of your hospitality, and must for the present hold my hand from chastising you as you deserve." (Here the man laughed derisively, while Frank, with a deepening flush upon his face, continued)—"But, sir, you shall not treat my just anger with levity, for if I have not my horse-whip in reach to scourge you as you deserve, I at least wear my boots conveniently enough for your enlightenment on the spot," and he advanced, as he spoke, into a sort of threatening proximity to the person of the gray-haired man.

The man stepped back with that gliding serpent-like movement, of which we have before spoken. The smile upon his face had not changed a line. It was the same smile, except that suddenly it became a white smile, and a fiercer glitter leaped from out his still eyes, about which his black brows contracted strangely.

Frank Carter did not know fear, but there was something so appallingly deadly and remarkable in the face before him, that he forgot his rage in wonder at the psychological phenomenon, and paused for an instant to stare, dropping his hand to his side.

The man muttered, as if to himself, "The wrong-headed young fool won't listen! He's given me trouble enough already. Ha! he will have it!" and at the same moment whipped a revolver from his belt.

Carter was as quick as he—sprang forward—knocked up his arm, and the weapon exploded into the air. He then closed in, grasping the arm which yet held the still deadly weapon with one hand, while he clutched the throat of his murderous antagonist with the other.

The struggle was a desperate one; for the gray-haired man was stouter and heavier, while the other was more agile.

Several moments of darkened and furious wrestling, which seemed as many centuries to Carter, had elapsed, when the man, one of whose arms was free, snatched one of Frank's own pistols from his belt, and placed it against his side.

Before he could fire the pistol, it was jerked away—the shrill scream of a woman's voice in terror accompanying the act.

Frank released his desperate grasp, and staggered back.

"Father! father! In the good God's name, forbear. He is our guest;" and the young girl threw her arms about him in such a way as to prevent his using the remaining pistol, had he been disposed.

The man of the dark eyebrows did not struggle in this embrace, and passively dropped his pistol. Frank Carter stepped back yet farther, and for the first time turned ashy pale, while he folded his arms across his breast.

The man's face remained still, and seemed shrunken in a white and terrible-collapse. The young girl shuddered visibly through all her frame, and, reaching up, kissed his blanched lips.

"Dear papa, do not look so. You always do what you repent of, when your face looks this way."

"Child, be still!" he muttered, in a singularly solemn undertone—"The boy is a heady fool. He will not listen!"

"But, dear papa, will you remember that he is my guest, and pardon him for my sake. He is sacred to us both, whatever he may have done, so long as he is here," and she kissed him again.

"What *could* he have done, papa, to bring you into this dreadful mood we both fear so much?" and she turned back her head as she clung about her father's neck, towards the marble-like figure of Frank Carter, with a look in which reproach and a wild, eager curiosity were strangely blended—

"What did you do, sir?"

"Ask him!" said Carter, in a smothered, difficult voice, as if he were choking.

"Dearest papa, tell me. I am sure I can make peace between you." And she renewed her caresses with a sort of clinging, frantic tenderness, that produced its immediate effect—for that singularly shrunken, white expression, rapidly gave way to the glow of life returning to the surface.

She looked up inquiringly into his face. In a moment it had resumed its habitual expression of settled and calm benignity.

"Father, dearest father, all will be right now!" and with a warm kiss, she struggled from his now embracing arms, and turned, with eyes glancing joy, upon Frank Carter, and with a laugh as gay as that which first saluted him, said—

"Come, my chivalric friend, you have no excuse. Tell me what it is that has frozen you so suddenly into such a sombre model of living statuary?"

Frank Carter smiled faintly at first, but the penetrating power of purity had gone out like a subtile aroma from the life of this strange, bright creature, illumining, with a soft light, that of both these persons.

Upon her father, we have seen its effect, or rather, felt it glance like sun's rays into and from the ice. Into the soul of the young man it shot with a keen, living flame that vitalized the now smouldering fires upon that sacred central altar, and sent them blazing up with the old fierceness through vein, muscle, nerve, and sense.

His arms were unfolded as if he had been galvanized—the chill dropped from his person, like accumulated snow from the drooped cedar that had been kissed by the warm sun of spring, and as the freezing burden slid off, his keenest sensations sprang back to the topmost reach of their aspiring, more lithe and vigorous than ever.

He said, laughingly—"Ah, my guardian Sprite! the whole of it is, that there was to me some slight mystery growing

out of the peculiar circumstances of your father's life—which, as I did not understand at first glance, I was stupid enough to fly into a passion about. I hope he and yourself may forgive me for my haste—for now I am satisfied of my mistake, and that every thing will prove to be correct!”

In the mean time, the Indians of the rancho had come crowding around the scene, attracted by the ominous sound of the pistol-shot.

The gray-haired man turned to them with an imperious wave of the hand, and spoke a few words in their own language. They dispersed instantly, almost, with a seeming of affright.

“You had better go in, my child; the explanation between this gentleman and myself can as well be made while you superintend the preparation of our morning's meal.”

“Yes, papa; I am so sure that all is understood between you two now, that I go with entire cheerfulness—don't be too long!”

And she bounded away, glancing her bright face back with a beaming look at Frank Carter as she went.

The father watched her until she disappeared, and then turning, said, with a kindly voice—

“Now, young sir, permit me to say, that had you only waited a little for me to proceed, you would have been satisfied.”

“Possibly so, sir! But pardon my impatient hastiness, and proceed now.”

“You are young—your blood is quick and warm, and therefore you are to be forgiven. I am anxious to satisfy you that you have done me injustice.

“Now look at the probabilities of the case! You think or thought me a robber and horse-thief, because you find the horses stolen from your camp in the horse-pen of my rancho. Pretty strong circumstantial evidence to begin with! Now suppose I should tell you that I knew the horses to be in the

pen when I brought you here—that I knew them to be stolen, and suspected they had been stolen from you the moment I heard your story—what would you think?”

“Proceed, sir! I would rather hear you fully, before I hazard an opinion again.”

“Discretion comes better late than never, young sir! Now hear how I will unravel all this vexed tangle for you. I spoke to you, last night, of my Indians, and gave you some idea of the uses to which their peculiar modes and habits are applied by me to the necessities of my remote and isolated position here.”

“Yes—you spoke of having used them as herdsmen and scouts.”

“This is their primary use to me. My daughter, as you are probably by this time aware, is something bold and eccentric, so far as her out-goings and in-comings are concerned. Her life here is companionless, and she seeks and will have, in distant and solitary excursions, at nearly all hours, through the forest and prairies in the neighbourhood, a dreamy fellowship with all the external forms of being presented by the rude nature amid which we live.”

Frank Carter stepped forward nearer to the gray-haired man; his form relaxed from the stately rigidity which had heretofore characterized his bearing, and in an instant he seemed like an eager child, listening to some fairy tale. He had entirely forgotten his wrath, his suspicions, and every thing else that was unpleasant now, and asked, with the unconscious simplicity of some boy whose big eyes glistened with curiosity—

“What can she find out there to love, sir?”

The answer was accompanied by a slight inflexion of the presiding smile—

“Oh! she has the faculty of finding things to love, and it is necessary for me to see that her wilful humour is protected on these amatory excursions; I, therefore, send a portion of

my Indian scouts, each day, to make the circuit of the range usually travelled by her, to see that there are no trails coming in which indicate the approach of dangerous intruders upon her play-ground. Others are employed to herd my cattle and horses—others are sent off as hunters, and these must necessarily have a license with regard to horses, which I cannot well control—for, since I pay them a certain price a head, it is impossible for me to tell whether they have stolen them from a wandering party of Indians or adventurers, as they always represent to me that they catch them with the lasso from a drove of mustangs. I can only have my suspicions from the appearance of the horses, as in the case of"—

"Never mind any further explanation," said Frank, with eager impatience. "But tell me who are her playfellows, and what are the objects of her love?"

His tormenter, with a mischievous turning down of the corners of the mouth, proceeded—

"Oh! she has playmates in plenty, and seems to find things enough to love,—for, to my certain knowledge, she holds tryst in the forest every morning, mounted on her favourite Black Hawk. Do not blanch so quickly, my young friend, for I think that there has been enough of that between us this morning."

"Sir!" said Carter, bracing himself up and flushing very much, "I was not aware that you added a connoisseurship of complexions to the many accomplishments you have already exhibited. However, it occurs to me, from my recollections of the morning, that this should be rather a sore subject with you!"

The other went on, without appearing to notice the petulant bitterness of this speech.

"Yes; I am informed by my scouts, who, among other duties, are sometimes called to attend her wilful progress, that she has quite as many love affairs as that old, diabolical

witch, Circe. For instance, she calls upon a favourite to accompany her to tryst, before the sun has risen. Away they go!—perhaps to the deep and heavy forest of the Black Walnut Bottom—the scout following at a respectful distance. In a deep glen, or may be on a sunny knoll, she will pause quickly at the foot of some huge hollow oak, and rapping on its side with her riding-switch, her cautious lover will come timidly forth, whisking"—

"Papa, breakfast is ready!"

"Yes, dear! Come, sir, let us walk in!"

Frank Carter followed, laughing an internal laughter, that made the chambers of his heart to ring again with joyous echoes; yet he could not help biting his lips, too, with petty vexation, for he felt that he had been most gracefully and ingeniously quizzed in the first place, and in the next, that he had been brutally hasty that morning.

It was with a half-abashed look that he seated himself at the rude table.

How was the young man surprised at that meal!

Before his host and himself were placed two large pewter dishes, on one of which steamed venison, and on the other a delicate hump-steak of buffalo; between these was a dish of hommony, as it is prepared by the Indians, out of the unbroken grain of Indian corn, and a plate of nicely-browned cakes, composed of the same grain coarsely pounded.

But what caused his "special wonder" was the character of the food placed before the young girl, who sat opposite to them.

On one side of her was a square, shallow basket, fancifully woven of coloured grasses. This was heaped with a variety of nuts, ready cracked—as the walnut, chestnut, hickory-nut, beach-nut, pecan, etc., with a flavoured representative of the family of acorns in a chincupin peculiar to that region.

On the other side were two smaller baskets of the same shape and material, one heaped with pungent wild herbs,

small, ruddy grapes, and plums, fresh with the dew upon them, and the other filled with the white, flower-like grains of parched or "pepped" corn.

Our enthusiast stared, and was silent with the mute communings of his surprise and wonder. He now remembered what he had not noticed before, because he was too tired and hungry then—that she had not eaten with him the night before.

He took and tasted mechanically of the food her father placed upon his plate, but he watched her with breathless interest.

He answered, mechanically, the bantering questions of his host, while he watched her. Was that intended merely as a dessert to their breakfast? But the father never offered to help her to the dishes before him, nor did she seem to suppose it at all necessary to invite him or her guest to partake of her simple food.

He watched her! He saw her take the kernels from those delicate nuts nearly whole, with the skill which showed a life-habit, and then she would turn to the young herbs and grapes—new births of the "bedabbled morn"—to freshen her glowing lips with their cool, dewy aromas.

Ah! this seemed so chaste to him.

The wonder in his eyes grew warmer, and he saw, as she placidly ate, what he had not observed before, but only felt, which was the crystalline clearness of her complexion. It seemed as if all the body was a window to the heart—as if you looked down through the perfect symmetries of some large precious gem, wrought out by the spell of some weird sculptor, that glowed of its own beauty in welcome to any curious eye that sought to read that throbbing mystery in its centre.

"Beautiful! beautiful!" thought the young man, while he stammered incoherently, in answer to the father: "Here, at last, I have found life to burn with a pure flame! Here we

have no murky smoke arising from fatty fuel, to darken and begrim the chambers of its royal palace! Beautiful! beautiful reality!"

The food of which he was partaking became utterly distasteful now, and he asked her, with a pleading look, almost of reverence, while he drew his chair nearer to her,—“May I not share with you your simple breakfast? You seem to have enough for both.” The young girl opened her eyes in astonishment, and pushing her baskets towards him quietly, said—

“Why, sir, you surprise me! How does it happen, that a man from civilization can have any taste for acorns, fruits, nuts, and herbs? Surely, you do not mean to cajole me?”

“No; not cajole, but honour you. You have adopted the regimen of daily life out of that pure and holy instinct which comes straight to us from the fresh Eden of innocent and primitive humanity. There God and his good angels walked with the young children of an infant earth, and partook with them of the fruits that were ruddied by sunbeams and inspired by the stars and the calm moon with keener and milder essences, that constituted the fit nutriment of immortal natures!”

The young girl looked at the speaker as if she thought that he came from a new sphere, and said, with an expression of utter amazement on her face—

“What! you don’t think it extraordinary that I should love such natural things? Who but men, that struggle with the ruder exigencies of life, could think of accepting as food any thing else than what drops down from towards heaven, as nuts and fruits do from the trees, like manna in a cloudless rain, which only warns us in the pattering voice of its fall, that it *has come to be eaten!* And then vegetables, herbs, flowers, and all humble plants that are not noxious—they seem to me to look up to us with a wise pleading, supplicating through their eloquent colours and odours that they

may rather be absorbed by *me* through either sense, and thus passed up into a life more high, than, being browsed by some coarse brute, to go back to nearly utter nothingness. Every herb we rescue from such a downward fate, every flower whose odours we inhale, becomes as much an angel as we do when we too are absorbed or inhaled by a life as much higher than ours as ours than theirs"—

"Why, I am *afraid* that you, too, are an enthusiast!" said Frank, with a look in which his life seemed shot through his eyes; "but your wise and inspired rhapsody will not satisfy the common mind. Where is the limit you would place and define clearly, between the two extremes of vegetable and meat diet?"

CHAPTER IV.

FANNY AND THE RIDE.

THE final adjustment of the nice question we left at issue between these two young people was deferred by an interruption of a somewhat unique character.

Frank had for some moments heard, without noticing it in particular, amid the novel excitement by which he was filled, that there was a distant cry of hounds in pursuit, which every moment seemed to bring nearer.

At once the cry burst upon the startled group as if inside the picket-court, and coming directly towards them; but now it was commingled with the most terrific yells of curs and Indian papooses, the whoopings of the men, and the shrill screeches of the squaws outside.

The party at the breakfast-table had scarcely time to raise their heads and look with startled inquiry into each other's eyes, when there was a quick clattering sound along the passage from the great door, and at once a fine doe burst into

the room, and with a swift bound cleared the table—which was in the middle—brushing the hair of Carter with its hoofs, as it passed over.

The creature had a wreath of flowers, withered, amid evergreens, about its neck, and paused for a moment, and shivered so all over with affright, that you could scarcely see how deep its pantings were. The doe listened for an instant, with neck stretched high and wildly-glistening eyes, then lowering its fine head, ran to its mistress and hid it in her embrace.

In the mean time, the gray-haired man sprang to his feet, and, assisted by Carter, drove out the fierce, clamorous pack that were rushing after in pursuit.

The hubbub outside was indescribable; for, between quelling the dogs and quieting the excited Indians of the rancho—who were crowding with eager curiosity in the passage, and gathered outside of the great door—the two men had enough to occupy them for several minutes.

When they turned to go back to the breakfast-room, Frank Carter, who was in advance, saw distinctly the faces of two men withdrawn quickly from the partly-opened door at the end of the passage, of which we have spoken as being opposite to that which led into the breakfast-room. The door was hastily closed, and he heard the sound of a bolt. Frank was terribly shocked at this sight. All those suspicions which led to the ugly scene before breakfast, came back upon him with redoubled force.

It could be no mistake! There were two faces—one of them was hairy, and seemed to intimate a cross between the mastiff and wire-haired Scotch terrier; the other one, which was thin and fox-like, and white, he did not see so distinctly. There had been but a moment for him to see, yet that moment was enough. Frank felt that he should know either face, if he saw it again anywhere—for they were of distinct types of character, and could by no possibility be mistaken. Then he recollected instantly how, as they approached the house

the night before, that end of it into which he had been introduced was lighted, and how, at the noise of their coming, the lights passed hastily by the dark port-holes of the other wing, before his host came to the door. He muttered to himself—

"The men were passing into concealment, then! They have betrayed themselves, by looking out to ascertain the cause of the unusual hubbub. As I suspected—a robber's stronghold! Ah! can it be *she* knows of this?" he groaned, in the silent agony of his heart's inmost depths.

All this passed with the rapidity of light through the brain of Frank Carter, for there were a few steps intervening before he reached the door of the breakfast-room; but with all the startle and commotion within himself, there was not the slightest variation in the manner of his gait or tread, which could indicate that he had perceived any thing unusual; for he felt sure that sharp eyes were upon him from behind, the astuteness of which he now swore to baffle, will with will.

He entered, with brows contracted like one suffering the sharp wrench of a mortal pain. He was unconscious of this, and that all his face was death-like, as that of a swooning man, and that curses—bitter curses of *her* were hissing through his teeth. He paused though, as he entered the door, irresistibly arrested by the scene.

The young girl had not heard him. She had turned her seat a little aside from the table, and, in entire forgetfulness of every thing else, was stooping over her pet doe.

The bright, gentle creature had forgotten its fright already, and, at the moment Frank entered, was reaching up to caress the bowed cheek of its mistress with its small tongue, and breathe on her the sweetly-scented breath of its gratitude for her protection, and for the fresh herbs she held to it from her basket. She was speaking quaint words of childlike, soft endearment to the creature, as if to allay its fright and assure it of its safety, now that it was with her.

There was too much of touching and unconscious innocence in this scene, not to dissipate even the hideous gloom of the latest shadow suspicion had thrown across the brain of Frank. He moved towards her slightly, to the impulse of a swift joy that sprang forward out of the darkness of his heart to lead him.

Now that the noises outside were somewhat stilled, the creature's fine senses detected the movement, and pricking forward sharply its long and beautifully rounded ears, regarded him with lifted head and glistening stare, while it stamped petulantly with its fine hoofs upon the earthen floor. The young girl, who had a presentiment of the coming, said, as she turned her head slowly, while she still continued to caress the creature—

"You see, sir, my pet is impatient because our love-scene has been interrupted!"

"Sorry to interrupt so pleasant a scene!" said he, in a very low voice, that shook, in spite of him, with a slight tremor.

"Oh, never mind! Fanny and I have plenty of time to make love! Sir, you look unwell! have you been hurt?" and she rose in haste, with a look that glowed in the eagerness of alert sympathy, while her pet bounded forward, lowering its delicate head with a ludicrously threatening shake, as if to frighten back the intruder.

Frank, whose face had not quite recovered from its pallor, now laughed outright. He merely said, in answer to her question, "Oh, nothing—nothing!" and then advanced with playful gesture; but the doe commenced a retrograde movement, still shaking its lowered head at him, until it had backed against the side of the room.

"Take care, sir! she will strike you!" said the young girl, nervously.

"Never mind; I know them!"

As he spoke, the creature struck quickly at him with its

sharp forefoot or hoof, as is their formidable manner of defence. Frank avoided the blow, and before it could be repeated merely touched it slightly on the point of the nose, and stroked it softly up the face and along the neck.

The creature struck out once more, but not so vehemently this time; and now it stood for some moments sullenly, with head to the ground and hair set forward, and submitted to be stroked by him. Then it raised its head gradually, smoothed its hair, and commenced licking his hand.

"You see, I have conquered your jealous pet?" said he, turning to the young girl, who was looking on in smiling wonder.

"Yes; you must carry a spell, for such creatures, in your touch! Fanny has always been incorrigibly combative towards every one but myself, before. How did you manage?"

"Oh, easily and naturally enough! Let the magnetism of the human touch be accompanied by a gentleness that soothes the blindness of brute impulse long enough for that powerful illumination to wake their dumb senses, and then they recognise their God-appointed liege, and submit in humble joy to gambol at his feet. It is because we have been their bloody and brutal tyrants, that these simple creatures fear us. The wildest and most savage brute can be tamed in a few hours, by a gentle and wisely graduated application of this supreme law of love, which is represented by the magnetic power—as it is called—indwelling in the human, who is the highest earthly type of that God whose essence is love. This is the secret of all those mysterious spells which men have pretended to cast upon wild animals. They must be controlled by one of the two extremes—fear or love. Fear is most usually resorted to, and works morbid wonders, which sometimes react fearfully upon those who trifle with them. But the conquest of love is like that of the sun upon the mute and sheathed seed: it springs forth in joy, and lives to do worship in its green luxuriance to its conqueror, and

render up the incense of its flowering-time to rejoice his nostrils!"

"This is the spell you have unconsciously exerted upon this creature, and, as I should judge, upon many others as well."

"Quite a profound exposition, that!" said the laughing voice of the gray-haired man, who had been for some moments standing in the doorway, attentively observing the manner and language of Frank. He now came forward, watching the expression of his face with a sharp scrutiny, while he smiled a very pleasant smile.

He had not witnessed the first part of the scene we have described, for he had lingered behind a little while, probably for the purpose of passing into the next apartment.

"I should like to know if you can tame men and women as effectually, by this apostolic ceremony of 'the laying on of hands,' my young friend? For I have a great many rude people about me, of both sexes, who require to be tamed by some stronger spell than any I know of."

"Oh, no," said Frank, looking up from caressing the deer, and meeting that shrewd questioning glance with one of the most entire and smiling unconsciousness. "I know no spells but gold and fear, that will tame the human brute!"

"Sit down, and let us finish breakfast." They drew once more about the table. "You do not compliment the humble human, particularly, as contrasted with your four-footed friends?"

"There is no room for compliment or comparison in the case. Man is the most hideously perverted from his natural instincts, and the human brute is the most remorseless of all. Gold falls faster, flashing down an abyss, than the loose clod of common earth, and requires a stronger hand to draw it up again. We are at present gods to the brute; but our God is out of sight, and acts through the representatives of power he has appointed among us!"

"Ah, my young friend," said the gray-haired man, bending forward with a placid look and a smile of benevolent reproof, "I fear you either sneer captiously, or are strangely infidel for one so young! Does not that love which you spoke of as constituting the representative presence of God in humanity, also imply justice and wisdom? Are these, then, more likely to fail in enlightening the blindness of sense in the highest and purest forms of its organization, than in those which are lower and more gross? Confess, then, that you rather sneered than thought when you spoke?"

Frank flushed a little, and stared in the confusion of blank surprise into the bland face of this extraordinary man. Was the wretch mocking, with the insolent mockery of a devilish intellection, or had all those circumstances, which so strongly aroused his suspicions, been illusory? Could it be he was the mild and gentle philosopher he seemed! "Surely, I must be mistaken, for he is *her* father!" he muttered to himself, and said aloud, with a faint effort at a smile—

"Perhaps you are right, sir, and I spoke with the foolish affectation of an incredulity I did not feel. But you must admit that the two extremes easily occur in contrast. Lucifer fell from heaven—the brute, at the worst, can only tumble down a precipice."

"Yes, but fortunate Lucifer had wings to break his fall," laughed the gray-haired man pleasantly, as he rose from the table. "You two must amuse yourselves as you can, until dinner. I will see to despatching a party of my scouts to the relief of your comrades, sir."

"Ah, I shall go with them," said Frank, rising quickly.

"You can, of course, do as you please, but I assure you there is not the slightest necessity for your going. My Indians will find them more readily without your aid or presence, than with it—you will only embarrass their movements. If you persist in going, let me warn you that to keep up with them will be the most difficult, vexatious, and

fatiguing feat of horsemanship that you have ever undertaken. If I might assume the privilege of a host, I would advise that you simply write a few lines to one of your friends, stating where you are, and requesting them to join you. The fact that my Indians will bring their horses back to them, will be a sufficient guaranty of honest intention on their part. I engage they will accept such guidance without hesitation, and will probably reach here by to-morrow night. In the mean time, my daughter will cheerfully undertake to amuse you by showing you the country around, and introducing you to those mysterious lovers of hers. If you tire of this, we will get up a grand hunt to-morrow, and give you a practical illustration of the uses of my Indians."

During this frank and hospitable speech, Carter was walking hurriedly up and down the room. His brain was in a confused whirl of uncertainty. "How much was this strange man to be trusted? How much real cause for the vague, but almost shuddering aversion and distrust he felt for him, was there in the circumstances thus far? Was he doing justice to his comrades in permitting them to come here—even inviting them into the midst of such suspicious surroundings? But then he remembered their revolvers, their devotion to him, and their personal prowess. With them ever at his side, if this place proved to be what he had some reason to suspect, he could and would at once destroy the den. But suppose this man does not intend they shall ever reach here! A sure ambush might be an easy thing! But then, if I went, I should most assuredly come back. I feel that the game of my life must be played here. The time has come at last! I will not give up this young girl until I understand more of all this, and of her, though I die for it. This man, if he be a villain, is an astonishing one, and I like to study such characters; it excites and charms me to play around the viper's coil, and then baffle its spring. As yet this man confounds me. He invites all my friends to his rancho, in the face of

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a most hostile avowal of my suspicions. This does not look like guilt or fear. One of two things is sure—he is acting with the most direct and straightforward honesty, or with the most diabolical purpose. Pshaw! I am here alone—if he had any foul designs, what interest could he have in slaughtering my friends? They could never find him or me, of course. He has all our horses—what more can he want? I have been made childish by this singular instinct of aversion and distrust which has possessed me since I first met this man's eye! The course he advises is entirely sensible; and then that reproof he gave me at table just now!—oh, I have done the man injustice! I don't care for the mystery of the two faces that shocked me so. He is *her* father!—*nevertheless I will warn Clenny to be on his guard!*" He looked up.

While this vehement struggle—which we have endeavoured to furnish some idea of in expression—had been passing swiftly through his mind, the gray-haired man had ceased to speak, and stood regarding his restless and abstracted movements for a moment with a curious smile.

Frank saw it, and said promptly—

"You are right, sir. I shall do as you advise. I perceive that you are amused at the degree of uncertainty as to the proper course for me to pursue, apparent in my manner; but you must remember, sir, that the tie of companionship in danger is a very sacred one; and I could not but feel that my less fortunate comrades would have good reason to consider me selfish in remaining here, surrounded by comforts, while I merely send to them a troop of half-naked Indian scouts, with orders to escort them to me! I need not remind you that such a course would hardly be in the spirit of good-fellowship demanded by such relations—this was the cause of my doubts. But I am now convinced that my going will probably do them more harm than good, as you suggested. I will have the note ready by the time your scouts are mounted. You have writing materials?"

"My daughter will furnish you. I understand and respect your feeling, which was a very natural and proper one. My fellows will be ready for you in a little while."

He passed out, while the young girl sprang up, followed by Fanny, and passed through the small door we have before mentioned as near the fireplace.

She was gone for a moment or two, and returned with a small rose-wood *escretoire*, which she placed before Frank. The presence of this elegant article in so rude a place, tended not a little to heighten the curiosity with which he had continued occasionally, during the morning, to regard that narrow door through which he had first seen her bright form disappear.

Every thing about this little article was feminine and delicate—there was to his sense even an indescribable fragrance which it seemed to have brought along with it, and he forgot to finish his note while his erratic fancy wandered through that door to breathe the air made fragrant by her dreams, or conjure many a graceful object, the creation of her own fresh taste and daring humours, or hallowed by the caressing of her touch.

She noticed his abstraction, and with a joyous laugh, exclaimed—

"What ho!—out of the land of shadows, there!—my father will want your note in a few minutes."

"Yes, yes—I will be ready in a minute;" and he wrote on eagerly, bending low over the paper to conceal the flush upon his face.

They soon after went out to the great gate of the rancho, to see the Indian scouts set off. They seemed to be a sort of transition race, occupying a middle ground between the characteristics of the two great races north and south of the Missouri.

In a word, there was an insolent look of savage and cunning ferocity about them, the formidable character of which

was not a little increased by the superior finish of their weapons and the assured ease and familiarity with which they handled them.

They numbered eight warriors. When Frank handed his note to the leader of the party, the fellow, whose complexion was much fairer than that of his followers, smiled cunningly, and by a significant gesture betrayed the "itching palm."

Frank threw him a dollar, and with a broad, obsequious grin and cringing bow he darted away, followed by his warriors.

"That fellow has all the vices of a mongrel, if he be not one," said Frank, as they turned back to enter the rancho.

"Yes!" said the young girl, somewhat hastily. "He is a half-breed, and father thinks him faithful!"

"Of what tribe are these ruffians?"

"I believe they are an off-shoot of the Kansas. My father never explained to me particularly; and as I am not very curious about such matters, I cannot tell you more than this. But shall we not ride this morning? I hear the impatient stamp of Black Hawk, and no doubt Celeste is by this time thoroughly refreshed. Papa has left us with the day before us, to make it out between ourselves as best we may!"

"Let us ride, certainly!" said Frank, with eagerness.

She called an Indian and gave the necessary orders. In a short time the horses were equipped, when they mounted, and were off in a brisk, emulous gallop, the fine animals they rode neighing their joy upon the morning, and looking out from the skirting forest towards the wide prairie, with ears pricked forward and eagerly, as if they meant to take wing and fly across its green and flowering expanse.

Their riders, too, seemed quite elate enough to enjoy such a proceeding wonderfully—perhaps with the proviso that they and their horses should keep together in the flight.

The riders were long silent. Frank was too full to speak.

He could not see the forest, the prairie with its multitudinous flowers—the white fantastic islands sailing through the blue and shoreless sea—the blessed sun that smiled a benediction over all!

There was but for him one light, and *she* was its source! The glory of the outward world was felt—not seen—for he was looking upon her as she rode by his side with downcast, averted eyes, and face that glowed consciously beneath his gaze.

What a marvellous being she seemed to him! It was as if the fluent summer had been wooed to stay and curl its yellow warmth all peacefully in clinging play about the young roses of the fresh-cheeked April—for her prodigal hair shook such perfume off to the rude breeze that he felt the flowering time of all the year had now come together in his life.

She rode with loose reins, as if her beautiful horse moved of her permission. She seemed as reposeful and abstracted, as though she saw through his eyes and guided his movements by an unconscious exercise of will.

Frank thought, if she had only willed that her black steed should

"Paw up the light,
And do strange deeds upon the clouds!"

—that forthwith he would have climbed the beams—and, poor fellow!—blessed himself that no such freak happened to possess her for the time—since, left alone, he would have felt unutterably desolate.

He broke the silence at last.

"But—I thought you were to introduce me to your wilderness friends? What are they?—of what substance are they made?" I am beginning to be quite jealous!"

At this moment both their horses shyed, quite violently, and on looking round, they saw Fanny—with all the withered flowers torn from out the wreath upon her neck—coming in long leaps close after them—with tail drooped, as if she had

been shot, and shaking her lowered head with every bound, as if in rage at her desertion!

They reined up, and she came alongside her mistress. The first petulant movement was to strike viciously at Black Hawk, as if he were responsible for carrying off her mistress.

The horse seemed to be familiar with such demonstrations, and merely jerked up his leg to avoid the blow, and then with ears playfully laid back, turned to bite at his assailant. Fanny dodged him as if it were an old play between them—and then she rose—as if on the leap, to caress with her tongue the hand of her mistress.

"You see my pretty Fanny has come to guide us—come! The jealous witch has found out all my secrets—and as she made peace with you, maybe she will condescend to be our guide!"

Fanny now went frisking and anticking before them—pausing now and then to look behind, as if to invite them to follow.

"Come!" said the young girl, starting into a swift gallop.—"We will follow Fanny, and see my people of the wilderness."

CHAPTER V.

THE RIDE.

AWAY! away over the bending grass of the prairie these two young riders sped, with a swiftness that caused their nerves to tingle, and made the great beds of sunflowers, over which they trampled, to run together as though a swift stream of molten gold went by on either hand—while Fanny, whom their speed had overtaken, seemed, as she gambolled by the side of her mistress, a strange dolphin sporting on a wave as strange!

Even the gentle breeze they met was roused by their wild speed, and went roaring in a gale of rollicking laughter past their ears—while, as for their exulting horses!—

"Through mane and tail the high wind sighs,
Fanning the hairs, which wave like feathered wings!"

Away! away! with their hearts on fire, their blood bounds faster than fleet-footed steeds can go. They do not look upon each other now. They touch occasionally, and one sphere encircles them. They feel that if they pause, their hearts will pale to ashes in that fierce, consuming flame—that they must on! and shake off the keen ardour that has gathered there, through motion, outwardly upon the cool wind, that it may go to warm the soul of nature, and relieve them of a present death of too much joy.

On! on they go! The yellow flowers have been passed, and now they come to great beds of the pink sweet-william; and the swift stream on either hand grows paler suddenly with a delicate flush, till they seem to be careering down some roseate river, rippling through the gates of dawn.

On! on! The pink flowers have been passed, and now come great beds of blue; and the swift stream on either hand seem like a liquid sky fallen in, with here and there a fleecy flake of cloud-foam on it, where some white flower swings its delicate plume along the wave.

But then this mad motion cannot last for ever. For several miles they had thus gone, when the cool winds and the calm of the blessed sun drew forth the burning fever of that overcoming ecstasy from their throbbing brains; and now their pulses could gradually subside to the full but slower beat of a less tempestuous happiness.

They reined up their reeking horses to a gentle canter; and then the subtle and more soothing influence of the scene through which they passed had time to interpenetrate their beings, and they were hushed in voiceless awe!

These wonderful prairies!—How gorgeously strange they seemed to them through their love-illuminated senses!

Even to their accustomed eyes, they still were a wonder and a miracle—for they combine many of the most picturesque characteristics of both the ocean and the sky.

Here it lay skirted in the vast circumference of a sky-bounded sea, while the stilled undulations rise and dip with the regular sweep of waves. Had the shadow of God's presence passed upon the waters just while they rose and fell in the long swells after a storm, and they had grown afraid, and paused, to wait through all time for his mandate of release—then would that enchanted sea have been like the prairie.

And then, if on the green, glassy mirror of those quiet billows the gorgeous sunset of a day of summer storms threw down the glorious reflex of its cloud-capped splendours, they might see in it the flowering robes the grand prairie wears.

And then all the living creatures that they see upon it—each one, whether deer, mustang, or tall white crane, standing so still as they approach—amid the solemn silence of that primeval solitude—

“As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean!”

that when one moves it makes them start to see it, as if that were a kind of miracle.

The only sounds they hear are the loud, sweet thrill of the yellow meadow-lark, which, bounding from the grass before them, turns its head as it goes off, to show them the black shield on its breast, and leaves a sigh of timid music, like a perfume, behind it, on their ears.

Or else the little grass-sparrow, with a shrill, affrighted chirp, darts from near their very feet, and dips quickly into covert again. Or when they approach too near the tall, stately cranes, and they begin to stalk majestically to and fro with ludicrous gesticulations of their long, shifting necks

—their hoarse, sudden croak will strike thumping on their ears, like a pistol shot at midnight.

Scattered motts of timber begin to loom upon the blue distance, like islands in the sea. They approach them more slowly. Soon, from banks of haze, they become more distinct; and first the outlines of tree-tops, and then that of each trunk, is clearly defined.

“Come!” said the young girl, breaking the silence at last, as she urged Black Hawk to a renewal of his speed. “Here are some of my wilderness loves, in this little valley.”

As she spoke, they commenced descending a gentle slope from the prairie level, the sides of which were covered with a scattering growth of noble oaks. A stream, narrow and glistening with the speed it made, held its way down the centre of the valley, and lit the dark trunks and foliage above with the golden shimmer thrown up by its ripples.

Here the grass seemed greener than elsewhere, for the tint was fresher; and as they passed down below the general level, the roar of the opposing breeze ceased upon their ears, and it was as if they had come suddenly upon the pulseless, sleepy silence of the fenced valley of the Lotus Eatus!

Before Carter could realize how strange this transition was, the young girl had bounded from her horse, throwing the reins upon his neck, and turned to him with a flushed cheek and joyous laugh—

“Dismount, sir! if you would see and know my Lilliputian people!”

Carter had already obeyed, and was approaching her hastily, when she stooped forward, spreading out her arms as if to protect something which he was crushing beneath his tread, and exclaimed, in a voice of tender entreaty—

“Oh! beware, sir! Step more carefully! See! see my gentle flowers.”

Frank paused and looked down for the first time, since all

his eyes had been for her. He saw that the sod about him was enameled with small flowers of the most rarely delicate forms, and of colours as various as they were strange.

He paused, in blank astonishment! He had never seen any thing so chastely beautiful!

She laughed merrily—

"Oh, you need not look so wild, sir! I have done no work of enchantment here! Spring tarries in this sheltered valley nearly all the year—and spring, you know, possesses a refining necromancy. All flowers that I bring here become gentle people, soon!"

"Ah!" said Frank, with an impulse of tenderness he could not resist, "there need be no idealization to account for all, since the imbodied Spring is here!—But how have you managed to bring together so many curious and delicate flowers upon this remote spot? I am puzzled!—the groups seem too rich for unassisted nature, and yet they follow her order perfectly! What is it you have done, and how have you done it?"

"Nothing wonderful!" said she, with a mischievous twinkle in her eye. "Nothing, at least, which entitles me to assert myself to be an imbodiment of Spring. The greater number of the flowers you see clustered along this slope down to the water's edge, are the growth of this valley. Here, the grass is finer, the soil more loose and better irrigated, and the protection from the wind is perfect. The shade of these few scattering trees is just sufficient to preserve the cool, spring temperature. Here, therefore, all the most delicate flowers grow best and flourish longest; and wherever I have found them, during my rides, I have taken them up carefully, to be transplanted to this natural garden."

"But do you not cultivate them?—I see no evidence that you have done so."

"It is not what you would call cultivation, in the cities. I merely observe carefully the location, the character of the

soil and surroundings in which I find them originally; and when the time for transfer comes, I bring each flower here, and place it, as nearly as I can remember, in a similar location and amid like surroundings. I then pluck away the grass and weeds from immediately about it, that it may have a fair chance for a start; after that it must take care of itself—and usually does."

"I see you have none of those prairie-flowers here, through such enormous beds of which we galloped so ruthlessly, on our way here?"

"Oh, no! I have no use for such coarse flowers, in those vast and firmly matted beds; presenting, with but little variation, a single colour at a time. They suit well to the extent and grandeur of the scene they are intended to diversify. They are like those singular changes in the colour of the water of the ocean, with the indications of which mariners are so familiar; but they are all alike—the individuality of each is lost and merged in the general effect!"

"Ah! I see!" said Frank, eagerly. "The great sea-like plain of the prairie furnishes, in its broad contrasts and garish tints, a rude type of earth's epic or heroic poetry, in colours; while, in this sheltered nook, where each of the elements is tempered as the wind to the shorn lamb, and all

'—— the blest infusions
That dwell in vegetives, metals, stones,'

co-operate harmoniously with them—the higher forms of this poetry are produced in more delicate shapes, and far intenser, more varied and glorious colours. It is much like the contrast of the vague splendours of Milton's great epic, with the chiseled, gem-like, and exquisite perfection of particular beauties of the *Mask of Comus*, and others of his minor poems."

She bent with a fond, caressing gesture, over a strange, frail little flower, the three petals of which were shaped like

the wings of a small butterfly—but were of such a new, peculiar, and unearthly tint of blue, that it seemed as if, in fluttering down from heaven, it must have brushed the colour off from farthest space!—it looked so unfamiliar and so unlike all other tints we know.

“Yes; it would seem quite as sacrilegious to me, to hear this rare, blue stranger—which is born only beneath the most beneficent smiles of God—profaned by the association of a vulgar name, as to find the common metre ballad-mongers aiming at the glowing, chaste, yet infinite simplicity of such an image as—

‘The holy dew—’tis like a pearl
Dropt from the opening eyelids of the morn
Upon the bashful rose!’

Milton said that; and in doing so, conveyed an image to my mind that comes, whenever memory brings it up, with scarcely less of the recurring charm of strangeness, than does the presence of this wonderful little flower!”

“They are very like—with the distinction that one is the creation of God, and the other of a godlike humanity. But I suppose you have the type, in colours and in odours, of many a rare thought of highest poetry?”

“Surely; for nature’s inspiration is more sure than that of any madman of them all, with ‘eyes in fine frenzy rolling.’ These creatures are my mute familiars, and I have always thought they seemed to know me when I came. These are my gentle nurslings of the wilderness.”

“But you are far from home, here. I wonder at your audacity!”

“It must be a fleet and wary foe that can surprise me, with two such quick-sensed watchers as Black Hawk and Fanny. They run to me instantly; on the slightest indication of the approach of any thing that has danger in it, and leaping with one bound into the saddle, I am safe,—for Black Hawk can defy in speed all the marauders, of whatever

colour, from whom I am in danger out here. See; I will show you!”

She gave a shrill whistle, by placing her two fingers in her mouth, and the noble horse, who was feeding a hundred paces off, with his head half-buried in the tall grass, wheeled instantly and dashed to her side, with the last tuft he had plucked still in his mouth. She placed her hand on the saddle-bow and sprang quickly into the seat.

Frank called Celeste, who came, though not quite so quickly: and away they went once more. Fanny looked after them a moment, then shook her head, and, with a gay frisk, followed.

They followed down the valley, which led them through the open grove, amid a maze of timber-islands. Through these they soon came to a vast and magnificent old forest—like an English park—with a cheerful greensward underneath, and the mighty trees standing far apart.

Now, his strange guide seemed to have almost forgotten poor Frank, who became jealous. Here a bird’s nest had to be visited, the winged people of which seemed half a mind not to be frightened; she would look into it, without touching, then drop some food near, and gallop on. Then she made Frank pause in sight of a great old oak. She rode up to it alone, and, tapping on it with her switch right sharply, she waited some moments for her summons to be obeyed. Soon, to his infinite amazement and delight, Frank saw a small head put forth from a round hole some distance up the trunk: a gray squirrel came forth cautiously, and, with wide-spread tail, making a low chattering sound, commenced descending towards her white, outstretched hand.

Soon came another forth, which was smaller, and seemed to be a young one. Others followed, until there were four of them upon the trunk, beside the old one. These were more timid, and did not come down quite to her hand; but the mother did, and, snatching from it a small ear of pop-corn,

darted up the trunk again, and disappeared in the hole, followed by her young.

She laughed gayly, and turning towards Frank said, as she joined him—

"You see, sir, that you are a formidable person, for my timid Bunny would not stay to be caressed as usual, for her quick senses had perceived that there was a stranger near. I called to her—Bunny! Bunny!—without avail, for she had caught a glimpse of you, and would not stay to thank me."

"But how, in the name of all miracles and wonders, have you managed to tame this wild creature so?"

"Oh! naturally enough! Bunny was an old pet of mine, and lived in my room with me for two years; and then I took a fancy to bring her out here into the neighbourhood of my flowers! I found that old oak without any tenants in its chambers, and I brought her here, leaving a sufficient supply of food at the foot of the tree to last her for some days, until she became accustomed to the new circumstances, and learned to provide for herself. She took possession of the tree, and, as I came to visit her every day, our friendship has never fallen through!

"I have almost made a conquest, too, of the wild lover she has found out here: and shall certainly make friends with her little folks—one of which frequently comes down to eat from my hand. So you see, sir, I am not quite a witch, after all!"

"I do not know that I am any the less convinced of that, now!" said Frank, with a meaning smile.

They rode on slowly through the forest. She had a thousand things to show him, for her sharp observation and solitary wanderings had made her quite as familiar with the homes and habits of the creatures of that forest, as if it had been a city of humanity, in exploring the haunts and characters of which, her life had been spent.

Now, she would tell him of some peculiar shrub or tree,

remarkable for beauty or for rareness, and then she would dart away to lead him to see it with her.

Then Frank would murmur in her ear—

"Confess that my suspicions are well grounded; repeat, now, the confessional after me:—

"I am the power
Of this fair wood; to live in open bower,
To nurse the saplings tall, and curl the grove
With ringlets quaint and wanton windings,
And all my plants to save from nightly ill
Of noisome winds and blasting vapours chill;
And from the boughs brush off the evil dew,
And heal the harms of thwarting thunder blue;
Or, what the cross, dire-looking planet smites,
Or hurtful worm, with canker'd venom, bites!"

"Pshaw! pshaw! You are even more sadly beset than the lost lady in the enchanted wood; for, though I found you lost—a gloomy wanderer, and have been doing all since that I could to open your eyes to the real world about you, still you will hear the 'airy tongues.'"

"No; you cannot dodge my implication so—for what is your mission now, but to

"Number your ranks, and visit every sprout
With puissant words and murmurs, made to bless!"

Answer me this?"

"Oh, never mind! Come on!" and away she would lead again, to show him the fox's den; and when they came near it, she would rein up, and approach with a slow, cautious tread, and point out to him the young cubs gambolling in the sun before a hole which had been dug beneath the upturned roots of some huge forest Titan, that had been thrown in wrestling with the storm.

When they took the alarm, and hurried in, she was off again with a merry laugh.

Now, she would stop her horse suddenly beside the decaying stump of a small tree, into which the woodpeckers had

hollowed for themselves a chamber once upon a time; but now, when she touched it, a flying-squirrel would rush out, with its large and meek black eyes glistening in affright, and from the top would dart away, with its rich-furred membrane spread like wings—all white beneath—and sail to some neighbouring trunk.

Then she would take the soft young ones from their warm bed and caress them tenderly, and show Frank their bright, gentle eyes, and talk to them in a quaint, rippling tongue, which she seemed to have learned from the waters, the winds, and the trees.

They were placed back all gingerly and snug again, and some food left for the mother, which Frank now, for the first time, observed was taken from a pouch which she carried at her saddle-bow.

Now they were off again, for she had always some new pet or wonder that he must see; and so the day went swiftly by.

The dinner was forgotten by them both, for they were too happy to think of eating.

As the evening came on, the character of the forest they were travelling became changed. From the open glades, which it seemed as if the most careful cultivation could not have improved, they had gradually come into a more rank and denser growth.

Frank had an idea that they had been skirting the edge of the great prairie round towards the rancho again, and were entering the dense and formidable forest of the Black Walnut Bottom, concerning which we have already heard something. They had been happy all day—too happy for words to tell! Like unheeding children, they had gone out to play, and through hours had gambolled on the lap of Nature—that ancient mother, who yet is ever young.

They had rather felt each other, and been meekly joyous, as they went side by side, than talked much, except in a

fragmentary way. This was too much happiness. It could not be real! There must be some wild delusion here! He had struggled so forlornly all his life with that ever present yet treacherous *Shadow of the Ideal*, that he could not realize this the embodied Real found at last.

The reaction of the bewildering joy—the glorified beatitude of all that day—was now distrust. Every thing he had yet found to lavish the garnered tenderness of his whole life upon, had somehow played him false!

Could it be that this was any higher, purer than the rest? Certainly he had never met a being that seemed to nestle with such sublime faith right close to the heart of Nature, where her pulses might be felt to guide a life by—but yet! but yet! there was too much joy in all this for him to realize at once!

There were dark suspicions gathered around the life of this fair young creature. Her father was a wonderfully acute, and, may be, bad man. She evidently loved him with an entire devotion. It might be, if this gray-haired man was vicious—as he instinctively felt him to be—that he still had enough of sacredness left in him to guard her from a knowledge of his vices and his crimes, and felt that he propitiated Heaven in permitting her to live, in unconscious ignorance of all this, happily with Nature.

With such gloomy and distrustful thoughts as these, the life of Frank Carter had been hushed for some time, and his brows grown unconsciously contracted. The shadow, too, had fallen on the girl, and she rode mutely by his side, in timid consciousness; but what it meant she knew not. That she was all at once unhappy, she knew.

They were penetrating more deeply into the sombre forest, and the lengthened shadows, as they fell across his form, seemed to darken his heart yet more.

But there was *that* in this primitive Nature, wearing her century-calms upon her front, which could not fail to over-

come him with a spell—to sink a nameless awe into his being—brooding in shadowy peace upon the tumult of excitement the passions had been subjected to during the late incidents.

Nowhere does this invisible power make itself so palpably felt as in the deep-tangled aisles of an old Southern forest; when the sun is near setting, too, as it was then, and strikes its levelled rays square athwart the gloom, glorifying in lines and angles the stout, rugged boles and gnarled arms overhead, leaving the severed shades sharply defined beneath and between the sheeted gold.

High up, sitting in the halo, the roseate-headed Caracara eagle screams to its mate—the black-squirrel sputters and barks, whisking its dusky brush, and saucily stamping on the pecan bark—the long whoo-oose of the bull-bat sighs hoarsely through the air—the paroquet, with its shrill, waspish chattering, in a glimmer of lit emeralds, goes by—the far tocsin tolled from out the swamp-lake by the wood-ibis, or dropped smiting suddenly from the clouds, as the great snowy crane sails over—the low, quavering wail of the dotted ocelot—the hack-hack, and quick, prolonged rattle of the ivory-billed woodpecker's hammer—the smothered shriek of the prowling wild-cat, impatient for the night—the chirr! chirr! of the active little creeper—the cracked gong of the distant bittern—these were the sights and sounds that gradually lulled and charmed him into utter abstraction—and of course into entire forgetfulness of every other purpose and object than the passion in his heart, and the being at his side who had thus led him in reach of their enchantment.

His heedless pace had gradually slackened—for the mood of dreams was on him. The unpleasant realities of the wild, unnatural life he had been leading disappeared, and in delicious revelations the ideal life of calm and holy peace came around him; and in the hushed quiet of that lull, the bewildered fancy danced with its own airy creatures to the merry click of the castanet a bright-eyed woodchuck was sounding,

as it sat familiarly on the other end of a log by which they paused.

Doubts, anger, suffering, suspicions, all were as things that had been and were not, while his heart was made blissful of its latest memories amid these evening choristers!

Now his trance was broken, and he turned to her with a bright, meaning look, and her life answered to the summons joyously, for she knew that his spirit had struggled into freedom now.

During the hour's gallop which it required to reach home, they rode with clasped hands, without speaking a word. When they reached the rancho, the young girl found that her father was not at home; and, with a bewitching air of confidence, invited the young man to pass with her that narrow door beside the fireplace, which he had regarded with such curious envy.

Here he found every thing as pure as he had dreamed it should be in the penetralia of such a life.

There were many books, a harp, and a guitar. The rude walls were hung about with quaint, but wild and graceful ornaments. Beside these, *her* ingenious fingers had plaited of flowers inwreathed with coloured quills and natural grasses, there were paintings, in water-colours, of scenes and faces which indicated the highest order of talent.

After the evening meal, she sang to him many songs, with the accompaniment of one or the other instrument. Most of these airs were old familiar friends to him; but many of them seemed to be improvised, as if she had caught the strathspey that the wild winds make when they go echoing amid cliffs, whispering through the deep, mysterious woods, or moaning off through vast prairies into silence!

Frank went to bed that night, and could not tell, for a long time, whether it was that he dreamed or was afloat upon a strange, gleaming sea, that lulled him on its waves of light, as they rocked to and fro harmoniously. It was enough that,

sleeping or waking, the cup of joy was filled up for him, until even with

"Beaded bubbles winking at the brim."

The next day was much a repetition of the last, so far as these young people were willing actors.

There had been no word of love spoken between them, and why was this necessary? They felt each other, saw each other, heard each other, lived through each other, and what more?

It seemed to Frank as if the sun was bright because her cheek was to shine upon, and he grew savagely jealous of

"The common-kissing Titan."

The earth rejoiced because of her, and the birds sang to do her praise!

They went forth again to visit the sweet valley of wild flowers, to see the squirrels, and many another wild thing that she knew and loved.

As they skirted the forest, on their return, they saw a long-winged hawk swoop from the clouds and disappear in the deep grass of the prairie. In a moment, it came flapping heavily up again, bearing a hare in its claws. The creature cried out, as it was borne up, with that plaintive, melancholy wail peculiar to the species when captured and in pain.

It was quite close to them that it had been struck; for the hawk had, as is their custom on the prairies, been poised for some time above the heads of the riders, watching to strike whatever small game they should scare up in their progress.

The wail of the poor creature was so touching, that they urged their horses forward with one impulse, in the hope to rescue it. They did not succeed, but were close enough to see the bright, inexorable eye of the winged marauder.

Frank raised his gun, and was about to fire, when she touched his arm.

"No, no! do not shoot—let him go!" He lowered his

gun, and turned to her in surprise, which was heightened when he saw that tears were streaming from her eyes.

"Why not shoot? You are weeping for the poor hare!"

"Yes; because its plaintive cry was eloquent to me, for help and mercy! Yet to the hawk, that same cry was only an appetizer, whetting the raven in its maw! The hawk was hungry, and the hare must die!"

"But suppose I was hungry; should the hare die then?" And Frank gazed into her face with curious eagerness.

"Yes; surely! if there was absolutely nothing else for you to eat. I do not reason—I only feel! But it seems to me, that even if you seized the hare with the clutch of famishing eagerness, you would feel that such a piteous moan as we just heard, would move you to weep before you could devour the creature with flesh and blood so like your own!"

"Thank you! thank you a thousand times!" said Frank, joyously. "Your beautiful instincts clearly confirm my own theory. You feel a profound truth, without reasoning upon it. The power of articulating sound—which is, of course, the most perfect mode of conveying sensation—constitutes the dividing line between a monstrous cannibalism and a legitimate diet. Man is the highest type of the Divine—the most immediate representative of God upon the earth. All articulated sounds are significant to him; and, wherever the power of producing these sounds exists, it evidently places the creature in intelligent communion with its loyal liege—for it enables it to appeal to him for mercy, for protection, and for help! It is well enough for hawks, wild-cats, and all other creatures, who are, on the ascending scale, merely birds and beasts of prey, to be dumb to this sort of appeal; but for us, who should be angels unto them, with a compelling splendour on our brows—who walk among them with a higher sense, and know the mournful language of their agony, to devour them, groans, shrieks, yells, moans, red blood, and all, is one of the worst forms of cannibalism! You will observe that it

is only the red-blooded animals which are capable of producing sounds the meaning of which our senses can comprehend. The evening song of the mocking-bird teems with inspiration, and is a joy and a glory to us, while that of the katydid contains about as much, significant of the desires and passions of the creature itself, as the rasping sound of two dry sticks rubbed together."

So the day passed, while they looked love, but discoursed of curious truths. They reached the rancho about dark, and found there all the bustle and confusion which indicated a new arrival.

There were many horses grouped outside the picketing, and the Indians of the rancho were busy in hospitable cares among them.

"Ha! they have come!" said Frank, eagerly springing to the ground. He almost forgot to offer his hand to assist the young girl in dismounting, so full was he of joy. But she saved him the trouble, and led the way over the picketing.

He found all his friends in the room where he had first been received. Then congratulations were warmly exchanged, and he even embraced Clenny in his rapture. The gray-haired man was there, and formally presented his daughter to Mr. Clenny.

Frank was not so far blinded by his happiness that he failed to observe how pale she turned, as she recognised his friend most formally, after an involuntary start, either when she heard his name, or saw his features fully, he could not tell which. But he remembered the fact for many a day after.

She continued to be pale, abstracted, and constrained during the remainder of the evening, and Frank was greatly troubled. It was a relief to him when their host proposed they should retire to sleep.

Frank noticed, too—for his watchful eye let nothing pass—that although himself and the four men were invited to

sleep upon the floor of the same room, still his friend Clenny was invited to sleep elsewhere—perhaps in that mysterious room—a vision through the half-open door of which had already cost him so much of pain.

That night, when Carter was fast enough asleep, dreaming of love and joy, four men were awake—wide awake, in that mysterious chamber, plotting of many things which would not have quite comported with the tenor of his dreams.

There were three pallets of buffalo-robes upon the floor of this room, and when the gray-haired man entered, bearing a shaded lamp in his hand, the three men sprang to their feet as they had lain down, fully dressed, and with their arms about them.

He set the lamp down on the small, rude table, and they gathered about it.

"What the d—l is the meaning, my honoured uncle Cedric, of this last most inconvenient and most ridiculous stratagem of yours—the stampede of all the horses belonging to our party? You left me in a nice position, sucking my thumbs like a bear or a zaney."

"Pshaw! Newnon, do not be impertinent. You know that my scheme was well devised. You should have known the topography of the country better than to have permitted him to come this way. My spies told me that your general course would bring you directly into this neighbourhood. This was to be prevented. I did not wish him to see Freta, and you were likely to cross her eccentric track any moment. My Indians carried off your horses, but that cursed Celeste broke away and went back, only to bring about the very meeting that I dreaded. They met in the woods, and she brought him here. I knew the youngster at a glance, though I wondered utterly how you could have let him go. I found him to be just the fiery, impracticable fool you had represented; for when he saw the horses of your party in my horse-pen, the next morning, he was so savagely indignant

and insulting, that he raised the devil *even in me!* Freta interposed in time to prevent my getting rid of the troublesome yonker. I had one of my white fits on me, which, as you know, do not often occur for nothing!—but when the girl interposed, a new idea flashed upon me. I saw that he was already in love, and I determined to encourage the thing to the utmost.”

“Why did you not have him shot at once?” said Clenny, with a spasmodic gesture.

“Keep cool, my gentle Newnon,” said Cedric, with a sneering smile.

“I see clearly how we are to manage this incorrigible youth, without the necessity of resorting to any such extremities. We have only to disgust him with his ideal here, and he will go back to Myra Haynes again! So you need not grow any whiter, if you can help it. This child you seem to have cultivated an insane passion for since her infancy, is quite as astute as you. She is only to be won through her intellect. I have given her sympathies the proper direction to insure this. This boy cannot touch her life, for she has learned to love and expend her overflowing sentiment and sympathies upon another class of objects, and now she is only to be *commanded*.

“This is a stern word, Newnon; but you are just the man to live up to its condition. Make her respect your intellect—impose her life with the results you shall accomplish, and she will give to you the love she has to spare from her flowers, birds, trees, and indeed all the wild creatures of the natural world, with whom she is now in strict communion.”

“I like the peril of the game, my good uncle!—there is something exciting in it to me. But what are we to do with that person for the present? I recall my hasty speech just now. I have a respect for him personally, for he has a great deal in him; and when he can be scourged out of the sphere of this childish sentimentalism, which has given me so much

trouble, he will be a great acquisition to us—for even if he lives merely upon the memory of that daring enthusiasm of his, he would be the subtlest agent of our purpose we have ever had—for, of a surety, it would impose upon Lucifer himself! How do you propose to get rid of him?”

“Never mind! I shall get rid of him to-morrow! But let us proceed to other business.”

The two men whose faces Frank had seen for a moment, and who had appeared to be impassive spectators during all this scene, now drew up closely around the table, and at once the four persons went into a close discussion of other matters, which, however far-reaching, we must leave to be developed in their future results.

The morning has come, and Frank has gone forth again upon his gay Celeste, with the young girl on her glossy steed—and they are full of love as yesterday.

Away! away they go, asking of Nature only joy—and leaving the gray Cedric to scheme with his apt nephew of “stratagems and spoils.” They were unconscious of every thing but of the sunshine and of happiness.

The day had gone by with them as the others—they looked love into each other's eyes, as they had done since they first met, and now felt it more, because the passion had grown stilled within them, and warmed them with a quiet glow, like that which the sun sinks down into the earth, in spring, to come up again in such an odorous beaming silence through young flowers.

They were riding through a narrow path which led from out the dark tangles of the forest of the Black Walnut Bottom—Frank was speaking to her of the gentle themes which had absorbed their lives, and she clung upon his words with looks, when all at once Celeste and Black Hawk shied together, and darted away in a panic of affright, and on the instant poor Frank found himself constrained and dragged powerless from his saddle, with a lasso about his neck, while several

Indians rushed upon him from the thicket. With fading vision he last saw the young girl going off at speed, as if unconscious he had disappeared from her side.

The latest sound he heard, too, was the shrill neigh of Celeste, and then a choking sensation darkened on his life—and all was black to him!

DREAMS come to dreamers out on the waste ways and in the wilderness, as well as in narrow walls amid crowded streets. The ideal is pursued in both, and is as fleeting here as there. Should it seem strange, then, that our hunter-poet has dreamed a short dream beneath the deep shadows of that old forest by the far and swift Nebraska? His awakening into darkness is but the common way. Does not black night follow the rosy-tinted morn? Even the bird, with most aspiring pinion, flashes not the sunlight off it always; he too must sink from his exulting, and crouch beneath the overcoming shadows, where the prowling owl goes hooting with the moaning wolf, and all foul things shine upon the dark, with their green, phosphorescent eyes. We have no new paradise as yet on earth, all fenced about against its evils; we have no dove-cotes of the ideal where hungry kites forget to swoop. It is all alike—the flowers grow in wilderness as well as city—and though the winds may make them wilder, as our Freta was, yet not less delicate are they. Young, manly hearts beat fast and warm, and yearn upon the amorous air, though may be with a swifter beat, out-doors upon the sea-like plain, and through the mighty aisles of “perplexed wood.”

We shall see—we shall see! Perhaps the wild flower wilts within the city. Perhaps the dreams forsake the dreamer where the dust of strife is thickened. The ideal may not live in a sooty, stifling air. We shall see!

A just knowledge of life requires a degree of familiarity with its two extremes. The madness and crime of the one may be the joy or justice of the other. These extremes reflect upon and are interwoven with each other, far more clearly and intimately than fireside philosophy can usually realize.

It is our business to give the realities of the Border, to be sure; but then these realities are by no means confined to the wilderness. They may leave their footprints as plainly upon Broadway or Chestnut street, as upon the war-path or buffalo-trace. Such brief and sudden episodes as this we have just given in the adventures of our friend Frank Carter, are by no means peculiar to either condition of life, savage or civilized, since we have daily examples that, let it begin in whichever extreme it may, it frequently ends in the opposite. Nor is it any more true that cut-throats and desperadoes, spitfires and viragoes are the only characters to be found on the frontiers of civilization or in the hearts of the wilderness, than it is true that burglars and sharpers, the murderers and the shrew, are the sole and peculiar denizens of the city. Each has its contrasts—and concerning these I shall proceed to “speak that I do know.”

THE FIGHT OF THE PINTO TRACE.

BUT while these sentimental and mysterious affairs, mentioned in our last chapters were being enacted, the author, who, it will be found, has been in one way or another mixed up with the whole apparently disconnected train of events heretofore given in this series, was engaged, a little farther south, in a rougher and somewhat different amusement. I was still with the Rangers, who had lately enjoyed a longer period of idleness than was usual; and although we had quite fallen into listless and loaferish habits, the news that the Camanches were down in considerable force, and ravaging the settlements, was sufficient to drive us to the saddle in double-quick time. The dusky marauders of the mountains had been unusually audacious on this new foray, and we heard, from all the settlements within fifty miles, alarms of their bloody visitation.

They move from point to point with such surprising rapidity, that a long line of frontier is frequently swept by them before the alarm can be spread sufficiently to permit a rally of its defenders in time to intercept the mischief. They can then only pursue; and as these robber horsemen are, though laden down with plunder, often as prompt and cunning in their return as in the descent, the pursuit is frequently bootless.

We had usually been quick enough for them—since our Ranger organization had been perfected by Hays in view of

immediate efficiency in these very emergencies—but this time we somehow missed the figure. We were promptly enough under way when we heard the news—perhaps in fifteen minutes we were all mounted and off! But the reports which came in were confused and vague, which caused us to lose a great deal of time in finding the true seat of operations.

We started wrong, and lost a whole day in finding the trail of the plunderers. When we at last found it, we saw that they must have passed nearly twelve hours before. With such a start, it was useless to hope that we could overtake them by following up the windings of the trail.

Our only chance was to intercept them by some short cut before they reached the mountains. Hays judged from their general course that they would make for the head waters of the Guadalupe; and trusting to his sagacity, we crossed the trail and struck off over the plains in that direction.

We were fifteen men in all, and now that our course had been determined, we moved on at a spanking pace, like men who had something certain to accomplish before them. The outset of a pursuit of this kind is always a merry time with the Rangers. They have had a rest, and are flushed with animal spirits, if not with spirits of another sort, and rush forth whooping in ungovernable delight at the prospect of any new excitement. Their horses are fresh, too, and drink the strong breeze against which they breast as fuel to their headlong speed. Accordingly, very hard riding, laughter, shouts, and merry jokes, constitute the order of the first day. Then fatigue and disappointment have somewhat taken the wire-edge off, and the second is more subdued, but still earnest and impetuous.

But the third day of suspense is almost uniformly too much for such volatile temperaments to get through with on an uncertainty. They become impatient, listless, and careless to an unmanageable degree, and unless some trace of the

enemy be found to enliven them, the pursuit had as well be given up.

So Hays found it to be, on the third evening of this pursuit. We had failed again to cross the trail of the Indians, as he had calculated; the first blush of excited animal spirits had been dissipated in the weariness consequent upon excessive hard riding. The men had laughed at each other's old jokes in the jolly *abandon* of the start, but now the attempted repetition of them was a serious matter, and the laughter such attempts called forth any thing but jocose.

As evening closed in, there was an anxious consultation held by Hays with the most spirited and experienced of our Rangers, while we still continued slowly to advance in careless, straggling order. Nothing satisfactory was elicited except the mutual conclusion that unless we found some traces of the Indians early in the day to-morrow, it would be as well for us to give up in despair.

We felt assured that we had come too fast for them to have passed up the valley of the Guadalupe, without our crossing their trail soon, if they were ahead. If we were ahead of them, the best thing we could possibly do would be to wait for them at a place some distance farther up, where the valley branched in several directions. Hays had been quite certain that they would attempt to reach the mountains by this route, because it was not only the most direct, but the most practicable.

On this route they were sure of firm, open ground to run upon—of good grazing and plenty of water. These were advantages which our astute captain felt assured they would and could not overlook in a retreat. Indeed they had scarcely ever been known to fail of selecting this valley to get out by, when they had come in upon the settlements north of Bahai.

During the greater part of the day we had found ourselves surrounded by quite novel and peculiar features of scenery. Although the ground was tolerably level in the valley, yet in

the early part of the day we could easily perceive a low, broken and irregular line of hills undulating the horizon on either side.

Gradually with the evening these distant lines closed in, and as the shadows lengthened in the setting sun, they almost lay across the valley. Now that we were near them, we could perceive that these hills were quite unlike any others we had seen; for instead of occurring in a chain, with something like regularity, they were isolated, and appeared as if they had been sown broadcast over the plain. What had seemed to us in the distance to be a line of hills, was only the nearer edge of this singular formation.

We rode in among them, and it reminded me most of a huge forest, the mighty tops of which had been torn off by the wrench of a whirlwind. They stood at irregular distances apart, and each hill or mound was of a shape peculiar to itself, and of a size for which none of its neighbours were even indirectly accountable, except in contrast. The river here broke up into a number of smaller head-streams, which wound away by the feet of these curious hills, and we could look up their several valleys from nearly the same point of view. A heavy forest of several miles in extent skirted the opposite bank of the largest of these streams. It was at once resolved that we should cross and camp in the forest—or on the edge of it, rather—for the night. We passed around a steep and long-backed hill, which stood along the water's edge on this side; a little beyond it we found a buffalo-crossing, which we knew to be always safe. We crossed, and, following up the buffalo-trace through a sort of meadow-break, or opening in the forest, we found that in a few hundred yards it intersected another very wide and deep trace, which led off up the valley towards the north-west, through a continuation of this prairie opening in the forest.

Hays and the spies examined this trace very carefully for any signs of the Indians having passed, but none were appa-

rent. He said this was the Pinto Trace, and that as it was greatly trampled by buffalo, he expected that the Indians would endeavour to lose their trail on its hard and confused surface. But the sharpest eyes of our trailers could discover nothing which indicated that they had passed.

It was, therefore, concluded that we must be ahead of them, or else have missed them entirely. We found a small thread-like stream running through this meadow, or strip of prairie, beside which we camped, just under the shadow of the forest.

We had by this time given up all hopes of finding the Indians, and accordingly all the ordinary precautions of the scout were neglected. We turned our horses on the luxuriant meadow to graze their fill, while we in the mean time were not disposed to be behind them in gratifying our appetites, which had for three days been stinted upon jerked beef, eaten without cooking, since the smoke of a fire is considered quite too significant a telegraph to be carelessly used upon the prairies while in pursuit of an enemy, or while in his possible neighbourhood.

We determined to have a full meal this night, in amends, and thought of or cared for nothing else but how to secure what we desired. The stringent requisitions of our early march were laughed at now, and recklessly contrasted with the devil-may-care method—or rather want of method—in our proceedings.

We built an enormous fire, while the most skilful hunters scattered in every direction to search for game. They came straggling in until some time after dark, and brought with them quite a sufficient complement of game to satisfy even our cravings. The greater part of a fat buck and of a young bear were basted before the blazing fire, while several wild-geese, and a turkey or two, gave variety to our feast.

Before the feast was over, a belated hunter came in, who announced that he had discovered a bee-tree, not far from

the camp, and it was determined by a party of us that we would go and cut it down, the first thing in the morning, and get the honey in time for breakfast, to eat with the remainder of our bear-steaks. The announcement and the proposition were received with great glee by the Rangers; for there is no higher luxury known to frontier life than bear-steaks and wild honey.

After indulging their appetites to the full, with the intention of waiting for the more delicate feast promised in the morning, one after another stretched himself upon his blanket and dropped off to sleep.

Nothing especial occurred during the night, and with the earliest morning a party of five or six of us were up and equipping ourselves for taking the bee-tree. We took our arms, of course, but, as well, carried with us a hatchet and several coils of lariat, which were to answer for ropes, should they be needed. We left our horses behind. Sam Walker and G—— went with us on horseback, to keep a look-out for *possibilities*! Walker, who has since made himself so illustrious by his extraordinary feats in the opening of the war with Mexico, and whose renowned death, as a Captain of the Rifles, thrilled the country lately to its heart's core, was then a subordinate Ranger, like the rest of us, and under the command of Hays.

G——, too, was a gallant fellow, distinguished for his skill in trailing—he had, since we set out, been acting as the associate of Walker in spying. We proceeded about a half mile through the forest to the bee-tree, which we found to be barely in sight of the long-backed hill on the opposite side of the river, and around the end of which we had been compelled to turn before we found the crossing. Our spies went on to reconnoitre, while we proceeded to attack the bee-tree.

It was a very large post-oak; and we soon perceived that the bees had hived in a limb of great size, the hollow entrance to which was some ten feet out from the main branch.

The tree was too thick through to be cut down in any reasonable time, and the readiest expedient seemed to be that it should be climbed by some one who should cut off the limb from the trunk.

No one appeared to be inclined to undertake this operation; for climbing trees, however pleasant an amusement it may be to us as boys, is never particularly agreeable to men. So general was this disinclination, that our designs upon the beehive seemed to be in a fair way to be relinquished utterly, when one of the men who had lately joined us, and who was a big, fat, and clumsy greenhorn, laughed out with a sort of wheezing chuckle, and said that we were "pretty fellows, not to be able to climb sich a tree as that."

The unfortunate sucker! no one had thought of him before; but now, so soon as he had spoken and attracted attention to himself, the determination to victimize him flashed simultaneously upon the minds of all, and we accordingly beset him. He had made himself ridiculous, ever since he joined us, by boasting, after the most loud-mouthed and bombastic fashion, of his surprising feats in every possible department of human prowess. But the deeds of valour which he described, and of which he was the modest hero, were always only just surpassed by the incomprehensible feats of personal agility which accompanied them—incomprehensible when we looked upon the fat, unwielding personalities of the panting boaster.

Every one now slyly assailed him upon the weak side—his stupendous vanity; and between us we finally coaxed, wheedled, flattered, or bullied poor Lynn into undertaking the very thing, of all others, he was precisely most unfitted for accomplishing.

The tree was not very difficult to climb after the first limbs had been reached, and we were all emulously officious to boost the heavy fellow upon our shoulders, until he reached the lower limbs and got a footing. Then we threw up the

coil of a lariat to him, that he might at his leisure draw after him the hatchet which we attached to the other end.

Now that he was fairly started on his way up, we threw ourselves upon the earth at the foot of the tree, and rolled over, and with bursts and roars of unrestrained laughter, as we watched his awkward and timid ascent. Now we would applaud him with cheers for some suspiciously insignificant step in his upward progress—then we would taunt him when he faltered to take breath, until the poor fellow seemed to be scarcely sure whether he were not performing some unheard of labour, worthy to enlist the applause and enthusiasm of assembled nations. Indeed, his round face glowed down upon us in the pauses of his ascent, like the red disc of the harvest moon just rising, and its general expression of doubt, triumph, and vexation was so blended with his sweaty pantings, that we fairly roared again with laughter whenever this occurred.

At last, however, he succeeded in reaching the limb, and according to our directions, proceeded to tie one end of the lariat about it, as far out as he could reach, and then passing the other over a smaller limb, dropped the lariat down to us, that we might ease the limb to the ground, when he had severed it from the trunk. This he now proceeded to do, and at last succeeded in cutting it through.

As it swung off, and we were easing it down by the lariat, out came the whole swarm of bees, and attacked the poor fellow furiously. He had cut it too far out, and blundered into the hollow.

He now steadied himself as best he could, and was fighting blindly with both hands to protect his face, and in his agony had even forgot to cry out, while we were convulsed and rocking with cruel laughter below, when suddenly Walker and G—— shouted, "Indians! Indians!"

This ominous cry was sufficient to sober us in a hurry. We let go the lariat, and dropped our coveted honey very suddenly; for though we could not see the Indians, we knew too

well that no false alarm could come through such men as our spies were.

The alarm caused something of a panic; for the contrast was too broad between our reckless hilarity and the immediate danger threatened.

Some of the men at the foot of the tree took up the cry, "Indians!" Poor Lynn, who was already half-maddened and blinded by the bee-stings, heard it, and gave a yell of such agonized, despairing terror as would have stampeded a drove of broken-down pack-mules.

The pain of the bee-stings seemed to be forgotten in a moment, and he dropped himself, with the agility of a monkey, from the limb on which he stood. He was about forty feet from the ground, and taking every thing together, it was no special wonder that he miscalculated his momentum somewhat.

Although we were all thoroughly startled by the alarm, yet I do not think two men budged while we watched the ludicrous descent of our frightened victim. He had clearly forgotten all about the bees, and was dropping hastily from limb to limb, with a constantly increasing momentum, until at last, when something like twenty feet from the ground, he let go all holds, and came crushing down, with the agonizing cry, as he thumped against it his helpless, mushy form,— "O J—s!—them Indians! Wait, boys!"

But we did not choose to wait now, and with one long burst of laughter, which sent us staggering off, we hurried back to the camp. We saw that Lynn had no bones or limbs broken, and he was certainly of as much use as he lay there grunting and frightened at the foot of that tree, as he could be under any other possible condition of things; so we left him to pluck the bee-stings out of his face, and dream of new prodigies of individual valour.

We found G—— already in camp with the news, and nearly all the horses caught up, in readiness. While we

were mounting, G—— returned to join Walker, and we followed in the shortest possible time.

We passed out of the forest along the buffalo trail, and as we came out of the narrow meadow, in sight of the crossing we had used, we saw Walker and G—— already mounting the other bank of the river. Our course was thus indicated, though we as yet saw no enemy.

We hurried on, and when we reached the ford we saw them. They were slowly and deliberately ascending the steep and long-backed hill of which I have spoken, while our two spies rode slowly out into the plain they had left, and seemed to be looking up curiously after them.

We were urging on in the mean time; for though we were in sight, we were still a considerable distance off. It was a large body of warriors!—at least it seemed so to us, as we saw them slowly mounting the steep hill in a long compact line, from which the gaudy feathers flaunted bravely from their heads and from the tops of their long lance-handles.

The two spies followed them slowly in advance of us. When we reached the ford, they had mounted to the crest of the hill, and clustering along its brow, had begun to make insulting and defying gestures to us. But these gestures seemed to be particularly addressed to Walker and G——, who were far in advance of us, and in full view of them, while we were concealed somewhat in crossing the river.

Their position was so favourable, and their numbers so immensely superior, that Hays, reckless and daring as he was, hesitated about charging upon them. Indeed, he would and could never have been rash enough to make deliberately an up-hill onset upon four or five times his number; but the thing was precipitated. There was among them a person who spoke imperfect English, and he roared out insulting taunts to Walker and G——, defying them to come on, with the most filthy and opprobrious epithets.

These fiery and chivalric men had never been in the habit

of counting noses when they were insulted—and accordingly, without turning their heads to see whether we were at hand or not, they urged their horses alone up the hill in the face of nearly a hundred insolent savages.

So soon as we saw this movement, all hesitation—which at any rate had been but momentary—was gone, and we urged our horses up the steeps at their best speed. It was a rough and precipitous ascent, and with all our eagerness, we made slow work of it. We saw the gallant and reckless Walker break into their insolent front, and a warrior tumble as his pistol went off. The throng fell back before him as he gave another shot from his revolver, and then G—— closed in with quick successive shots from his deadly repeater.

But though the panic might be for an instant, yet it was too much to suppose that two men, even with so much audacity, backed even by repeaters, could rout a force of eighty insolent and defying warriors.

We saw them close about our rash and beloved comrades. We urged our horses like madmen up the steep. We saw Walker go down, and with a frantic cry—which was most like the ferocious wail of a pantheress for her young—we burst into the fray with drawn revolvers.

They made terrible work, and although the Indians fought like men possessed to maintain their vantage ground, we drove them back along the ridge with ruthless slaughter. They could not stand before our murderous revolvers.

I remember, as it were yesterday, seeing, as we swept past, poor Walker lying on his face with a lance through him! I considered him as done for, and never expected to see him on his feet again. Poor G—— was writhing near him, with a dozen lance-wounds. The Indians retreated before our furious charge, and, leaving their dead behind, they started off in the most extraordinary panic along the ridge of the hill.

Before long they rallied, and met us again in full shock.

The collision lasted only for a moment, when they broke again, leaving their dead as before. Thus this terrible fight continued for nearly six miles—they pausing every now and then to fight a moment, and then breaking up before our resistless charge, to fly a few miles farther and make a new stand, to be routed as before. We drew up at last, absolutely weary of slaughter, and permitted them to escape into some timber, with more than one-half their whole number killed or wounded.

This was the most bloody and ferocious fight which ever occurred between our race and the Camanches. We were about fourteen men to eighty stout and well-armed warriors. We routed them from their chosen position on the hill, and with the loss of three men and four wounded, literally cut them to pieces—killing nearly half of their whole number. But for our revolvers, the attack would never have been made; and had it been, we should only have been awfully whipped.

When we returned to the camp, we found that Walker, whom we had supposed to be slain, had drawn the lance out, which had been driven into him from behind, and crawled down to the water to drink. It had missed the vitals, and he lived to render his name illustrious and die at last right gloriously!

G—— was stone dead, with fatal wounds enough on his body to have killed half our whole number. We buried him decently; and, on the examination of the papers on his person by Hays, in the presence of us all, there came to light a small parchment, which was no sooner looked at by Hays, than he hastened to conceal it in his bosom, turning slightly pale as he glanced eagerly around at our faces. It was too late! The signature was in bold, large letters, and many of us saw it—it was "Regulus!" Not a word was spoken.

As for the man of the bee-tree, we found him with his eyes so bunged that he was never able to see double any more.