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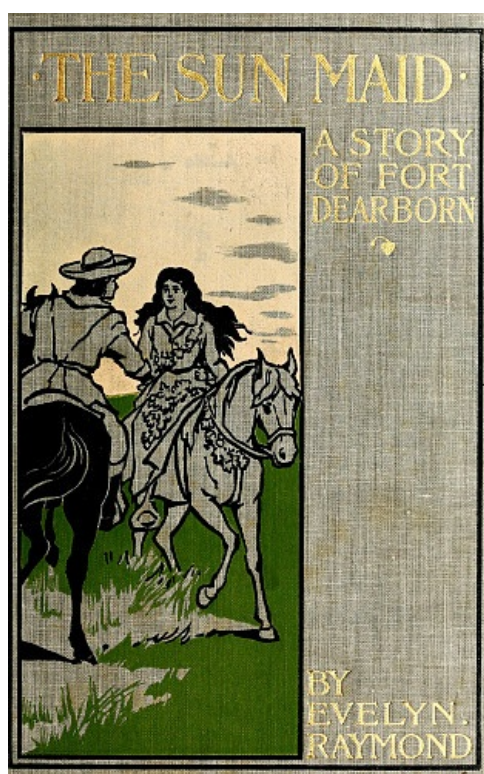
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THE SUN MAID
A STORY OF FORT DEARBORN

BY

EVELYN RAYMOND

AUTHOR OF "THE LITTLE LADY OF THE HORSE," ETC.



FORT DEARBORN

NEW YORK

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Page [22](#). **KITTY AND THE SNAKE.**
Frontispiece.

**TO ALL YOUNG HEARTS
IN THAT FAIR CITY BY THE INLAND SEA**

CHICAGO

PREFACE.

In some measure, the story of the Sun Maid is an allegory.

Both the heroine and the city of her love grew from insignificant beginnings; the one into a type of broadest womanhood, the other into a grandeur which has made it unique among the cities of the world.

Discouragements, sorrows, and seeming ruin but developed in each the same high attributes of courage, indomitable will power, and far-reaching sympathy. The story of the youth of either would be a tale unfinished; and those who have followed, with any degree of interest, the fortunes of either during any period will keep that interest to the end.

There are things which never age. Such was the heart of the Maid who remained glad as a girl to the end of her century, and such the marvellous Chicago with a century rounded glory which is still the glory of a youth whose future magnificence no man can estimate.

E. R., BALTIMORE, January, 1900.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. AS THE SUN WENT DOWN	1
II. TWO FOR BREAKFAST	13
III. IN INDIAN ATTIRE	27
IV. THE WHITE BOW	38

V. HORSES: WHITE AND BLACK	50
VI. THE THREE GIFTS	64
VII. A THREEFOLD CORD IS STRONGEST	77
VIII. AN ISLAND RETREAT	91
IX. AT MUCK-OTEY-POKEE	107
X. THE CAVE OF REFUGE	124
XI. UNDER A WHITE MAN'S ROOF	138
XII. AFTER FOUR YEARS	156
XIII. THE HARVESTING	169
XIV. ONCE MORE IN THE OLD HOME	180
XV. PARTINGS AND MEETINGS	194
XVI. THE SHUT AND THE OPEN DOOR	209
XVII. A DAY OF HAPPENINGS	231
XVIII. WESTWARD AND EASTWARD OVER THE PRAIRIE	247
XIX. THE CROOKED LOG	260
XX. ENEMIES, SEEN AND UNSEEN	272
XXI. FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH	284
XXII. GROWING UP	296
XXIII. HEROES	306
XXIV. CONCLUSION	315

ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
FORT DEARBORN	<i>Title-page</i>
BLACK PARTRIDGE AND THE SUN MAID	6
KITTY AND THE SNAKE	<i>Frontispiece</i> 22
THE GIFT OF THE WHITE BOW	48
SNOWBIRD AND THE SUN MAID	68
GASPAR AND KITTY REACH THE FORT	188
"KITTY! MY KITTY!"	258
OSCEOLO AND GASPAR	276

THE SUN MAID.

[Pg 1]

CHAPTER I.

AS THE SUN WENT DOWN.

With gloom in his heart, Black Partridge strode homeward along the beach path.

The glory of a brilliant August sunset crimsoned the tops of the sandhills on the west and the waters of the broad lake on the east; but if the preoccupied Indian observed this at all, it was to see in it an omen of impending tragedy. Red was the color of blood, and he foresaw that blood must flow, and freely.

"They are all fools. All. They know that Black Partridge cannot lie, yet they believe not his words. The white man lies, and works his own destruction. His doom be on his head!"

As his thought took this line the chief's brow grew still more stern, and an expression of contempt curled the corners of his wide, thin lips. A savage though he was, at that moment he felt himself immeasurably superior to the pale-faces whom he had known; and in the consciousness of his integrity he held his tall form even more erect, while he turned his face toward the sky in gratitude to that Great Spirit who had made him what he was.

[Pg 2]

Then again he remembered the past, and again his feather-adorned head drooped beneath its burden of regret, while his brown fingers clasped and unclasped themselves about a

glittering medal which decorated his necklace, and was the most cherished of his few possessions.

"I have worn it for long, and it has rested lightly upon my heart; but now it becomes a knife that pierces. Therefore I must return it whence it came."

Yet something like a sigh escaped him, and his hands fell down straight at his sides. Also, his narrow eyes gazed forward upon the horizon, absently, as if their inward visions were much clearer than anything external. In this manner he went onward for a little distance, till his moccasined foot struck sharply against something lying in his path, and so roused him from his reverie.

"Ugh! Ugh! So. When the squaw dies the papoose must suffer."

The soft obstruction was a little child, curled into a rounded heap, and fast asleep upon this primitive public highway. The touch of the red man's foot had partially wakened the sleeper, and when he bent and laid his hand upon her shoulder, she sprang up lightly, at once beginning to laugh and chatter with a gayety that infected even the stolid Indian.

[Pg 3]

"Ugh! The Little-One-Who-Laughes. Why are you here alone, so far from the Fort, Kitty Briscoe?"

"I runned away. Bunny rabbit runned away. I did catch him two times. I did find some posies, all yellow and round and—posies runned away, too. Ain't that funny? Kitty go seek them."

Her laughter trilled out, bird clear, and a mischievous twinkle lighted her big blue eyes.

"I runned away. Bunny rabbit runned to catch me. I runned to catch bunny. I caught the posies. Yellow posies gone—I go find them, too."

As if it were the best joke in the world, the little creature still laughed over her own conceit of so many runnings till, in whirling about, she discovered the remnants of the flowers she had lost upon the heat-hardened path behind her. Indeed, when she had dropped down to sleep, overcome by sudden weariness, it had been with the cool leaves and blossoms for a couch. Now the love of all green and growing things was an inborn passion with this child, and her face sobered to a keen distress as she gazed upon her ruined treasures. But almost at once the cloud passed, and she laughed again.

"Poor posies, tired posies, sleepy, too. Kitty sorry. Put them in the water trough and wake them up. Then they hold their eyes open, just like Kitty's."

[Pg 4]

"Ugh! Where the papoose sleeps the blossoms wither," remarked Black Partridge, regarding the bruised and faded plants with more attention. They were wild orchids, and he knew that the child must have wandered far afield to obtain them. At that time of year such blooms were extremely rare, and only to be found in the moist shadows of some tree-bordered stream quite remote from this sandy beach.

"Oh, dear! Something aches my feet. I will go home to my little bed. Pick up the posies, Feather-man, and take poor Kitty."

With entire confidence that the Indian would do as she wished, the small maid clasped his buckskin-covered knee and leaned her dimpled cheek against it. It proved a comfortable support, and with a babyish yawn she promptly fell asleep again.

Had she been a child of his own village, even of his own wigwam, Black Partridge would have shaken her roughly aside, feeling his dignity affronted by her familiarity; but in her case he could not do this and on this night least of all.

The little stray was the orphan of Fort Dearborn; whose soldier father had met a soldier's common fate, and whose mother had quickly followed him with her broken heart. Then the babe of a few weeks became the charge of the kind women at the Fort, and the pet of the garrison in general.

[Pg 5]

But now far graver matters than the pranks of a mischievous child filled the minds of all her friends. The peaceful, monotonous life of the past few years was over, and the order had gone forth that the post should be evacuated. Preparations had already begun for the long and hazardous journey which confronted that isolated band of white people, and the mothers of a score of other restless young folk had been too busy and anxious to notice when this child slipped away to wander on the prairie.

For a brief time the weary baby slumbered against the red man's knee, while he considered the course he would best pursue; whether to return her at once to the family of the commandant, or to carry her southward to the Pottawatomie lodge whither he was bound.

Then, his decision made, he lifted the child to his breast and resumed his homeward way.

But the bright head pillowed so near his eyes seemed to dazzle him, and its floating golden locks to catch and hold, in a peculiar fashion, the rays of the sunset. From this, with his race instinct of poetic imagery, which finds in nature a type for everything, he caught a quaint suggestion.

“She is like the sun himself. She is all warmth and brightness. She is his child, now that her pale-faced parents sleep the long sleep, and none other claims her. None? Yes, one. I, Black Partridge, the Man-Who-Lies-Not. In my village, Muck-otey-pokee, lives my sister, the daughter of a chief, her whose one son died of the fever on that same dark night when the arrow of a Sioux warrior killed a brave, his sire. In her closed tepee there will again be light. The Sun Maid shall make it. So shall she escape the fate of the doomed pale-faces, and so shall the daughter of my house again be glad.” [Pg 6]

Thus, bearing her new name, and all unconsciously, the little Sun Maid was carried southward and still southward till the twilight fell and her new guardian reached the Pottawatomie village, on the Illinois prairie, where he dwelt.

Sultry as the night was, there was yet a great council fire blazing in the midst of the settlement, and around this were grouped many young braves of the tribe. Before the arrival of their chief there had been a babel of tongues in the council, but all discussion ceased as he joined the circle in the firelight.

The sudden silence was ominous, and the wise leader understood it; but it was not his purpose then to quarrel with any man. Ignoring the scowling glances bestowed upon him, he gave the customary evening salutation and, advancing directly to the fire, plucked a blazing fagot from it. This he lifted high and purposely held so that its brightness illuminated the face and figure of the child upon his breast. [Pg 7]



BLACK PARTRIDGE AND THE SUN MAID. Page 6.

A guttural exclamation of astonishment ran from brave to brave. The action of their chief was significant, but its meaning not clearly comprehended. Had he brought the white baby as a hostage from the distant garrison, in pledge that the compact of its commandant would surely be kept? Or had some other tribe anticipated their own in obtaining the gifts to be distributed?

Shut-Hand, one of the older warriors, whose name suggested his character, rose swiftly to his feet, and demanded menacingly:

“What means our father, thus bringing hither the white papoose?”

“That which the Black Partridge does—he does.”

Rebuked, but unsatisfied, the miserly inquirer sat down. Then, with a gesture of protection, the chief raised the sleeping little one, that all within the circle might better see her wonderful, glowing beauty, intensified as it was by the flare of the flames as well as by contrast to the dusky faces round about.

“Who suffers harm to her shall himself suffer. She is the Sun Maid, the new daughter of our tribe.”

Having said this, and still carrying the burning fagot, he walked to the closed tepee of his widowed sister and lifted its door flap. Stooping his tall head till its feathered crest swept the floor he entered the spacious lodge. But he sniffed with contempt at the stifling atmosphere within, and laying down his torch raised the other half of the entrance curtain.

[Pg 8]

At the back of the wigwam, crouching in the attitude she had sustained almost constantly since her bereavement, sat the Woman-Who-Mourns. She did not lift her head, or give any sign of welcome till the chief had crossed to her side, and in a tone of command bade her:

“Arise and listen, my sister, for I bring you joy.”

“There is no joy,” answered the woman, obediently lifting her tall figure to a rigidly erect posture; by long habit compelled to outward respect, though her heart remained indifferent.

“Put back the hair from your eyes. Behold. For the dead son I give you the living daughter. In that land to which both have gone will her lost mother care for your lost child as you now care for her.”

Slowly, a pair of lean, brown hands came out from the swathing blanket and parted the long locks that served as a veil to hide a haggard, sorrowful face. After the deep gloom the sudden firelight dazzled the woman’s sight, and she blinked curiously toward the burden upon her brother’s breast. Then the small eyes began to see more clearly and to evince the amazement that filled her.

[Pg 9]

“Dreams have been with me. They were many and strange. Is this another?”

“This a glad reality. It is the Sun Maid. She has no parents. You have no child. She is yours. Take her and learn to laugh once more as in the days that are gone.”

Then he held the little creature toward her; and still amazed, but still obedient, the heart-broken squaw extended her arms and received the unconscious foundling. As the warm, soft flesh touched her own a thrill passed through her desolate heart, and all the tenderness of motherhood returned.

“Who is she? Whence did she come? Where will she go?”

“She is the Sun Maid. From the Fort by the great lake, where are still white men enough to die—as die they must. For there is treachery afoot, and they who were first treacherous must bear their own punishment. Only she shall be saved; and where she will go is in the power of the Woman-Who-Mourns, and of her alone.”

Without another word, and leaving the still blazing fagot lying on the earthen floor, the chief went swiftly away.

But he had brought fresh air and light and comfort with him, as he had prophesied. The small Sun Maid was already brightening the dusky lodge as might an actual ray from her glorious namesake.

[Pg 10]

It was proof of her utter exhaustion that she still slept soundly while her new foster-mother prepared a bed of softest furs spread over fresh green branches and went hurriedly out to beg from a neighbor squaw a draught of evening’s milk. This action in itself was sufficiently surprising to set all tongues a-chatter.

The lodge of Muck-otey-pokee had many of the comforts common to the white men’s settlements. Its herd of cattle even surpassed that at Fort Dearborn itself, and was a matter of no small pride to the Pottawatomie villagers. From the old mission fathers they had learned, also, some useful arts, and wherever their prairie lands were tilled a rich result was always obtainable.

So it was to a home of plenty, as well as safety, that Black Partridge had brought the little Sun Maid; and when she at length awoke to see a dusky face, full of wonderment and love, bending above her, she put out her arms and gurgled in a glee which brought an answering smile to lips that had not smiled for long.

With an instinct of yearning tenderness, the Woman-Who-Mourns had lightened her sombre

attire by all the devices possible, so that while the child slept she had transformed herself. She had neatly plaited her heavy hair, and wound about her head some strings of gay beads. She had fastened a scarlet tanager's wing to her breast, now covered by a bright-hued cotton gown once sent her from the Fort, and for which she had discarded her dingy blanket. But the greatest alteration of all was in the face itself, where a dawning happiness brought out afresh all the good points of a former comeliness. [Pg 11]

"Oh! Pretty! I have so many, many nice mammas. Are you another?"

"Yes. All your mother now. My Sun Maid. My Girl-Child. My papoose!"

"That is nice. But I'm hungry. Give me my breakfast, Other Mother. Then I will go seek my bunny rabbit, that runned away, and my yellow posies that went to sleep when I did. Did you put them to bed, too, Other Mother?"

"There are many which shall wake for you, papoose," answered the woman, promptly; for though she did not understand about the missing blossoms, it was fortunate that she did both understand and speak the language of her adopted daughter. Her dead husband had been the tribe's interpreter, and both from him and from the Fort's chaplain she had acquired considerable knowledge.

Until her widowhood and voluntary seclusion the Woman-Who-Mourns had been a person of note at Muck-otey-pokee; and now by her guardianship of this stranger white child she bade fair to again become such. [Pg 12]

CHAPTER II.

[Pg 13]

TWO FOR BREAKFAST.

The dead son of the Woman-Who-Mourns had never been disobedient, and small Kitty Briscoe had never obeyed anybody. She had laughed and frolicked her way through all rules and over all obstacles with a merry indifference that would have been insolent had it been less innocent and charming. During her short life the orphan had heard no voice but was full of tenderness, toward her at least; and every babyish misdemeanor had been pardoned almost before it was committed, by reason of her exceeding loveliness and overflowing affection. She had so loved all that she feared none, and not one of the kind mothers at the Fort had felt it her especial duty to discipline so sweet and fearless a nature. By and by, when she grew older, why, of course, the child must come under the yoke, like other children of that stern generation; but for the present, what was she but an ignorant baby, a motherless babe at that?

So that, on that first morning of their life together, it gave the latest foster-mother a very decided shock when she directed: [Pg 14]

"Take your bowl of suppawn and milk, and eat it here by the fire, Girl-Child," to have the other reply, with equal decision:

"Kitty will take it to the out-doors."

"How? The papoose must eat her breakfast here, as I command."

"But Kitty must take it out the doors. What will the pigeons say? Come with me, Other Mother."

Quite to her own astonishment, the proud daughter of a chief complied. Superstition had suggested to her that this white-robed little creature, with her trustful eyes and her wonderful hair, who seemed rather to float over the space to the threshold than to tread upon the earthen floor, was the re-embodied spirit of her own lost child come back to comfort her sorrow and to be a power for good in her tribe.

But if the Sun Maid were a spirit, she had many earthly qualities; and with a truly human carelessness she had no sooner stepped beyond the tent flap than she let fall her heavy bowl and spilled her breakfast. For there stood her last night's rescuer, his arms full of flowers.

"Oh, the posies! the posies! Nice Feather-man did bring them."

"Ugh! Black Partridge, the Truth-Teller. I have come to take my leave. Also to ask you, my sister, shall I carry away the Sun Maid to her own people? Or shall she abide with you?" [Pg 15]

"Take her away, my brother? Do you not guess, then, who she is?"

"Why should I guess when I know. I saw her father die, and I stood beside her mother's grave. The white papoose has neither tribe nor kinsman."

"There for once the Truth-Teller speaks unwisely. The Sun Maid, whom you found asleep on the path, is my own flesh and blood."

In surprise Black Partridge stared at the woman, whose face glowed with delight. Then he reflected that it would be as well to leave her undisturbed in her strange notion. The helpless little one would be the better cared for, under such circumstances, and the time might speedily come when she would need all the protection possible for anybody to give.

"It is well—as you believe; yet then you are no longer the Woman-Who-Mourns, but again Wahneenah, the Happy."

For a moment they silently regarded the child who had thrown herself face downward upon the great heap of orchids that Black Partridge had brought, and which he had risen very early to gather. They were of the same sort that the little one had grieved over on the night before, only much larger and fairer, and of far greater number. Talking to the blossoms and caressing them as if they were human playmates, the Sun Maid forgot that she was hungry, until Wahneenah had brought a second bowl of porridge and, gently lifting her charge to a place upon the mat, had bidden her eat.

[Pg 16]

"Oh, yes! My breakfast. I did forget it, didn't I? Oh, the darling posies! Oh! the pretty Feather-man, that couldn't tell a naughty story. I know 'bout him. We all know 'bout him to our Fort. My Captain says he is the bestest Feather-man in all the—everywhere."

"Ugh! Ugh!"

The low grunt of assent seemed to come from every side the big wigwam. At all times there were many idle Indians at Muck-otey-pokee, but of late their number had been largely increased by bands of visiting Pottawatomies. These had come to tarry with their tribesmen in the village till the distribution of goods should be made from Fort Dearborn, as had been ordered by General Hull; or until the hour was ripe for their treacherous assault upon the little garrison.

The Man-Who-Kills was in the very centre of the group which had squatted in a semi-circle as near as it dared before the tepee of their chief's sister, and the low grunts came from this band of spectators.

"We will sit and watch. So will we learn what the Black Partridge means," and when Spotted Rabbit so advised his brothers, they had come in the darkness and arranged themselves as has been described.

[Pg 17]

The chief had found them there when, before dawn, he came with his offering of flowers, and Wahneenah had seen them when she raised the curtain of her tent and looked out to learn what manner of day was coming. But neither had noticed them any more than they did the birds rustling in the cottonwood beside the wigwam, or the wild creatures skurrying across the path for their early drink at the stream below.

Neither had the Sun Maid paid them any attention, for she had always been accustomed to meeting the savages both at the Fort and on her rides abroad with any of her garrison friends; so she deliberately sipped her breakfast, pausing now and then to arrange the pouch-like petals of some favored blossoms and to converse with them in her fantastic fashion, quite believing that they heard and understood.

"Did the nice Feather-man bring you all softly, little posies? Aren't you glad you've come to live with Kitty? Other Mother will give you all some breakfast, too, of coldest water in the brook. Then you will sit up straight and hold your heads high. That's the way the children do when my Captain takes the book with the green cover and makes them spell things out of it. Oscar doesn't like the green book. It makes him wriggle his nose—so; but Margaret is as fond of it as I am of you. Oh, dear! Some day, all my mothers say, I, too, will have to sit and look on the printing and spell words. I can, though, even now. Listen, posies. D-o-g—that's—that's—I guess it's 'cat.' Isn't it, posies? But you don't have to spell things, do you? I needn't either. Not to-day, and maybe not to-morrow day. Because, you see, I runned away. Oh, how I did run! So fast, so far, before I found your little sisters, posies, dear. Then I guess I went to sleep, without ever saying my 'Now I lay me,' and the black Feather-man came, and—that's all."

[Pg 18]

Wahneenah had gone back to her household duties, for she had many things on hand that day. Not the least, to make her neglected tepee a brighter, fitter home for this stray sunbeam which the Great Spirit had sent to her out of the sky, and into which He had

breathed the soul of her lost one. Indistinctly, she heard the murmuring of the babyish voice at the threshold and occasionally caught some of the words it uttered. These served but to establish her in her belief that the child had more than mortal senses; else how should she fancy that the blossoms would hear and understand her prattle?

"Listen. She talks to the weeds as the white men talk to us. She is a witch," said the Man-Who-Kills to his neighbor in the circle, the White Pelican. [Pg 19]

"She is only a child of the pale-faces. The Black Partridge has set her among us to move our hearts to pity."

"The White Pelican was ever a coward," snorted the Man-Who-Kills.

But the younger warrior merely turned his head and smiled contemptuously. Then he critically scrutinized the ill-proportioned figure of the ugly-tempered brave. The fellow's crooked back, abnormally long arms and short legs were an anomaly in that race of stalwart Indians, and the soul of the savage corresponded to his outward development. For his very name had been given him in derision; because, though he always threatened and always sneaked after his prey, he had never been known to slay an enemy in open combat.

"That is as the tomahawks prove. The scalps hang close on the pole of my wigwam," finally remarked the Pelican.

"Ugh! But there was never such a scalp as that of the papoose yonder. It shall hang above all others in *my* tepee. I have said it."

"Having said it, you may unsay it. That is no human fleece upon that small head. She is sacred."

"How? Is the White Pelican a man of dreams?"

The elder brave also used a tone of contempt, though not with marked success. His thought reverted to the night before, when the chief had stood beside the council fire holding the sleeping child in his arms. Her wonderful yellow hair, fine as spun cobwebs and almost as light, had blown over the breast of Black Partridge like a cloud, and it had glistened and shimmered in the firelight as if possessed of restless life. The little figure was clothed in white, as the Fort mothers had fancied best suited their charge's fairness, even though the fabric must of necessity be coarse; and this garment likewise caught the glow of the dancing flames till it seemed luminous in itself. [Pg 20]

As an idle rumor spreads and grows among better cultured people so superstition held in power these watchful Indians. Said one:

"The father of his tribe has met a spirit on the prairie and brought it to our village. Is the deed for good or evil?"

This was what the men in the semi-circle had come to find out. So they relapsed again into silence, but kept a fixed gaze upon the indifferent child before them. She continued her playing and feeding as unconsciously as if she, the flowers, and the sunshine, were quite alone. Some even fancied that they could hear the orchids whispering in return; and it was due to that morning's incident that, thereafter, few among the Pottawatomies would lightly bruise or break a blossom which they then learned to believe was gifted with a sensate life. [Pg 21]

But presently a sibilant "Hst!" ran the length of the squatting line, and warriors who feared not death for themselves felt their muscles stiffen under a tension of dread as they saw the slow, sinuous approach of a poisonous reptile to the child on the mat; and the thought of each watcher was the same:

"Now, indeed, the test—spirit or mortal?"

The snake glided onward, its graceful body showing through the grass, its head slightly upraised, and its intention unmistakable.

An Indian can be the most silent thing on earth, if he so wills, and at once it was as if all that row of red men had become stone. Even Wahneenah, in the wigwam behind, was startled by the stillness, and cautiously tiptoed forward to learn its cause. Then her heart, like theirs, hushed its beating and she rigidly awaited the outcome.

Only the child herself was undisturbed. She did not cease the slow lifting of the clay spoon to her lips, and between sips she still prattled and gurgled in sheer content.

"Kitty is most full'd up, 'cause she did have so big a breakfast, she did. Nice Other Mother did give it me. I wish my bunny rabbit had not runned away. Then he could have some. Never mind. Here comes a beau'ful cunning snake. I did see one two times to my Fort. Bad [Pg 22]

Jacky soldier did kill him dead, and that made Kitty cry. Come, pretty thing, do you want Kitty's breakfast? Then you may have it every bit."

So she tossed her hair from her eyes and sat with uplifted spoon while the moccasin glided up to the mat and over it, till its mouth could reach the shallow bowl in the child's lap.

"Oh! the funny way it eats. Poor thing! It hasn't any spoon. It might have Kitty's, only——"

The bright eyes regarded the rudely shaped implement and the mouth it was to feed; then the little one's ready laughter bubbled forth.

"Funny Kitty! How could it hold a spoon was bigger 'n itself—when its hands have never grown? Other pretty one, that Jacky killed, that didn't have its hands, either. Hush, snaky. Did I make you afraid, I laugh so much? Now I will keep very, very still till you are through. Then you may go back home to your childrens, and tell them all about your nice breakfast. Where do you live? Is it in a Fort, as Kitty does? Oh, I forgot! I did promise to keep still. Quite, quite still, till you go way away."

So she did; while not only the red-skins, but all nature seemed to pause and watch the strange spectacle; for the light breeze that had come with the sunrise now died away, and every leaf stood still in the great heat which descended upon the earth. [Pg 23]

It seemed to Wahneenah, watching in a very motherly fear, and to the squatting braves, in their increasing awe, as if hours passed while the child and the reptile remained messmates. But at length the dangerous serpent was satisfied and, turning slowly about, retreated whence it came.

Then Mistress Kitty lifted her voice and called merrily:

"Come, Other Mother! Come and see. I did have a lovely, lovely creepy one to eat with me. He did eat so funny Kitty had to laugh. Then I remembered that my other peoples to my Fort tell all the children to be good and I was good, wasn't I? Say, Other Mother, my posies want some water."

"They shall have it, White Papoose, my Girl-Child-Who-Is-Safe. She whom the Great Spirit has restored nothing can harm."

Then she led the Sun Maid away, after she had gathered up every flower, not daring that anything beloved of her strange foster-child should be neglected.

The watching Indians also rose and returned into the village from that point on its outskirts where Wahneenah's wigwam stood. They spoke little, for in each mind the conviction had become firm that the Sun Maid was, in deed and truth, a being from the Great Beyond, safe from every mortal hurt. [Pg 24]

Yet still, the Man-Who-Kills fingered the edge of his tomahawk with regret and remarked in a manner intended to show his great prowess:

"Even a mighty warrior cannot fight against the powers of the sky."

After a little, one, less credulous than his fellows, replied boastfully:

"Before the sun shall rise and set a second time the white scalp will hang at my belt."

Nobody answered the boast till at length a voice seemed to come out of the ground before them, and at its first sound every brave stood still to listen for that which was to follow. All recognized the voice, even the strangers from the most distant settlements. It was heard in prophecy only, and it belonged to old Katasha, the One-Who-Knows.

"No. It is not so. Long after every one of this great Pottawatomie nation shall have passed out of sight, toward the place where the day dies, the hair of the Sun Maid's head shall be still shining. Its gold will have turned to snow, but generation after generation shall bow down to it in honor. Go. The road is plain. There is blood upon it, and some of this is yours. But the scalp of the Sun Maid is in the keeping of the Great Spirit. It is sacred. It cannot be harmed. Go." [Pg 25]

Then the venerable woman, who had risen from her bed upon the ground to utter her message, returned to her repose, and the warriors filed past her with bowed heads and great dejection of spirit. In this mood they joined another company about the dead council fire, and in angry resentment listened to the speech of the Black Partridge as he pleaded with them for the last time.

"For it is the last. This day I make one more journey to the Fort, and there I will remain until you join me. We have promised safe escort for our white neighbors through the lands of the hostile tribes who dare not wage war against us. The white man trusts us. He counts

us his friends. Shall we keep our promise and our honor, or shall we become traitors to the truth?"

It was Shut-Hand who answered for his tribesmen:

"It is the pale-face who is a traitor to honesty. The goods which our Great Father gave him in trust for his red children have been destroyed. The white soldiers have forgotten their duty and have taught us to forget ours. When the sun rises on the morrow we will join the Black Partridge at the Fort by the great water, and we will do what seems right in our eyes. The Black Partridge is our father and our chief. He must not then place the good of our enemies before the good of his own people. We have spoken."

[Pg 26]

So the great Indian, who was more noble than his clansmen, went out from among them upon a hopeless errand. This time he did not make his journey on foot, but upon the back of his fleetest horse; and the medal he meant to relinquish was wrapped in a bit of deerskin and fastened to his belt.

"Well, at least the Sun Maid will be safe. When the braves, with the squaws and children, join their brothers at the camp, Wahneenah will remain at Muck-otey-pokee; as should every other woman of the Pottawatomie nation, were I as powerful in reality as I appear. It is the squaws who urge the men to the darkest deeds. Ugh! What will be must be. Tchtk! Go on!"

But the bay horse was already travelling at its best, slow as its pace seemed to the Black Partridge.

CHAPTER III.

[Pg 27]

IN INDIAN ATTIRE.

Not many hours after Black Partridge turned his back upon Muck-otey-pokee, all its fighting men, with their squaws and children, also left it, as their chief had foreseen they would. They followed the direction he had taken, though they did not proceed to the garrison itself.

The camp to which they repaired was a little distance from the Fort, and had been pitched beside the river, where was then a fringe of cottonwoods and locusts affording a grateful shade. Here the squaws cooked and gossiped, while their sons played the ancient games of throwing the spear through the ring, casting the hatchet, and shooting birds on the wing.

The braves tested their weapons and boasted of many valorous deeds; or were else entirely silent, brooding upon mischief yet to come. Over all was the thrill of excitement and anticipation, which the great heat of the season seemed to deepen rather than dispel.

At the Fort, Black Partridge pleaded finally and in vain.

"We have been ordered to evacuate, and we will obey. All things are in readiness. The stores are already in the wagons, and other wagons wait for the sick, the women, and the children. Your people have promised us a safe conveyance through their country, and as far as we shall need it. They will be well paid. Part they have received, and the rest of their reward will be promptly delivered at the end of the journey. There is no more to be said"; and with this conclusion the weary commandant sat down in his denuded home to take a bit of food and a few moments' rest. He nodded hospitably toward an empty chair on the farther side of the deal table, by way of invitation that the Indian should join him, but this the honest chief declined to do.

[Pg 28]

"No, good father, that can no longer be. I have come to return you this medal. I have worn it long and in peace. It was the gift of your people, a pledge between us of friendship. My friendship remains unbroken, but there also remains a tie which is stronger. I am the chief of my tribe. My young men are brave, and they have been deceived. They will punish the deceivers, and I have no power to prevent this. Nor do I blame them, though I would hold them to their compact if I could."

"Cannot the Truth-Teller compel his sons to his own habit?"

"Not when his white father sets them a bad example."

[Pg 29]

"Black Partridge, your words are bold."

"Your deed was bolder, father. It was the deed of a fool."

"Take care!"

As if he had not heard, the chief spoke steadily on:

"My tribesman, Winnemeg—the white man's friend—brought the order that all goods stored here should be justly distributed among my people, to every man his portion. Was it thus done?"

"Come, Black Partridge, you are not wanting in good sense nor in honesty. You must admit that such a course would have been hazardous in the extreme. The idea of putting liquor and ammunition into the hands of the red men was one of utter madness. It was worse than foolhardy. The broken firearms are safe in the well, and the more dangerous whiskey has mingled itself harmlessly with the waters of the river and the lake."

"There is something more foolish than folly," said the Indian, gravely, "and that is a lie! The powder drowned in the well will kill more pale-faces than it could have done in the hands of your red children. The river-diluted whiskey will inflame more hot heads than if it had been dispensed honorably and in its full strength. But now the end. Though I will do what I can do, even the Truth-Teller cannot fight treachery. Prepare for the worst. And so—farewell!"

[Pg 30]

Then the tall chief bowed his head in sadness and went away; but the terrible truth of what he then uttered all the world now knows.

Meanwhile, in the almost empty village among the cottonwoods, the Sun Maid played and laughed and chattered as she had always done in her old home at the Fort. And all day, those wiser women like Wahneenah, who had refrained from following their tribe to the distant camp, watched and attended the child in admiring awe.

By nightfall the Sun Maid had been loaded with gifts. Lahnowenah, wife of the avaricious Shut-Hand but herself surnamed the Giver, came earliest of all, with a necklace of bears' claws and curious shells which had come from the Pacific slope, none knew how many years before.

The Sun Maid received the gift with delight and her usual exclamation of "Nice!" but when the donor attempted to clasp the trinket about the fair little throat she was met by a decided: "No, no, no!"

"Girl-Child! All gifts are worthy, but this woman has given her best," corrected Wahneenah, with some sternness. This baby might be a spirit, in truth, but it was the spirit of her own child and she must still hold it under authority.

At sound of the altered tones, Kitty looked up swiftly and her lip quivered. Then she replied with equal decision:

[Pg 31]

"Other Mother must not speak to me like that. Kitty is not bad. It is a pretty, pretty thing, but it is dirty. It must have its faces washed. Then I will wear it and love it all my life."

An Indian girl would have been punished for such frankness, but Lahnowenah showed no resentment. Beneath her outward manner lay a deeper meaning. To her the necklace was a talisman. From generations long dead it had come down to her, and always as a life-saver. Whoever wore it could never be harmed "by hatchet or arrow, nor by fire or flood." Yet that very morning had her own brother, the Man-Who-Kills, assured her that the child's life was a doomed one, and she had more faith in his threats than had his neighbors in their village. She knew that the one thing he respected was this heirloom, and that he would not dare injure anybody who wore it. The Sun Maid was, undoubtedly, under the guardianship of higher powers than a poor squaw's, yet it could harm nobody to take all precautions.

So, with a grim smile, the donor carried her gift to the near-by brook and held it for a few moments beneath the sluggish water; then she returned to the wigwam and again proffered it to the foundling.

"Yes. That is nice now. Kitty will wear it all the time. Won't the childrens be pleased when they see it! Maybe they may wear it, too, if the dear blanket lady says they may. Can they, Other Mother?"

[Pg 32]

The squaws exchanged significant glances. They knew it was not probable that the Fort orphan and her old playmates would ever meet again; but Wahneenah answered evasively:

"They can wear it when they come to the Sun Maid's home."

Again Lahnowenah would have put the necklace in its place, and a second time she was prevented; for at that moment the One-Who-Knows came slowly down the path between the trees, and held up her crutch warningly, as she called, in her feeble voice:

“Wait! This is a ceremony. Let all the women come.”

Lahnowenah ran to summon them, and they gathered about the tepee in expectant silence. When old Katasha exerted herself it behooved all the daughters of her tribe to be in attendance.

Wahneenah hastened to spread her best mat for the visitor’s use, and helped to seat her upon it.

“Ugh! Old feet grow clumsy and old arms weak. Take this bundle, sister of my chief, and do with its contents as seems right to thee.”

The other squaws squatted around, eagerly curious, while Wahneenah untied the threads of sinew which fastened the blanket-wrapped parcel. This outer covering itself was different from anything she had ever handled, being exquisitely soft in texture and gaudily bright in hue. It was also of a small size, such as might fit a child’s shoulders.

[Pg 33]

Within the blanket was a little tunic of creamy buckskin, gayly bedecked with a fringe of beads around the neck and arms’ eyes, while the short skirt ended in a border of fur, also bead-trimmed in an odd pattern. With it were tiny leggings that matched the tunic; and a dainty pair of moccasins completed the costume.

As garment after garment was spread out before the astonished gaze of the squaws their exclamations of surprise came loud and fast. A group of white mothers over a fashionable outfit for a modern child could not have been more enthusiastic or excited.

Yet through all this she who had brought it remained stolid and silent; till at length her manner impressed the others, and they remembered that she had said: “It is a ceremony.” Then Wahneenah motioned the squaws to be silent, and demanded quietly:

“What is this that the One-Who-Knows sees good to be done at the lodge of her chief’s daughter?”

“Take the papoose. Set her before me. Watch and see.”

[Pg 34]

Wide-eyed and smiling, and quite unafraid, the little orphan from the Fort stood, as she was directed, close beside the aged squaw while she was silently disrobed. Her baby eyes had caught the glitter of beads on the new garments, and there was never a girl-child born who did not like new clothes. When she was quite undressed, and her white body shone like a marble statue in contrast to their dusky forms, the hushed voices of the Indians burst forth again in a torrent of admiration.

But Kitty was too young to understand this, and deemed it some new game in which she played the principal part.

The prophetess held up her hand and the women ceased chattering. Then she pointed toward the brook and, herself comprehending what was meant by this gesture, the Sun Maid ran lightly to the bank and leaped in. With a scream of fear, that was very human and mother-like, Wahneenah followed swiftly. For the instant she had forgotten that the merry little one was a “spirit,” and could not drown.

Fortunately, the stream was not deep, and was delightfully sun-warmed. Besides, the Fort children had all been as much at home in the water as on the land and a daily plunge had been a matter of course. So Kitty laughed and clapped her hands as she ducked again and again into the deepest of the shallow pools, splashing and gurgling in glee, till another signal from the aged crone bade the foster-mother bring the bather back.

[Pg 35]

“No, no! Kitty likes the water. Kitty did make the Feather-lady wash the necklace. Now the old Feather-lady makes Kitty wash Kitty. No, I do not want to go. I want to stay right here in the brook.”

“But—the beautiful tunic! What about that, papoose?”

It was not at all a “spiritual” argument, yet it sufficed; and with a spring the little one was out of the water and clinging to Wahneenah’s breast.

As she was set down, dewy and glistening, she pranced and tossed her dripping hair about till the drops it scattered touched some faces that had not known the feel of water in many a day. With an “Ugh!” of disgust the squaws withdrew to a safe distance from this unsolicited bath, though remaining keenly watchful of what the One-Who-Knows might do. This was, first, the anointing of the child’s body with some unctuous substance that the old woman had brought, wrapped in a pawpaw leaf.

Since towels were a luxury unknown in the wilderness, as soon as this anointing was

finished Katasha clothed the child in her new costume and laid her hand upon the sunny head, while she muttered a charm to "preserve it from all evil and all enemies." Then, apparently exhausted by her own efforts, the prophetess directed Lahnwenah, the Giver, to put on the antique White Necklace.

[Pg 36]

This was so long that it went twice about the Sun Maid's throat and would have been promptly pulled off by her own fingers, as an adornment quite too warm for the season had not the fastening been one she could not undo and the string, which held the ornaments, of strong sinew.

Then Wahneenah took the prophetess into her wigwam, and prepared a meal of dried venison meat, hulled corn, and the juice of wild berries pressed out and sweetened. Katasha's visits were of rare occurrence, and it had been long since the Woman-Who-Mourns had played the hostess, save in this late matter of her foster-child; so for a time she forgot all save the necessity of doing honor to her guest. When she did remember the Sun Maid and went in anxious haste to the doorway, the child had vanished.

"She is gone! The Great Spirit has recalled her!" cried Wahneenah, in distress.

"Fear not, the White Papoose is safe. She will live long and her hands will be full. As they fill they will overflow. She is a river that enriches yet suffers no loss. Patience. Patience. You have taken joy into your home, but you have also taken sorrow. Accept both, and wait what will come."

[Pg 37]

Even Wahneenah, to whom many deferred, felt that she herself must pay deference to this venerable prophetess, and so remained quiet in her wigwam as long as her guest chose to rest there. This was until the sun was near its setting and till the foster-mother's heart had grown sick with anxiety. So, no sooner had Katasha's figure disappeared among the trees than Wahneenah set out at frantic speed to find the little one.

"Have you seen the Sun Maid?" she demanded of the few she met; and at last one set her on the right track.

"Yes. She chased a gray squirrel that had been wounded. It was still so swift it could just outstrip her, and she followed beyond the village, away along the bank. Osceolo passed near, and saw the squirrel seek refuge in the lodge of Spotted Adder. The Sun Maid also entered."

"The lodge of Spotted Adder!" repeated Wahneenah, slowly. "Then only the Great Spirit can preserve her!"

CHAPTER IV.

[Pg 38]

THE WHITE BOW.

Wahneenah had lived so entirely within the seclusion of her own lodge that she had become almost a stranger in the village. It was long since she had travelled so far as the isolated hut into which the youth, Osceolo, had seen the Sun Maid disappear, and as she approached it her womanly heart smote her with pain and self-reproach, while she reflected thus:

"Has it come to this? Spotted Adder, the Mighty, whose wigwam was once the richest of all my father's tribe. I remember that its curtains of fine skins were painted by the Man-Of-Visions himself, and told the history of the Pottawatomies since the beginning of the world. Many a heap of furs and peltries went in payment for their adornment, but—where are they now! While I have sat in darkness with my sorrow new things have become old. Yet he is accursed. Else the trouble would not have befallen him. I have heard the women talking, through my dreams. He has lain down and cannot again arise. And the White Papoose is with him! Will she be accursed, too? Fool! Why do I fear? Is she not a child of the sky, and forever safe, as Katasha said? But the touch of her arms was warm, like the clasp of the son I bore, and—"

[Pg 39]

The mother's reverie ended in a very human distress. There was a rumor among her people that whoever came near the Spotted Adder would instantly be infected by whatever was the dread disease from which he suffered. That the Sun Maid's wonderful loveliness should receive a blemish seemed a thing intolerable and, in another instant, regardless of her own danger, Wahneenah had crept beneath the broken flap of bark, into a scene of squalor indescribable. Even this squaw, who knew quite well how wretched the tepees of her

poorer tribesmen often were, was appalled now; and though the torn skins and strips of bark which covered the hut admitted plenty of light and air, she gasped for breath before she could speak.

"My Girl-Child! My Sun Maid! Come away. Wrong, wrong to have entered here, to have made me so anxious. Come."

"No, no, Other Mother! Kitty cannot come. Kitty must stay. See the poor gray squirrel? It has broked its leg. It went so—hoppety-pat, hoppety-pat, as fast as fast. I thought it was playing and just running away. So Kitty runned too. Kitty always runs away when Kitty can."

"Ugh! I believe you. Come."

[Pg 40]

"No, Kitty must stay. Poor sick man needs Kitty. I did give him a nice drink. Berries, too. Kitty putted them in his mouth all the time. Poor man!"

Wahneenah's anger rose. Was she, a chief's daughter, to be thus flouted by a baby, a pale-face at that? Surely, there was nothing whatever spiritual now about this self-willed, spoiled creature, whom an unkind fate had imposed upon her. She stooped to lift the little one and compel obedience, but was met by a smile so fearless and happy that her arms fell to her sides.

"That's a good Other Mother. Poor sick man has wanted to turn him over, and he couldn't. Kitty tried and tried, and Kitty couldn't. Now my Other Mother's come. She can. She is so beau'ful strong and kind!"

There was a grunt, which might have been a groan, from the corner of the hut where the Spotted Adder lay; and a convulsive movement of the contorted limbs as he vainly strove to change his uncomfortable position. Wahneenah watched him, with the contempt which the women of her race feel for any masculine weakness, and did not offer to assist. His poverty she pitied, and would have relieved, though his physical infirmity was repugnant to her. She would not touch him.

But the Sun Maid was on her feet at once, tenderly laying upon the ground the wounded squirrel which she had held upon her lap. The wild thing had, apparently, lost all its timidity and now fully trusted the child who had caressed its fur and murmured soft, pitying sounds, in that low voice of hers, which the Fort people had sometimes felt was an unknown language. Certainly, she had had a strange power, always, over any animal that came near her and this case was no exception. Her white friends would not have been surprised by the incident, but Wahneenah was, and it brought back her belief that this was a child of supernatural gifts. She even began to feel ashamed of her treatment of Spotted Adder, though she waited to see what his small nurse would do.

[Pg 41]

"Poor sick Feather-man! Is you hurted now? Does your face ache you to make it screw itself all this way?" and she made a comical grimace, imitative of the sufferer's expression.

"Ugh! Ugh!"

"Yes; Kitty hears. Other Mother, that is all the word he says. All the time it is just 'Ugh! Ugh!' I wish he would talk Kitty's talk. Make him do it, Other Mother. Please!"

"That I cannot do. He knows it not. But he has a speech I understand. What need you, Spotted Adder?" she concluded, in his own dialect.

"Ugh! It is the voice of Wahneenah, the Happy. What does she here, in the lodge of the outcast? It is many a moon since the footfall of a woman sounded on my floor. Why does one come now?"

[Pg 42]

"In pursuit of this child, the adopted daughter of our tribe, whom the Black Partridge himself has given me. It was ill of you, accursed, to wile her hither with your unholy spells."

"I wiled her not. It was the gray squirrel. Broken in his life, as am I, the once Mighty. Many wounded creatures seek shelter here. It is a sanctuary. They alone fear not the miserable one."

"Does not the tribe see to it that you have food and drink set within your wigwam, once during each journey of the sun? I have so heard."

"Ugh! Food and drink. Sometimes I cannot reach them. They are not even pushed beyond the door flap, or what is left of it. They are all afraid. All. Yet they are fools. That which has befallen me may happen to each when his time comes. It is the sickness of the bones. There is no contagion in it. But it twists the straight limbs into torturing curves and it rends the body with agony. One would be glad to die, but death—like friendship—holds itself aloof.

Ugh! The drink! The drink!"

The Sun Maid could understand the language of the eyes, if not the lips, and she followed their wistful gaze toward the clay bowl from which she had before given him the water. But it was empty now, and seizing it with all her strength, for it was heavy and awkward in shape, she sped out of the wigwam toward a spring she had discovered.

[Pg 43]

"Four, ten, lots of times Kitty has brought the nice water, and every time the poor, sick Feather-man has drunk it up. He must be terrible thirsty, and so is Kitty. I guess I will drink first, this time."

Filling the utensil, she struggled to lift it to her own lips, but it was rudely pushed away.

"Papoose! Would you drink to your own death? The thing is accursed, I tell you!"

"Why, Other Mother! It is just as clean as clean. Kitty did wash and wash it long ago. It was all dirty, worse than my new necklace, but it is clean now. Do you want a drink, Other Mother? Is you thirsty, too, like the sick one and Kitty?"

"If I were, it would be long before I touched my lips to that cup."

"Would it? Now I will fill it again. Then you must take it, Other Mother, and quick, quick, back to that raggedy house. Kitty is tired, she has come here and there so many, many times."

"Is it here you have spent this long day, papoose?"

"I did come here when the gray squirrel runned away. I did stay ever since."

[Pg 44]

Wahneenah's heart sank. But to her credit it was that, for the time being, she forgot the stories she had heard, and remembered only that there was suffering which she must relieve. It might be that already the soul of Spotted Adder was winged for its long flight, and could carry for her to that wide Unknown, where her own dead tarried, some message from her, the bereft. As this thought flashed through her brain she seized the bowl and hastened with it to the lodge.

This time, also, she forgot everything but the possibility that had come to her, and kneeling beside the old Indian she held the dish to his mouth.

"It is the fever, the fever! A little while and the awful chill will come again. The racking pain, the thirst! Ugh! Wahneenah, the Happy, is braver than her sisters. Her courage shall prove her blessing. The lips of the dying speak truth."

"And the ears of the dying? Can they still hear and remember? Will the Spotted Adder take my message to the men I have lost? Sire and son, there was no Pottawatomie ever born so brave as they. Tell them I have been faithful. I have been the Woman-Who-Mourns. I have kept to my darkened wigwam and remembered only them, till she came, this child you have seen. She is a gift from the sky. She has come to comfort and sustain. She was born a pale-face, but she has a red man's heart. She is all brave and true and dauntless. None fear her, and she fears none. I believe that they have sent her to me. I believe that in her they both live. Ask them if this is so."

[Pg 45]

"There is no need to ask, Wahneenah, the Happy. Happy, indeed, who has been blessed with a gift so gracious. She is the Merciful. The Unafraid. She will pass in safety through many perils. All day she has sat beside me whom all others shun. She has moistened my lips, she has kept the gnats from stinging, she has sung in her unknown tongue of that land whither I go, and soon,—the land of the sky from whence she came. The light of the morning is on her hair and the dusk of evening in her eyes. As she has ministered to me, the deserted, the solitary, so she will minister unto multitudes. I can see them crowding, crowding; the generations yet unborn. The vision of the dying is true."

On the floor beside them the Sun Maid sat, caressing the wounded squirrel. Through the torn curtains the waning sunlight slanted and lighted the bleak interior. It seemed to rest most brilliantly upon the child, and in the eyes of the Spotted Adder she was like a lamp set to illumine his path through the dark valley, an unexpected messenger from the Great Father, showing him beforehand a glimpse of the beauty and tenderness of the Land Beyond. Yet even if a spirit, she wore a human shape, and she would have human needs. She would be often in danger against which she must be guarded.

[Pg 46]

"Wahneenah, fetch me the bow and quiver."

"Which?" she asked, in surprise, though in reality she knew.

"Is there one that should be named with mine? The White Bow from the land of eternal

snow; the arrows winged with feathers from the white eagle's wing,—light as thistle down, strong as love, invincible as death."

The Spotted Adder had been the orator of his tribe. Men had listened to his words in admiration, wondering whence he obtained the eloquence which moved them; and at that moment it was as if all the power of his earlier manhood had returned.

The White Bow was well known among all the Pottawatomie tribes. Even the Sacs and Foxes had heard of it and feared it. It was older than the Giver's historic necklace, and tradition said that it had been hurled to earth on the breath of a mighty snowstorm. It had fallen before the wigwam of the Spotted Adder's ancestor and had been handed down from father to son, as fair and sound as on the day of its first bestowal. None knew the wood of which it was fashioned, which many could bend and twist but none could break. The string which first bound it had never worn nor wasted, and not a feather had ever fallen from the arrows in the quiver, nor had their number ever diminished, no matter how often sped. It was the one possession left to the neglected warrior and had been protected by its own reputed origin. There were daring thieves in many a tribe, but never a thief so bold he would risk his soul in the seizure of the White Bow. [Pg 47]

Wahneenah felt no choice but to comply with the Indian's command. She took the bow and its accoutrements from the sheltered niche in the tepee where it hung; the only spot, it seemed, that had not been subjected to the destruction of the elements. She had never held it in her hand before, and she wondered at its lightness as she carried it to its owner, and placed it in the gnarled fingers which would never string it again.

"Good! Call the child to stand here."

With awe, Wahneenah motioned the little one within the red man's reach. The last vestige of fear or repulsion had vanished from her own mind before the majesty of this hour.

"Does the poor, sick Feather-man want another drink? Shall Kitty fetch it now?"

"Hush, papoose!"

He would have opened the small white hand and clasped it about the bow, which reached full three times the height of the child, and along whose beautiful length she gazed in wonder, but he could not. [Pg 48]

"Take it, Girl-Child. It is a gift. It is more magical than the necklace. Take it, hold it tight—that will please him—and say what is in your heart."

"Oh, the beau'ful bow! Is it for Kitty? To keep, forever and ever? Why, it is bigger than that one of the Sauganash, and far prettier than Winnemeg's. It cannot be for Kitty, just little Kitty girl."

"Yes; it is."

Then the Sun Maid laid it reverently down, and catching hold her scant tunic made the old-fashioned curtsey which her Fort friends had taught her.

"Thank you, poor Feather-man. I will take care of it very nice. I won't break it, not once."

"Ugh!" grunted the Indian, with satisfaction. Then he closed his eyes as if he would sleep.

"Good-night, Spotted Adder, the Mighty. I thank you, also, on the child's behalf. It is the second gift this day of talismans that must protect. Surely, she will be clothed in safety. Harken to me. I must go home. The Sun Maid must be fed and put to sleep. But I will return. I am no longer afraid. You were my father's friend. All that a woman's hand can now do for your comfort shall be done." [Pg 49]



THE GIFT OF THE WHITE BOW. Page 48.

But the Spotted Adder made no sign, and whether he did or did not hear her, Wahneenah never knew. She walked swiftly homeward, bearing the White Papoose upon one strong arm and the White Bow upon the other. Yet she noticed, with a smile, that the child still clung tenderly to her own burden of the injured squirrel, and that she was infinitely more careful of it and its suffering than of the wonderful gift she had received.

Long before her own tepee was reached the Sun Maid was fast asleep; and as the small head rested more and more heavily upon Wahneenah's shoulder, and the soft breath of childhood fanned her throat, the woman again doubted the spiritual origin of the foundling, and felt fresh gratitude for its simple humanity.

"Well, whoever and whatever she is, she is already thrice protected. By her Indian dress, by her White Bow, and by Lahnwenah's White Necklace. She is quite safe from every enemy now."

"Not quite," said a voice at Wahneenah's elbow.

But it was only Osceolo, the Simple. Nobody minded him or his words.

CHAPTER V.

[Pg 50]

HORSES: WHITE AND BLACK.

On the morning of the 15th of August, 1812, the sun rose in unclouded splendor, and transformed the great Lake Michigan into a sheet of gold.

"It is a good omen," said one of the women at Fort Dearborn, as she looked out over the shining water.

But only the merry children responded to her attempted cheerfulness.

"We shall have a grand ride. I wish nobody need make the journey on foot; and I'm glad, for once, I'm just a boy, and not a grown-up man."

"Even a boy may have to do a man's work, this day, Gaspar Keith. I wish that you were strong enough to hold a gun; but you have been taught how to use an arrow. Is your quiver well supplied?"

That his captain should speak to him, a child, so seriously, impressed the lad profoundly. His ruddy cheek paled, and a fit of trembling seized him. A sombre memory rose to frighten him, and he caught his breath as he asked:

[Pg 51]

"Do you think there will be any trouble, Captain Heald? I thought I heard the soldiers saying that the Pottawatomies would take care of us."

"Who trusts to an Indian's care leans on a broken reed. You know that from your own experience. Surely, you must remember your earlier childhood, even though you have been forbidden to talk of it here."

"Oh! I do, I do! Not often in the daytime, but in the long, long nights. The other children sleep. They have never seen what I did, or heard the dreadful yells that come in my dreams and wake me up. Then I seem to see the flames, the blood, the dead white faces. Oh, sir, don't tell me that must come again: don't, don't! I cannot bear it. I would rather die right now and here—safe in our Fort."

Instantly the soldier regretted his own words. But the lad was one of the larger children at the garrison and should be incited, he thought, to take some share in the matter of defence, should defence be necessary. He had not known that under Gaspar's quiet, almost sullen demeanor, had lain such hidden experiences. Else he would have talked them over with the boy, and have tried to make him forget instead of remember his early wrongs.

For Gaspar Keith was the son of an Indian trader, and had been born in an isolated cabin far to the northwest of his present home. The little cabin had been overflowing with young life and gayety, even in that wilderness. His mother was a Frenchwoman of the happiest possible temperament and, because no other society was available, had made comrades of her children. "What we did in Montreal" was the type of what she attempted to do under her more restricted conditions. So, for a long season of peace, the Keiths sang and made merry over every trifling incident. Did the father bring home an extra load of game, at once there was a feast prepared and all the friendly Indians, the only neighbors, were invited to come and partake.

[Pg 52]

On one such occasion, when a red-skinned guest had brought with him a bottle of the forbidden "fire-water," a quarrel ensued. The trader was of sterner sort than his light-hearted wife, and of violent temper. In his own house his word was law, and he remonstrated with the Indian for his action. To little Gaspar, in his memories, it seemed but a moment's transition from a laughing group about a well-spread table to a scene of horror. He saw—but he could never afterward speak in any definite way of what he saw. Only he knew that almost before he had pushed back from his place he had been caught up on the shoulder of the chief Winnemeg, also a guest; and in another moment was riding behind that warrior at breakneck speed toward the little garrison, in pursuit of shelter for himself and aid for his defenceless family.

[Pg 53]

The shelter was speedily found, but the aid came too late; and for a time the women of the Fort had a difficult task in comforting the fright-crazed boy. However, they were used to such incidents. Their courage and generosity were unlimited, and they persevered in their care till he recovered and repaid them by his faithful devotion and service.

The manner of his arrival among them was never discussed in his presence, and as he gradually came to act like other, happier children, they hoped he had outgrown his troubles. He had now been at the Fort for two years, during all which time he had gone but short distances from it. Yet even in his restricted outings he had picked up much knowledge of useful things from the settlers near, and of things apparently not so useful from his red-faced friends. So it happened that there was not, probably, even any Indian boy who could string a bow or aim an arrow better than Gaspar.

The Sauganash himself had presented the little fellow with a bow of finest workmanship, and had taught him the rare trick of shooting at fixed paces. It had been the delight of the garrison to watch him, in their hours of recreation, accomplish this feat. Sighting some bird flying high overhead, the lad would take swift aim and discharge each arrow from his quiver at a certain count. There never seemed any variation in the distances between the discharged arrows as they made the arc—upward with unerring aim, and downward in the body of the bird; hitting it, one by one, at proportionate intervals of time and space.

[Pg 54]

The women thought it a cruel sport, and would have prevented it if they could; but the men knew that it was a wonderful achievement, and that many fine archers among the surrounding tribes would fail in accomplishing it. Therefore, it was natural that the Fort's commandant should be anxious to know if his ward's equipment were in order, on a morning so full of possible dangers as this.

"There is no talk of dying, Gaspar. You are a man, child, if not full grown. You are brave and skilful. You have a clear head, too; so listen closely to what I say. In our garrison are not more than forty men able to fight. There are a dozen women and twenty children, of which none have been trained to use a bow as you can. Besides these helpless ones, there are

many sick soldiers to occupy the wagons. I know you expected to be with your mates, but I have another plan for you. I want you to ride Tempest, and to sling your bow on your saddle horn."

"Ride—Tempest! Why, Captain Heald! Nobody—that is, nobody but you—can ride him. I was never on his back——" [Pg 55]

"It's time you were. Lad, do you know how many Indians are in camp near us, or have broken camp this morning to join us?"

"Oh! quite a lot, I guess."

"Just so. A whole 'lot.' About five hundred, or a few less."

The two were busily at work, packing the last of the few possessions that the commandant must convey to Fort Wayne, and which he could entrust to no other hands than his own and those of this deft-fingered lad, and they made no pause while they talked. Indeed, Gaspar's movements were even swifter now, as if he were eager to be through and off.

"Five hundred, sir? They are friendly Indians, though. Black Partridge and Winnemeg——"

"Are but as straws against the current. Gaspar, I shall need a boy who can be trusted. These red neighbors of ours are not so 'friendly' as they seem. They are dissatisfied. They mean mischief, I fear, though God forbid! Well, we are soldiers, and we cannot shrink. You must ride Tempest. You must tell nobody why. You can keep at a short distance from our main band, and act as scout. Captain Wells will march in front with his Miamis, upon whose assistance—the Miamis', I mean—I do not greatly count. They are cowards. They fear the 'canoe men.' Well, what do you say, my son?" [Pg 56]

Gaspar caught his breath. His own fear of an Indian had been nearly overcome by the friendship of those chiefs who were so constantly at the Fort; but the night before had brought him a recurrence of the terrifying visions which were as much memories as dreams. After such a night he was scarcely himself in courage, greatly as he desired to please the captain. Then he reflected how high was the honor designed him. He, a little boy, just past ten and going on eleven for a whole fortnight now, and—of course he'd do it!

"Well, I'll ride him. That is, I'll try. Like as not, he'll shake me off first try."

"Make the second try, then. You know the copy in your writing-book?"

"Yes, sir. I wrote the whole page of it, yesterday, and the chaplain said it was well done. Shall I get him now? Are you almost ready?"

The commandant looked at the waiting wagons, the assembled company, the women and little ones who were so dear and in such a perilous case. For a moment his heart sank, stout soldier though he was, and it was no detriment to his manhood that a fervent if silent prayer escaped him.

"Yes, fetch him if you can. If not, I'll come." [Pg 57]

Tempest was a gelding of fine Kentucky breed. There were others of his line at the garrison, and upon them some of the women even were to ride. But Tempest was the king of the stables. He was the master's half-broken pet and recreation. For sterner uses, as for that morning's work, there was a better trained animal, and on this the commandant would make his own journey.

A smile curled the officer's lips despite his anxiety as, presently, out from the stables galloped a bareheaded lad, clinging desperately to Tempest's back, who tried as desperately to shake off his unusual burden. But the saddle girth was well secured, and the rider clung like a burr. His bow was slung crosswise before him and his full quiver hung at his back.

A cheer went up. The sight was as helpful to the soldiers as it was amusing, and they fell into line with a ready step as the band struck up—what was that tune? *The Dead March*? By whose ill-judgment this?

Well, there was no time to question. Any music helps to keep a line of men in step, and there was the determined Gaspar cavorting and wheeling before and around the soldiers in a way to provoke a mirth that no dismal strain could dispel. So the gates were flung open, and in orderly procession, each man in his place, each heart set upon its duty, the little garrison marched through them for the last time. [Pg 58]

Of what took place within the next dread hours, of the Indians' treachery and the white men's courage, there is no need to give the details. It is history. But of brave Gaspar Keith

on the wild gelding, Tempest, history makes no mention. There is many a hero whose name is unknown, and the lad was a hero that day. He did what he could, and his empty quiver, his broken bow, told their own story to a Pottawatomie warrior who came upon the boy just as the sun crossed the meridian on that memorable day.

Gaspar was lying unconscious beneath a clump of forest trees, and Tempest grazing quietly beside him. There was no wound upon the lad, and whether he had been thrown to the ground by the animal, or had slipped from his saddle out of sheer weariness, even he could never tell.

The Indian who found him was none other than the Man-Who-Kills; and, from a perfectly safe distance for himself, he had watched the young pale-face with admiration and covetousness.

“By and by, when the fight is over, I will get him. He shall be my prisoner. The black gelding is finer than any horse ever galloped into Muck-otey-pokee. They shall both be mine. I will tell a big tale at the council fires of my brothers, and they shall account me brave. Talking is easier than fighting, any time, and why should I peril my life, following this mad war-path of theirs to that far-away Fort Wayne? Enough is a plenty. I have hidden lots of plunder while the men of my tribe did their killing, and the Man-Who-Kills will always be wise, as he is always brave. I could shoot as fast and as far as anybody if—if I wished. But I do not wish. It is too much trouble. So I will tie the boy on the gelding’s back and lead them home in triumph. Will my squaw, Sorah, flout me now? No. No, indeed! And there is no need to say that I dared not mount the beast myself. But I can lead him all right, and when the Woman-Who-Mourns, that haughty sister of my chief, sees me coming she will say: ‘Behold! how merciful is this mighty warrior!’”

[Pg 59]

These reflections of the astute Indian, as he rested upon the shaded sward, afforded him such satisfaction that he did, indeed, handle poor Gaspar with more gentleness than might have been expected; because such a person commonly mistakes brutality for bravery.

Oddly enough, Tempest offered no resistance to the red man’s plan, and allowed himself to be burdened by the helpless Gaspar and led slowly to the Indian village. There the party aroused less interest than the Man-Who-Kills had anticipated, for other prisoners had already been brought in and, besides this, something had occurred that seemed to the women far more important.

[Pg 60]

This was the fresh grief of Wahneenah as she roamed from wigwam to wigwam, searching for her adopted daughter and imploring help to find her. For again the Sun Maid had disappeared, as suddenly and more completely than on the previous day though after much the same manner.

The child had been attending her injured squirrel and giving her bowls of orchids fresh drinks, upon the threshold mat of her new home, and her indulgent foster-mother had gone to fetch from the stream the water needed for the latter purpose. At the brook’s edge she had stopped, “just for a moment,” to discuss with the other squaws the news of the massacre that was fast coming to them by the straggling bands of returning braves.

But the brief absence was long enough to have worked the mischief. The small runaway had left her posies and her squirrel and departed, nobody could guess whither.

Till at last again came Osceolo, the mischievous, and remarked, indifferently:

“The Woman-Who-Mourns may save her steps. The White Papoose and the Snowbird are far over the prairie while the women search.”

“Osceolo! You are the son of the evil spirit! You bring distress in your hand as a gift! But take care what you say now. You know, as I know, that nobody can mount the White Snowbird and live. Or if one could succeed and pass beyond the village borders, it would be a ride to some far land whence there is no return. What is the mare, Snowbird, but a creature bewitched? or the home of the soul of a dead maiden, who would rather live thus with her people than without them as a spirit in the Great Beyond? You know all this, and yet you tell me——”

[Pg 61]

“That the Sun Maid is flying now on the Snowbird’s back toward the setting sun, who is her father.”

“How do you know this?”

“I saw it.”

“Who took her to the Snowbird’s corral? Who? Osceolo, torment of our tribe, it was you! It was you! Boy, do you know what you have done? Do you know that out there, on the prairie

where you have sent her, the spirit of murder is abroad? Not a pale-face shall escape. She was safe here, where your own chief, the Black Partridge, placed her. Hear me. If harm befalls her, if by moonrise she is not restored to me, you shall bear the punishment. You——”

By a gesture he stopped her. Now thoroughly frightened, the mischievous boy put up his arms as if to ward off the coming threat. Half credulous, and half doubtful that the Sun Maid was more than mortal, he had made a test for himself. He had remembered the Snowbird, fretting its high spirit out within the closed paddock, and a daring notion had seized him. It was this:

[Pg 62]

“While the Woman-Who-Mourns gossips with her neighbors, I’ll catch up the papoose and carry her there. She’ll come fast enough. She ran away yesterday, and she played with me before the Spotted Adder’s hut. She trusts everybody. I’ll have some fun, even if my father didn’t let me go with him to the camp yonder.”

Among all nations boyhood is the same—plays the same wild pranks, with equal disregard of consequences; and Osceolo would far rather have had a good time than a good supper. He thought he was having a perfectly fascinating good time when he bound a long blanket over the Snowbird’s back and then fastened Kitty Briscoe in the folds of the blanket. He had laughed gayly as he clapped his hands and set the mare free, and the little one riding her had laughed and clapped also. He had watched them out of sight over the prairie, and had felt quite proud of himself.

“If she is a spirit she’ll come back safe; and if she’s nothing but a white man’s baby—why, that’s all she is. Only a squaw child at that, though the silly women have made such ado. I wonder—will I ever see her again? Well, I’ll go around by Wahneenah’s tepee, after a while, and enjoy the worry. It’s the smartest thing I’ve done yet; and she did look cunning, too. She wasn’t a bit afraid—she isn’t afraid of anything—which makes her better than most girl papooses, and she was laughing as hard as I was when she went away.”

[Pg 63]

With these thoughts, Osceolo had come back to the spot where Wahneenah met him and demanded if he knew aught of her charge; and there was no hilarity in his face now as he watched her enter her wigwam and drop its curtains behind her. He suddenly remembered—many things; and at thought of the Black Partridge’s wrath he turned faint and sick.

But the test had been made and no regret could recall it.

Meanwhile, there came into his mind the fact: a black horse had just entered the village and a white one had gone out of it. The narrow superstition in which he had been reared taught him that the one brought misfortune and the other carried away happiness; and, in a redoubled terror at his own act and its consequences, Osceolo turned and fled.

CHAPTER VI.

[Pg 64]

THE THREE GIFTS.

“

The Black Partridge has served his white friends faithfully. He should now remember his own people, and rest his heart among them,” said the White Pelican as he rode homeward beside his chief, not many hours after the massacre of the sandhills.

The elder warrior lifted his bowed head, and regarded his nephew in sadness. His eyes had that far-away, dreamy look which was unusual among his race and had given him, at times, a strange power over his fellows. Because, unfortunately, the dreams were, after all, very practical, and the silent visions were of things that might have been averted.

“The White Pelican, also, did well. He protected those whom he wished to kill. He did it for my sake. It shall not be forgotten, though the effort was useless. The end has begun.”

The younger brave touched his fine horse impatiently, and the animal sprang forward a few paces. As he did so, the rider caught a gleam of something white skimming along the horizon line, and wondered what it might be. But he had set out to attend his chief and, curbing his mount by a strong pull, whirled about and rode back to the side of Black Partridge.

[Pg 65]

“What is the end that has begun, Man-Who-Cannot-Lie?”

“The downfall of our nations. They have been as the trees of the forest and the grasses of

the prairie. The trees shall be felled and the grasses shall be cut. The white man's hand shall accomplish both."

"For once, the Truth-Teller is mistaken. We will wrest our lands back from the grasp of the pale-faces. We will learn their arts and conquer them with their own weapons. We will destroy their villages—few they are and widely scattered. Pouf! This morning's work is but a show of what is yet to come. As we did then, so we will do in the future. I, too, would go with my tribe to that other fort far beyond the Great Lake. I would help again to wipe away these usurpers from our homes, as I wipe—this, from my horse's flank. Only my promise to remain with my chief and my kinsman prevents."

The youth had stooped and brushed a bit of grass bloom from the animal's shining skin; and as he raised his head again he looked inquiringly into the stern face of the other. Thus, indirectly, was he begging permission to join the contemplated raid upon another distant garrison. [Pg 66]

Black Partridge understood but ignored the silent petition. He had other, higher plans for the White Pelican. He would himself train the courageous youth to be as wise and diplomatic as he was brave. When the training was over, he should be sent to that distant land where the Great Father of the white men dwelt, and should there make a plea for the whole Indian race.

"Would not a man who saved all this"—sweeping his arm around toward every point of the prairie—"to his people be better than one who killed a half-dozen pale-faces yet lost his home?"

"Why—yes," said the other, regretfully. "But——"

"But it is the last chance. The time draws near when not an Indian wigwam will dot this grand plain. Already, in the talk of the white men, there is the plan forming to send us westward. Many a day's journey will lie between us and this beloved spot. Our canoes will soon vanish from the Great Lake, and we shall cease to glide over our beautiful river. Hear me. It is fate. These people who have come to oust us from our birthright have been sent by the Great Spirit. It is His will. We have had our one day of life and of possession. They are to have theirs. Who will come after them and destroy them? They——" [Pg 67]

But the White Pelican could endure no more. The Black Partridge was not often in such a mood as this, stern and sombre though he might sometimes be, nor had his prophecies so far an outlook. That the Indians should ever be driven entirely away by their white enemies seemed a thing impossible to the stout-hearted young brave, and he spoke his mind freely.

"My father has had sorrow this day, and his eyes are too dim to see clearly. Or he has eaten of the white man's food and it has turned his brain. Were it not for his dim eyesight, I would ask him to tell the White Pelican what that creature might be that darts and wheels and prances yonder"; and he pointed toward the western horizon.

Now there was a hidden taunt in the warrior's words. No man in the whole Pottawatomie nation was reputed to have such clearness of eyesight as the Black Partridge. The readiness with which he could distinguish objects so distant as to be invisible to other men had passed into a proverb among his neighbors, who believed that his inward "visions" in some manner furthered this extraordinary outward eyesight.

The chief flashed a scornful glance upon his attendant and, quite naturally, toward the designated object. White Pelican saw his gaze become intent and his indifference give way to amazement. Then, with a cry of alarm, that was half incredulity, the Black Partridge wheeled and struck out swiftly toward the west. [Pg 68]

"Ugh! It looked unusual, even to me, but my father has recognized something beyond my guessing. He rides like the wind, yet his horse was well spent an hour ago."

Regardless of his own recent eagerness to be at Muck-otey-pokee, and relating the day's doings to an admiring circle of stay-at-homes, the young brave followed his leader. In a brief time they came up with a wild, high-spirited white horse, which rushed frantically from point to point in the vain hope of shaking from its back a burden to which it was not used.

"Souls of my ancestors! It is—the Snowbird!"

"It is the Sun Maid!" returned Black Partridge.

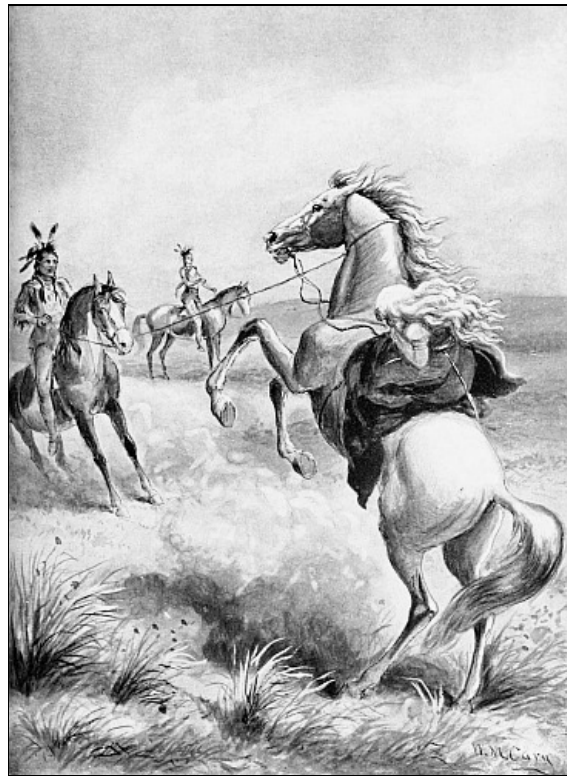
But for all his straining vision, White Pelican could not make out that it was indeed that wonderful child who was wrapped and bundled in the long blanket and lashed to the Snowbird's back by many thongs of leather. Not until, by one dexterous swoop of his

horsehair rope, the chief collared the terrified mare and brought her to her knees.

“Cut the straps. Set the child free.”

The brave promptly obeyed; while the chief, holding the struggling mare with one hand, carefully drew the Sun Maid from her swathing blanket and laid her across his shoulder. Her little figure hung limp and relaxed where it was placed, and he saw that she had fainted.

[Pg 69]



SNOWBIRD AND THE SUN MAID. Page 68.

“Take her to that row of alder bushes yonder. There should be water there. I’ll finish what has been begun, and prove whether this is a beast bewitched, or only a vicious mare that needs a master.”

The White Pelican would have preferred the horse-breaking to acting as child’s nurse to this uncanny small maiden who had ridden a creature none other in his tribe would have attempted. But he did as he was bidden and laid the little one down in the cooling shade of the alders. Then he put the water on her face and forced a few drops between her parted lips. After that he fixed all his attention on the efforts of Black Partridge to bring into subjection the unbroken mare.

However, the efforts were neither very severe nor long continued. Like many another, the Snowbird had received a worse name than she deserved, and she had already been well wearied by her wild gallop on the prairie. She had done her best to throw and kill the child which Osceolo had bound upon her back, but she had only succeeded in tightening the bands and exhausting both herself and her unconscious rider. More than that, Black Partridge had a will stronger than hers and it conquered.

[Pg 70]

“Well, I did ride a long, long way, didn’t I? Feather-man, did you put Kitty on the nice cool grass? Will you give Kitty another drink of water? I guess I’m pretty tired, ain’t I?”

These words recalled the White Pelican’s attention to his charge.

“Ugh! It’s a wonder you’re alive.”

“Is it? I rode till I got so sleepy I couldn’t see. The sky kept whirling and whirling, and the sun did come right down into my face. And I got so twisted up I couldn’t breathe. I guess—I guess I don’t much love that Osceolo. He said it would be fun, and it was—a while. But he didn’t come, too, and—I’m glad I’m here now. Who’s that walking? Oh! my own Black Partridge, the nicest Feather-man there is!”

The Sun Maid sat up and lifted her arms to be taken, while she bestowed upon the chief one of her sweetest smiles. But he received it gravely, and regarded the child in her new Indian dress with critical scrutiny. Who had thus clothed her he could not surmise, for too short a time had elapsed since he had taken her to his village for his sister to prepare these well-

fitting garments. Finally, superstition began to influence him also, as it had influenced the weaker-minded people at Muck-otey-pokee, as he spoke to the White Pelican, rather than to the child.

[Pg 71]

“Place her upon the Snowbird. They belong to each other, though I know not how they found one another.”

“Osceolo,” answered the younger brave, tersely.

“Humph! Then there’s more of black spirits than white in this affair. However, I have spoken. Place the Sun Maid on the Snowbird’s back.”

Kitty would have objected and strongly; but there was something so unusually stern in the elder warrior’s face and so full of hatred in that of the younger that she was bewildered and wisely kept silence.

Having made a comfortable saddle out of the long blanket, they seated her again upon the white mare’s back, and each on either side, they led her slowly toward Muck-otey-pokee. But the little one had again fallen asleep long before they reached it, and now there could have been no gentler mount for so helpless a rider than this suddenly tamed White Snowbird.

At the entrance to the village Wahneenah met them. She had again put on her mourning garb, and her hair was unplaited, while the lines of her face had deepened perceptibly. She had lamented to Katasha:

“The Great Spirit sent me back my lost ones in the form of the Sun Maid, and because of my own carelessness and sternness He has recalled her. Now is our separation complete, and not even in the Unknown Land shall I find them again.”

[Pg 72]

But the One-Who-Knows had answered, impatiently:

“Leave be. Whatever is must happen. The child is safe. Nothing can harm her. Has she not the three gifts? The White Necklace from the shore of the Sea-without-end?^[1] The White Bow from the eternal north? and the White Snowbird, into which entered the white soul of a blameless virgin? Have I not clothed her with the garb of our people? You are a fool, Wahneenah. Go hide in your wigwam, and keep silence.”

This was good advice, but Wahneenah couldn’t take it. She was too human, too motherly, and under all her superstition, too sure of the Sun Maid’s real flesh-and-blood existence to be easily comforted. So she went, instead, to the outskirts of the settlement to watch for what might be coming of good or ill. And so she came all the sooner to find her lost darling, and she vowed within herself that never again, so long as her own life should last, would she lose sight of that precious golden head.

“My Girl-Child! My White Papoose, Beloved! Found again! But how could you?”

“I did get runned away with myself this time, nice Other Mother. Don’t look at Kitty that way. Kitty is very hungry. Nice Black Partridge Feather-man did find me, riding and riding and riding. The pretty Snowbird had lots of wings, I guess, for she flew and flew and flew. But I didn’t see Osceolo. He couldn’t have come, could he? I thought he was coming, too, when he clapped his hands and shooed me off so fast. Where is he?”

[Pg 73]

That was what several were desirous to learn. The affair had turned out much better than might have been expected, but there would be a day of reckoning for the village torment when he and its chief should chance to meet.

Knowing this, Osceolo remained in hiding for some time. Until, indeed, his curiosity got the better of his discretion. This happened when the Man-Who-Kills came stealing to his retreat and begged his assistance.

“I want you to take my white boy-captive and lead him to the tepee of the Woman-Who-Mourns. My wife Sorah will not have him in her wigwam. She says that from the moment that other white child, the Sun Maid, came to the lodge of Wahneenah, there has been trouble without end, even though all the three charms against evil have been bestowed upon her. There are no charms for this dark boy, but there’s always trouble enough (where Sorah is). He’s so worn and unhappy, he’ll make no objection, but will follow like a dog. He neither speaks nor sleeps nor eats. I have no use for a fool, I. You do it, Osceolo, and you’ll see what I will give you in reward! Also, if the Woman-Who-Mourns has lost the Sun Maid, maybe this Dark-Eye will be a better stayer.”

[Pg 74]

“But what will you give me, Man-Who-Kills? I—I think I’d rather not meddle any more with the family of my chief.”

"Ugh! Are a coward, eh? Never mind. There are other lads at Muck-otey-pokee, and plenty of plunder in my wigwam."

"All right. Come along, Dark-Eye. Might as well be Dark-Brow, too, for he looks like a night without stars. What will you do with his horse, Man-Who-Kills?"

"Let you ride it for me, sometimes."

"I can do it"; and without further delay, leading the utterly passive and disheartened Gaspar, the Indian lad set off for Wahneenah's home. The captive had no expectation of anything but the most dreadful fate, and his tired brain reeled at the remembrance of what he might yet undergo. Yet, what use to resist?

Meanwhile, Osceolo, confident that all the braves whom he need fear were still absent from the village, started his charge along the trail at a rapid pace, and reached the wigwam of the Woman-Who-Mourns at the very moment when Black Partridge, White Pelican, and the Sun Maid came riding to it from the prairie.

[Pg 75]

She was alive, then! She was, in truth, a "spirit"! His mischievousness had had no power to harm her, she was exempt from any ill that might befall another, she had come back to—How could such an innocent-appearing creature punish one who had so misled her?

He had no time to guess. For the child had caught sight of the stupid lad he was leading, and with a cry of ecstasy had sprung from the Snowbird and landed plump upon the prisoner's shoulders.

"Gaspar! My Gaspar, my Gaspar! Mine, mine, mine!"

It was a transformation scene. The white boy had staggered under the unexpected assault of his old playmate, but he had instantly recognized her. With a cry as full of joy as her own, he clasped her close, and showered his kisses on her upturned face.

"Kitty! why, Kitty! You aren't dead, then? You are not hurt? And we thought—oh, Kitty, Kitty, Kitty!"

Clinging to each other, they slipped to the ground, too absorbed in themselves to notice anything else; while Osceolo watched them in almost equal absorption.

But he was roused sooner than they. A hand fell on his shoulder. A hand whose touch could be as gentle as a woman's, but was now like a steel band crushing the very bones.

[Pg 76]

"Osceolo!"

"Yes, Black Partridge," quavered the terrified lad.

"You will come to my tepee. Alone!"

CHAPTER VII.

[Pg 77]

A THREEFOLD CORD IS STRONGEST.

"She is a spirit. I know that nothing can harm her. Yet many things can harm me. I have no desire to suffer any further anxiety. Therefore—this. My Girl-Child, my White Papoose, come here."

The Sun Maid reluctantly obeyed. It was the morning after her perilous ride on the back of an untamed horse and her joyful reunion with Gaspar, her old playmate of the Fort. The two were now just without the wigwam of Wahneenah, sitting clasped in each other's arms, as if fearful that a fresh separation awaited them should they once relinquish this tight hold of one another; and it was in much the same feeling that the foster-mother regarded them.

"But why, Other Mother? I do love my Gaspar boy. I did know him always."

"You've known me two years, Kitty," corrected the truthful lad. "But I suppose that is as long as you can remember. You're such a baby."

"How old is the Sun Maid—as you white people reckon ages?" asked Wahneenah.

"She is five years old. Her birthday was on the Fourth of July. We had a celebration. Our Captain fired as many rounds of ammunition as she was years old. The mothers made her a cake, with sugar on the top, and with five little candles they made themselves on purpose, and colored with strawberry juice. Oh, surely, there never was such a cake in all the world

[Pg 78]

as they made for our 'baby!'" cried the lad, forgetting for the moment present troubles in this delightful memory.

"Well, there are other women who can make other cakes," said Wahneenah, with ready jealousy.

"Oh, but an Indian cake—" began Gaspar, then stopped abruptly, frightened at his own boldness.

Wahneenah smiled. For small Kitty was swift to see the change in her playmate's face, and her own caught, for an instant, a reflection of its fear. The foster-mother wished to banish this fear.

"Wahneenah likes those who say their thoughts out straight and clear. She is the sister of the Man-Who-Cannot-Lie. It is the crime of the pale-faces that they will lie, and always. Wherefore, they are always in danger. Take warning. Learn to be truth-tellers, like the Pottawatomies, and you will have no trouble."

A quick retort rose to Gaspar's lips, but he subdued it. Then he watched what was being done to Kitty, and a faint smile brightened his face, that had been so far too gloomy for his years. Wahneenah had made a long rope of horsehair, gaily adorned with beads and trinkets, and was fastening it about the Sun Maid's waist. The little one submitted merrily, at first; but when it flashed through her mind that she was thus being made a prisoner, being "tied up," she burst into a paroxysm of tears and temper that astonished the others, and even herself.

[Pg 79]

"I will not be 'tied up!' I was not a naughty girl. When I am bad, I will be punished, and I will not cry nor stamp my feet. But when I am good, I will be free—free! There shall nobody, nobody do this to me! Not any single body. Gaspar, will you let her do it?"

The boy's timidity flew to the winds. His dark eyes flashed with indignation, and his heavy brows contracted in a fierce scowl. At that instant, he appeared much older than he really was, and he advanced upon Wahneenah with upraised hand and threatening gesture.

She might easily have picked him up and tossed him out of the way; but there is nothing an Indian woman admires more greatly than courage. In this she does not differ from her pale-faced sisters, and, instead of resenting Gaspar's rudeness, she smiled upon him.

"That is right, Dark-Eye. It is a warrior's duty to protect his women. You are not yet a warrior, nor is the Sun Maid yet a woman, but as you begin so you will continue. Hear me. Let us make compact. I was fastening the child for her own good, not in punishment. Is that a white mother's custom? Well, this is better. Let us three pledge our word: each to watch over and protect the other so long as our lives last. The Great Spirit sent the Sun Maid into my arms, by the hands of Black Partridge, my brother and my chief. The meanest Indian in Muck-otey-pokee brought you to the village, and the meanest boy to my wigwam. But when the chief saw you, he took you by the hand, and gave you, also, to me. A triple bond is the strongest. Shall we clasp hand upon it?"

[Pg 80]

It was a curious proceeding for one so much older than these children, but it was in profoundest earnest. Wahneenah recognized in Gaspar a representative of a race whose wisdom exceeded that of her own, even if, as she believed, its morality was of a lower standard. But her brother and the other braves had already told her of his great courage on the day before, and of his wonderful skill with the bow and arrow. He had done a man's work, even though a stripling, and she would accord him a man's honor. As for the Sun Maid, despite her very human-like temper, she was, of course, a being above mortal, and therefore fit to "compact" with anybody, even had it been the case with one as venerable as old Katasha. So she felt that there was nothing derogatory to her own dignity in her request.

[Pg 81]

Gaspar fixed his piercing eyes upon Wahneenah's face, and studied it carefully.

The penetration of a child is keen, and not easily deceived. What he read in the Indian woman's unflinching gaze satisfied him, for after this brief delay, he lay his thin boyish hand within the extended palm in entire trust. Of course, what Gaspar did Kitty was bound to do. To her it was a game, and her own plump little fingers closed about the backs of the lad's with a mischievous pinch. Already her anger had disappeared, and her sunny face was dimpling with laughter.

"Kitty was dreadful bad, wasn't she? She wouldn't be tied up first, because she wasn't naughty. Now she has been bad as bad, she did stamp and scream so; and she may be tied, if Other Mother wishes. Do you, nice Other Mother? It is a very pretty string. It wouldn't hurt, I guess."

But Wahneenah's desire to fasten her ward to the lodge-pole had vanished. She would far rather trust the true, loving eyes of the boy Gaspar than the stoutest horsehair rope ever woven.

"We will tie nobody. But hear me, my children, for you are both mine now. In this village are many friends and more enemies. Braves and their families, from other villages and other branches of our tribe, have raised their tepees here. It is easier for them to do this than to build villages of their own, and we are hospitable people. When a guest comes to us, he must stay until he chooses to go away again, and there are none who would bid them depart. Some of other tribes than our own are also here. It is they who are stirring up much mischief. They are giving the Black Partridge anxiety; they will not be wise. They will not learn that their only safety lies in friendship with the white faces. Therefore the heart of our chief is heavy with foreboding. He has the inner vision. To him all things are clear that to us are quite invisible. This is his command to me, ere he departed in the dawn of this day, to seek our friends who were of the Fort, and help them in their need, if need again arises. Listen to the words of Black Partridge:

"Have these white children trained to ride as an Indian rides. The boy Gaspar is to be given the black gelding, Tempest, for his very own. I shall see the man who owns it, and I will pay his cost. The White Snowbird belongs to the Sun Maid. Let nobody else dare touch the mare, except to handle it in care. The day is coming when they will need to ride fast and far, and with more skill than on yesterday. The Snake-Who-Leaps is the best horseman in our tribe. I have bidden him come to this tepee when the sun crosses the meridian. He is friendly to these prisoners, because they are mine, and he will guide them well."

Gaspar's eyes had opened to their widest extent. The words he had heard seemed incredible; yet he was shrewd and practical by nature, and he promptly inquired:

"Why? Why will the Indian chief bestow so rich a gift upon his white boy-prisoner? For if he buys Tempest from the Captain he will have to pay big money. There isn't another like the black gelding this side that far-away Kentucky where he was bred."

"Hear me, Gaspar Keith; prisoner, if you will. But I would rather call you an adopted son of the Black Partridge, and by your new name of Dark-Eye. This is the reason: In these troubles which are coming, you may not only serve yourself, the Sun Maid, and me, by having as your own the gelding Tempest, but you may help the helpless, also. In this one village of Muck-otey-pokee are many old and many very young. The Spotted Adder was the oldest man I ever knew, and though he has died just now, there are others almost of his age. They ought to die, too, and not burden better people. But nobody dies who should while those who should not are snatched away like a feather on the breeze."

Here Wahneenah became absorbed in her own reflections, and was so long silent that Kitty stole her arms about the woman's neck and kissed the dark face to remind her that they were still listening.

"Yes, beloved, Child of the Sunshine and Love! You do well to call me back. Let the dead rest. You are the living. I will remember only you," and she laid the little one against her heart.

"Gaspar, too, Other Mother," suggested the loyal little maid.

But Gaspar was quite able to speak for himself.

"No decent white person would wish the old to die!" he exclaimed, hotly. "There was a grandmother at our Fort, and she was the best loved, the best cared for, of all the women. That is what a white boy thinks, even if he is an Indian's prisoner!"

"Ugh! So? You are an odd youth, Dark-Eye. As timid as a wild pigeon one minute, and the next—flouting your chief's sister."

"I don't mean that, Wahneenah. I—I only—I don't just know what I do mean, except that it seems cowardly to wish the old should die. If you should grow very, very old some day, and Kitty and I should not be—be nice to you, then you would understand what I feel, if I cannot say it rightly."

Wahneenah laughed.

"Your halting speech makes me happy, Dark-Eye. Kitty and you and I; still all together, even when age shall have dimmed my sight and dulled my hearing. It is well. I am satisfied. But hear me. Herein lies the trouble: when folks are young they forget that they will ever be old. That is a mistake. One should remember that youth flies away, fast, fast. They should teach themselves wisdom. They should learn to be skilled in the things which will make them lovely when they are old. For, despite your judgment, there are some among us whom

we would keep till all generations are past. Katasha, the One-Who-Knows; and the Snake-Who-Leaps—why, he is older even than Katasha. Yet there is nobody can ride a horse, or shoot a flying bird, or bring in the game that he can. He is the friend of his chief. He is the most honored one in our whole village. Why? Because he makes few promises, and breaks none. He has never lowered his manhood by drinking the fire-water that addles one's brains and sets the limbs a-tremble. He has talked little and done much. He is One-To-Be-Trusted. That was his name in his youth, when he began to practise all his virtues. The other name came afterward, because of the swift punishment he can also inflict upon his enemies. You would do well to pattern after your teacher, Dark-Eye."

Gaspar listened respectfully; but this sounded so very much like the "lectures" he had received at the Fort that it had less originality than most of Wahneenah's conversations; and, besides that, he had just espied, approaching over the village street, a tall Indian leading the black gelding and Snowbird. Behind this man walked Osceolo; but greatly changed from the bullying youth whom Gaspar had met on the previous day. [Pg 86]

Whatever had occurred in the closed tepee of Black Partridge, when its door flaps fell behind himself and the lad he had ordered to accompany him, nobody knew; but, whatever it was, Osceolo was certainly—at least for the time being—a changed young person.

He walked along behind the Snake-Who-Leaps in a meek, subdued manner quite new to him, but which immediately impressed Dark-Eye as being a vast improvement on his former bearing. He paused, when ordered to "Halt!" by the old man, as if he had been stricken into a wooden image, and only when requested to take the Snowbird's bridle did he make any other motion.

"Why, Osceolo! What's the matter?" asked the Sun Maid, running toward him in surprise.

But he did not answer, and she was hastily snatched back by the strong hand of the foster-mother.

"The Girl-Child speaks to none who is in disgrace."

[Pg 87]

"But I will speak to anybody who is unhappy, Other Mother! I cannot help that, can I? One day, Osceolo was all laughing and clapping; and now—now he looks like Peter Wilson did after his father had whipped him with a musket. Did anybody whip you with a musket, poor, poor Osceolo?"

Not a sign from the disgraced youth.

"Has you lost your tongue, too? Well as your eyes, that you can't look up? Never mind, Osceolo. Kitty is sorry for you. Some day Kitty will let you ride her beau'ful White Snowbird; some day."

"The Sun Maid will first learn to ride the Snowbird, herself," corrected the Snake-Who-Leaps. "She will begin now."

With unquestioning confidence, a confidence that Gaspar did not share, she ran back to the old warrior's side, and stood on tiptoe to be lifted into place.

"Ugh!" he grunted in satisfaction. "That is well. The one who has no fear has already conquered the wildest animal. But the White Snowbird is not wild. She has been given an evil name, and it has clung to her as evil always clings," and the One-To-Be-Trusted turned to give his silent attendant a meaning glance. But Osceolo had not yet raised his gaze from the ground, and the reproof fell pointless. [Pg 88]

Nobody had observed that, from another direction, another youth had quietly led up a beautiful chestnut horse, whose cream-colored mane and tail would have made it a conspicuous object anywhere; but Wahneenah had expected this addition to their equestrian party and, as she turned to look for it, exclaimed in pleasure at its prompt appearance.

The Snake-Who-Leaps heard her ejaculation, and evinced his disgust.

"Ugh! Is it to teach a lot of women and a worthless pale-faced lad that I have left the comfort of my own lodge this hot summer day?"

"The old forget. It was long ago, when I was no bigger than the Sun Maid here, that the One-To-Be-Trusted took me behind him on a wild ride over the prairie. It was the only lesson he ever gave—or needed to give—*me*. I will show him that I am still young enough to remember!" cried Wahneenah, with all the gayety of girlhood, and with so complete a change in her appearance that it was easy to see how she had come to be named The Happy.

Even before the teacher had settled the Sun Maid in her tiny blanket saddle, Wahneenah had sprung upon the chestnut's back. As she touched it, a clear, determined, if very youthful voice, shouted behind her: [Pg 89]

"I am a white man! No Indian shall ever teach me a thing that I can learn for myself!"

For suddenly Gaspar remembered the wrongs he had suffered at the red men's hands, and leaped to Tempest's back unaided. Another instant, and the trio of riders dashed away from Muck-otey-pokee in a mad rush that left their disgruntled instructor in doubt which was the better pupil of them all.

"Who begins slow finishes fast; but who begins fast may never live to finish slow," he remarked, sententiously; then observing that Osceolo had, for the first time, raised his eyes, he promptly laid a heavy hand upon the youth's shoulder and wheeled him about.

"To my wigwam—march!"

And Osceolo marched—exactly as if all his limbs were sticks and his joints mechanical.

"Ugh! So? Like the jointed dolls of the papooses, eh? Very good. Keep at it. From now till those three return, dead or alive, my fine young warrior, you shall be my pupil. You have set me the pace you like. You may keep at it. From the locust tree east of my lodge to the pawpaw on the west, as the branch swings in the wind, so shall you swing. Ugh! May they ride far and long. One—two—commence!"

It was noonday when he began that weary, weary automatic "step, step"; but when the last rays of the sun had disappeared beyond the prairie, Osceolo was still enduring his discipline, and making his pendulum-like journey from locust-tree to pawpaw, from pawpaw to locust. His head swam, his sight dimmed, but still sat stolid Snake-Who-Leaps in the entrance of his tepee, "instructing" the only pupil fate had left him. [Pg 90]

CHAPTER VIII.

[Pg 91]

AN ISLAND RETREAT.

Under the incentive of love and excitement—heightened by a tinge of jealousy—all Wahneenah's former skill in horsemanship returned to her. When the Snake-Who-Leaps lifted the Sun Maid to the back of the Snowbird the woman felt an unreasoning anger against him. She could not patiently endure to have any other hand than her own touch the small body of her adopted child, upon whom had now centred all the pent-up affection of her starved heart.

"If my darling must be taught, I will teach her myself!" she suddenly resolved, and promptly acted upon the resolution. Previously, and when she ordered the chestnut to be brought to her tepee, she had merely intended to ride in company with the others and in a limited circle about the village. Now a mad impulse seized her to be off over the prairie, farther than sight could reach, and on half-forgotten trails once familiar to her. It was the first time she had mounted any animal since her widowhood.

When she heard Gaspar's daring declaration, she thrilled with delight. All the savage in her nature roused to enjoy this wild escapade, and, catching firm hold of the Sun Maid's bridle rein, she nodded over her shoulder to the lad, and led the way northward. [Pg 92]

"It's like that strange fairy story, in the book given Peter Wilson, that came from way over in England, and was the only one in the world, I guess. Was the only one at our Fort, anyway," thought Gaspar, as he followed in equal speed, and at imminent risk of his life. For a night's rest had restored the black gelding to all his spirit, and had the boy attempted to guide or control him there would have been serious trouble.

As it was, Gaspar confined his efforts to just sticking on, and had all he could do at that; but after a short distance, the three horses broke into an even lope, keeping well together, and all under the command of the Indian woman.

"Oh, I love it!" she cried, the rich blood flaming under her dusky skin, her eyes sparkling, and her long black hair streaming on the wind which their own motion created.

"Kitty loves it—too—Kitty guesses!" echoed the child, entering into the other's mood with quick sympathy. Indeed, she was the safer of the three. There is a hidden understanding between horses and children, and numberless instances prove how carefully even an [Pg 93]

untamed beast will treat a little child—if nobody interferes. But let an adult attempt to avert a seeming danger, and the animal will promptly throw the responsibility on human shoulders, and act out its own mood at its own will.

Wahneenah understood this, and, simply leaving her hand upon the Snowbird's rein, but quite without any pressure, rode where that frolicsome creature chose to lead. A strap, which the Snake-Who-Leaps had fastened around the waist of the Sun Maid, held her securely to her saddle, though her small hands clutched the flying mane of her mount so tightly that she could not well have been shaken off.

It was a rough school in which to learn so dangerous an art, but it sufficed; and that one day's ride did more to help Gaspar and Kitty to good horsemanship than all the instruction they afterward received.

"How far—nice Other Mother?" asked the little girl, when the three horses of their own accord began to slacken speed.

"Not far now, papoose. See yonder, where the trees fringe the river? Among those trees is a wonderful spot I know. I've not seen it for years, but in its shelter my warrior and I spent many happy hours. There we used to take our son, and tell him the story of his people. It was a hiding-place, in the ancient years, when enemies of the Pottawatomies were on the war-path, and the chief would save his women and children. But nobody remembers that trail, at this late day, except those of my father's house. Besides me, not one soul lives who could find his way thither, save Black Partridge. It is even many moons since he has talked with me about it, and he may not recall it still. Though he is a man who never forgets, and the knowledge is doubtless merely sleeping in his brain."

[Pg 94]

Kitty Briscoe understood but little of this speech, but Gaspar's interest was roused. Amid the discipline and routine of his old life at the Fort, his lighter, gayer qualities had lain dormant, but they were now rapidly awakening under the influence of his recent adventures. It was impossible, too, for anybody to be long with Wahneenah, in her present mood, without catching her spirit and gayety; and though the Sun Maid comprehended little save the liveliness of her companions, she could enter into that with all her heart.

Therefore, it was a merry party which came at last to the river bank, where the horses were glad to pause for rest, and where they would eagerly have slaked their thirst, had they been permitted.

"But that won't do, Wahneenah, will it? At our Fort we never watered a horse when it was warm. The Captain said they would be ruined, so."

[Pg 95]

"You do well to remember all the wisdom you have been taught, Dark-Eye. Here, let me show you something even a white man may not know. How to tether a horse with a rope of prairie grass, made in a moment, but strong enough to last for long."

"Lift me off, Other Mother," cried Kitty, from the Snowbird's back, and Wahneenah swung her down.

"Now, Dark-Eye, pull as much of this rush grass as your arms can hold. It will take a heap for three ropes."

"Have the pretty ponies been naughty? Must they be tied up, too?"

"Not because they are bad, but because they are good, papoose! That is the way of life. It is full of contradictions. But, don't wrinkle your pretty brows puzzling what you cannot understand. Run and help the Dark-Eye pull the long grasses."

It was so wonderful to see Wahneenah's skilful fingers twist and turn and thread the slender blades in and out that both children were fascinated by her deftness; and though Gaspar could not at all catch the trick of this curious weaving, he resolved to practise it in private till he could equal, or excel, this example. Again his ambition arose to prove that a pale-face was always superior to an Indian, and his dark eyes gazed so fixedly upon Wahneenah's flying fingers that she laughed, and demanded:

[Pg 96]

"Are you jealous, my son? But there's no need. Nothing that I know will be hidden from you, if you choose to be taught. But, come. Take this rope that is finished. Twist it about the gelding's neck—so; now pass it downward between his front legs and hobble him by the right hind one. No, he'll not resist. Try it. Then you'll see that he'll neither nibble at his tether nor run away from us."

Gaspar was too proud to show that he somewhat dreaded interfering with the restless legs of the spirited Tempest, and to his astonishment he found that the animal submitted very quietly to the tying. This may have been because Wahneenah stood by its beautiful head

and murmured some soft sounds into its dainty ears. Though what the murmuring meant nobody save herself and Tempest understood. In like manner, and very quickly, all three horses were fastened in the shade of the trees, and as soon as they had cooled sufficiently, Gaspar was bidden to water them.

Then the Sun Maid was called from her play among the wild flowers that fringed the bank, and made to walk behind Wahneenah's skirts.

"Cling close, my Girl-Child! We're going into fairyland. Bow your pretty head till it is low—low—low down, like this"; and herself bending till her own head was very near the earth, the guide pushed forward into what appeared to be a solid tangle of bushes. [Pg 97]

"Why, Wahneenah! You can't go through there. It's a regular hedge. But if you want to try, I have a little knife in my pocket, that my Captain gave me. Let me go first—I am the man—and cut the way; though I don't see why. Isn't there a better place?"

"There are many things a lad of ten cannot understand, Dark-Eye, even though he be as manly as you. Trust Wahneenah. An Indian never forgets, and never makes the haste that destroys. Watch me. Learn a lesson in woodcraft that will be useful to you more than once. Cut or broken twigs have tongues which betray. But thus—even a bird could find no trace."

With infinite patience and accuracy of touch, the woman parted the slender, interwoven branches so delicately that scarcely a leaf was bruised, and little by little opened a clear passage into a downward sloping tunnel. This tunnel ran directly under the river bed, and was so steep in places that one might easily have coasted over it.

"Why, how queer! It's like the underground passage from the Fort to the river, where we children used to peep, but were never allowed to enter. What is it? Why is it?" [Pg 98]

"Let your eyes ask and answer their own questions. They are safer than a tongue, my son. But fear nothing. Where Wahneenah leads the way for the children whom the Great Spirit has sent her they may safely follow."

Then, without further speech, she went forward for what seemed a long distance, through the half light of the tunnel, until it opened into a wide chamber, across which trickled a clear stream and which was fanned by a strong current of air.

The children were silent from curiosity, not unmixed with dread; and their guide had also become very grave and silent. Memories were crowding upon her soul, and banishing the present; but she was roused at length by the wild clutch of the Sun Maid's arms, as something winged swept by them in the twilight.

"Other Mother! Other Mother! I—I don't like it! Take Kitty, quick!"

"Ah! I was dreaming. My dead walked here beside me, and I forgot. But is the Sun Maid ever afraid? I did not think that. Well, it's over now. The gloomy passage, the big, dark room—See?"

Suddenly, at a turn westward out of the chamber and beyond it, they entered upon what might, indeed, have been fairyland. The exit was another passage, rising gently to a rock-and tree-sheltered nook in the heart of a tiny island. From any outward point this retreat was invisible, and when they had emerged upon it the Indian woman's spirits rose again. She caught up the Sun Maid and tossed her lightly upon a bending branch, that seemed to have grown expressly for a child's swing. [Pg 99]

"My warrior trained that bough for our son's pleasure, and from it he rocked and danced as a tiny papoose. Now—in you, he lives again. Hold, Dark-Eye! What are you seeking?"

"Oh, just nothing! I was poking around to see——"

"If you could find anything to eat? The wild blackberries should grow just yonder, and, wait—I'll look."

"For what will you look, Other Mother? Aren't these the prettiest posies yet?" and Kitty held upward a cluster of cardinal flowers which she had pulled from a mass by the water's edge.

"Ah, they are alive! They have the heart of fire. But, take care. It is always wet where they grow and small feet slip easily. If you were to soil your pretty clothes, old Katasha might be angry."

"I'll take care. May I have all I can gather?"

"All. Every one."

Then Wahneenah returned into the cave and to a niche in its wall where, years before, she had put a store of dried corn, some salt, and a bit of tinder. The articles had been stored in earthen jugs, and it was just possible they might be found in good condition. If they were, she would show the man-child how to catch a fish out of the little stream in the cavern, where the delicate trout were apt to hide. Then they would make a fire as they had used in the old days, and she would cook for these white children such a supper as her own dear ones had enjoyed.

[Pg 100]

“See, Gaspar, Dark-Eye. I will fetch you a line and hook. Sit quiet and draw out our supper—when it bites!”

“But I have a far better hook than that in my pocket; and a line the Sauganash gave me, one day. I am a good fisher, Wahneenah. How many fish do you want for your supper?”

“You are a good boaster, any way, pale-face, like all your race; and I want just as many fish as will satisfy our hunger. If you had your bow here, you might wing us a bird. Though that would not be wise, maybe. Keep an eye to the Sun Maid, lest she slip in the brook.”

“This is a funny place. It is an island, isn’t it? Like the pictures in my geography; and there is a little creek through it, and another in a cave, and—I think it is beautiful. But you’re funny, too, Wahneenah. You say my Kitty is a ‘spirit,’ and ‘nothing can harm her,’ yet you watch out for her getting hurt closer than the other mothers did.”

[Pg 101]

“You see too much, Dark-Eye. But—well, she is a spirit in a girl’s body. If you let evil happen her it will be the worse for you. Hear me?”

“I wouldn’t let her get into trouble any sooner than you would, Wahneenah. I love her, too. She hasn’t any folks, and I haven’t any, except you, of course. She belongs to me.”

“Oh! she does? Well. Enough. We all belong to each other. We have made the bond.”

When the woman returned from her search in the cavern her face was very grave. Yet it should have been delighted, for she had found not only the corn and the other things she remembered, but a goodly store of articles, quite too fresh and modern to have remained there since she last visited the spot. There were dried beans, salted beef, cakes of sugar from her old maple trees—she knew her own mark upon them; and, besides these, were flour and tea in packages, such as had been distributed from Fort Dearborn among as many Indians as were entitled to receive them. It was both puzzling and disappointing to find her retreat discovered and appropriated by somebody else.

“It must be that Shut-Hand has, in some way, found this cavern out. All the other people would have eaten and enjoyed their good things, and not stored them up, like this. But he is crafty and secretive, and his name is his character.”

[Pg 102]

Had Wahneenah hunted further she would have found, in addition to the provisions, a considerable quantity of broadcloth, calico, and paint; which articles, also, had been among those recently secured from the garrison. But she neither examined very closely nor touched anything except that for which she had come to the recess; and she even forced herself to put the matter out of mind, for the time being.

“I have brought my children here to make a holiday for them. I will not, therefore, darken it by my forebodings. The young live only in the present or the future. I, too, will again become young. I will forget all that is past.”

From that wonderful pocket of his, Gaspar took a decent hook and line, and easily proved his skill among fish that were too seldom disturbed to have learned any fear; while Wahneenah made a tiny fire of dried twigs, in the mouth of the cavern, and boiled her prepared corn, that she had broken and ground between two stones, into a sort of mush. With Gaspar’s fish, broiled upon the live coals, the pudding sweetened by a bit of honey from a close sealed crock, and a draught of water from the underground stream, the trio made a fine supper; and afterward, when she had carefully cleared away the *débris*, Wahneenah rekindled the fire, and, sitting beside it, took the Sun Maid on her knee and drew the motherless Dark-Eye within the shelter of her arm.

[Pg 103]

Then she told them tales and legends of the wide prairies and distant mountains; and her own manner gave them thrilling interest, because she believed in them quite as sincerely as did her small, wide-eyed listeners.

“Tell it once more, Other Mother. That beau’ful one ‘bout the little papoose that hadn’t any shoes, and the flowers growed her some. Just like mine”; holding up her own tiny moccasined feet, and rubbing them together in the comfortable heat.

“Once upon a time a little girl papoose was lost. The enemies of her people had come to her

father's village, and had scattered all her tribe. There was not one of them left alive except the little maid."

"I guess that's just like Kitty, isn't it?"

"No. No, it is not," replied the story-teller, quickly. For she had felt a shiver run through Gaspar's body, and pressed it close in warm protection. "No. It is not like either of you. For to you is Wahneenah, the Mother; the sister of a chief who lives and is powerful. But this was away in the long past, before even I was born. So the girl papoose found herself wandering on the prairie, and it was the time of frost. The ground was frozen beneath the grasses, which were stiff and rough and cut the tender feet that a mother's hand had hitherto carried in her own palm."

[Pg 104]

"Show me how, Mother Wahneenah."

"Just this way Sweetheart," clasping the tiny moccasins in a loving caress.

"Tell some more. I guess the fire is going to make Kitty sleepy, by and by."

"Sleep, then, if you will, Girl-Child."

"And then?"

"Then, when the little one was very cold and tired and lonely she remembered something: it was that she had seen her own mother lift her two hands to the sky and ask the Great Spirit for all she might need."

"He always hears, doesn't He?"

"He hears and answers. But sometimes the answers are what He sees is best, not what we want."

"Don't sigh that way, Other Mother! S'posin' your little boy did go away. Haven't you got Gaspar and Kitty?"

"Yes, little one."

"Go on, then. About the little maid—just like me."

"So she put her own two tiny hands up toward the sky and asked the Great Spirit to put soft shoes on her tired little feet."

"And He did, didn't He?"

[Pg 105]

"Surely. First the pain eased and that made her look down. And there she saw a pair of the softest moccasins that ever were made. They were of pale pink and yellow, and all dotted with dark little bead-spots; and they fitted as easily as her own dainty skin. Then the girl papoose was grateful, and she begged the Great Spirit that He would make many and many another pair of just such comfortable shoes for every other little barefoot maid in all the world. That not one single child should ever suffer what the girl papoose had suffered."

"Did He?" asked Gaspar, as interested as Kitty.

"Yes. Surely. The prayer of the unselfish and innocent is always granted. He sent a voice out of the sky and bade the child look all about her. So she did, and the whole wide prairie was a-bloom with more pink and yellow 'shoes' than all the children in all the earth could ever wear. They were growing right out of the hard ground, reaching up to be plucked and worn. So she cried out aloud in her gratitude: 'Oh, the moccasin flower! the moccasin flower!' and ever since then this shoe-like blossom has been beloved of all the children in the world. But, because the heat burns as well as the cold pinches, it blooms nowadays at all times and seasons of the year. A few flowers here, a few there; but quite enough for any child to find—who has the right spirit."

[Pg 106]

"Kitty must have had the spirit, mustn't she, Other Mother? That day when her feet were so tired and the good Feather-man found her. 'Cause she had lots and lots of them; only she went to sleep and they all solemn'd down. And——"

Gaspar started suddenly and held up a warning hand. His quick ear had caught the sound of approaching feet, crushing boldly through the cavern, like the tread of one who knows his way well and is coming to his own.

Wahneenah had also heard, though she had continued her story, making no sign that she was inwardly disturbed. But she now paused and listened whether this footfall were one she knew, either of friend or foe. Then a bush cracked behind them, and Gaspar's heart stood still, as the tall form of an Indian warrior pushed past them into the firelight.

CHAPTER IX.

[Pg 107]

AT MUCK-OTEY-POKEE.

Wahneenah did not lift her eyes. For the moment an unaccustomed fear held her spellbound, and it was the Sun Maid's happy cry which roused her at length, and restored them all to composure.

"Black Partridge! My own dear Feather-man!"

With a spring, the child threw herself upon the Indian's breast and clasped his neck with her trustful arms. It was, perhaps, this confidence of hers in the good-will of all her friends that made them in return hold her so dear. Certain it was that the chief's face now assumed that expression of gentleness which was the attribute small Kitty ascribed to him, but which among his older acquaintances was not considered a leading trait of his character. Just he always was, but rather severe than gentle; and Wahneenah marked, with some surprise, the caressing touch he laid upon the Sun Maid's floating hair as he quietly set her down and himself dropped upon a ledge to rest.

"You are welcome, my brother. Though, at first, I feared it was some alien who had discovered our cave." [Pg 108]

"It is not the habit of the Happy to fear. She who forebodes danger where no danger is but paves the way to her own destruction."

Wahneenah glanced at her brother sharply.

"It is the Truth-Teller himself who has put foreboding into my soul. He—and the new-born love which the Sun Maid has brought."

The face of Black Partridge fell again into that dignified gravity which was its habitual expression and he sat for a long time with the "dream-look" in his eyes, gazing straightforward into the embers of their little fire.

"Is you hungry, Feather-man? We did have such a beau'ful supper. Nice Other Mother can cook fishes and cakes and—things. Shall she cook you some fish, Black Partridge?"

"Will my chief eat the food I prepare for him?" asked Wahneenah, seconding the child's invitation.

"With pleasure. For one hour he will let the cares of his life slip from him. He will have this night of peace, and while the meal is getting he will sleep."

With a sigh of relief the tall Indian moved a few steps back into the cave and stretched himself at length upon the ground. His eyes closed, and before Gaspar had made ready his line to catch the fresh trout he had sunk into a profound slumber.

Wahneenah put her finger to her lip to signify silence, but she need not have done so. Gaspar had long ago learned the red man's noiseless ways, and the Sun Maid immediately placed herself beside the prostrate chief, and clasping his hand that lay on his breast snuggled her cheek against it, and followed his example. [Pg 109]

The Black Partridge, like most of his race, could sleep anywhere, at any time, and for as long as he chose. He had elected to wake at the end of a half-hour, and he did so on the moment. Sitting up, he gently placed the still slumbering Sun Maid upon the ground and moved forward to the fire. While he ate the food she had provided for him, Wahneenah continued standing near, but a little behind him; ready to anticipate his needs, and with a humility of demeanor which she showed toward no other person.

Gaspar watched the pair, wondering if they could really be of the same race which had destroyed his childhood's home, and now again that second home of his adoption—the Fort. He liked, and was impelled to trust them both, and was already learning to love his foster-mother. But when they began to converse in their own dialect, and with occasional glances toward himself and the sleeping Kitty, the native caution of his mind arose, and made him miserable. He remembered a byword of the Fort:

"The only safe Indian is a dead one"; and with a sudden sense of danger leaped to his feet and ran to bend above the unconscious maid. [Pg 110]

"If you harm her, I'll—I'll—kill you!" he shouted fiercely.

Wahneenah looked amazed, but the Black Partridge instantly comprehended the working of

the boy's thoughts, and a smile of satisfaction faintly illumined his sombre features.

"It is well. Let every brave defend his own. The Dark-Eye is no coward. His years are few, but he has the heart of a warrior and a chief. He must begin, at once, to learn the speech of his new tribe. He that knows has doubled the strength of his arm. Draw near. There is good and not evil in the souls of the chief and his sister. We are Truth-Tellers. We cannot lie. We have pledged our faith to the Dark-Eye and the Sun Maid—though she needs it not."

The sincerity and admiration in the Indian's eyes compelled the lad's obedience; and when, as he stepped into the firelight, the chief indicated that he should sit beside himself, and also nodded to Wahneenah to take her own place opposite, his heart swelled with pride and ambition. So had the white Captain trusted and counselled with him. He had been faithful through all that dreadful day of massacre, and he had felt the man's spirit within his child- [Pg 111]

body. Now again, a commander of others, the wise leader of a different people, was honoring him with a share in his council. There must be good in him, and some sort of wisdom—even though so young—else they had paid him no heed. His cheek flushed, his breast heaved, and his beautiful eyes shone with the exultation that thrilled him.

"Let the chief pardon the child—which I was, but a moment ago. I am become a man. I will do a man's task, now and forever. If I suspected evil where there was none, is it a wonder? I have told Wahneenah, the Happy, the story of my life. The Black Partridge knew it already."

Quite unconsciously, Gaspar dropped into the Indian manner of speech, and he could not have done a better thing for himself had he pondered the matter for long. Black Partridge nodded approvingly, and remarked:

"Another Sauganash is here! Well, while the Sun Maid sleeps, let us consider the future. The evil days are near."

"What is the evil that my brother, the chief, beholds with his inner vision?" questioned the woman.

"War and bloodshed. Still more of war, still more of death. In the end will our wigwams lie flat on the earth as fallen leaves, while the remnant of my people moves onward, forever onward toward the setting sun."

Wahneenah kept a respectful silence, but in her heart she resented the dire forebodings of her chief. At last, when her brooding thought forced utterance, she inquired: [Pg 112]

"Can not the wisdom of the Black Partridge hinder these days of calamity? If the great Gomo, and Winnemeg, and those white braves who have lived among us, as the Sauganash, take counsel together, and compel their tribes to keep the peace, and to copy of the pale-faces the arts which have made them so powerful—will not this avert the evil? Why may there not in some time and place, a mighty grave be digged in which may be buried all the guns that kill and the knives that scalp, with the arrows which fly more swiftly than a bird? Over all may there not be emptied the casks and bottles of the fearful fire-water, that, passing through the lips of a warrior, changes him to a beast? Then the red man and his pale brother may clasp hands together and abide, each upon the earth, where the Great Spirit placed him."

"It is a dream. Dreams vanish. Even as now the night speeds, and we are far from home. It avails us not to think of what might—but never will—be. Occasional friendships bridge the feud between our alien races, but the feud remains. It is eternal. Endless as the years which will witness the gradual extinction of the weaker, because smaller, race. Let us dream no more. Has Wahneenah, my sister, observed how the store she left in the old cave has grown? How the few sealed jars have become many, and how there are heaps of the good gifts which the Great Father sent to his white children at the Fort for the red children's use?" [Pg 113]

"Yes. I thought it was the miser, Shut-Hand, who had placed them here in our cave."

"It was I, the Black Partridge."

"For what purpose, my brother?"

"Against the needs of the time I have foretold. It is a sanctuary. Here may Wahneenah, and the young son and daughter which have been given her, find shelter and sustenance."

Something of her old tribal exultation seized the woman, who was a great chief's daughter. Rising to her fullest height, her fine head thrown slightly back, she demanded, indignantly:

"Is the heart of my brother become like that of the papoose upon its mother's shoulders? Was it not to the red men that the victory came, but so brief time past? What were all the pale-faces, in their gaudy costumes, with their music and their guns and their childish way

of battle? The arrows of our people mowed them like the grass upon the prairie when a herd of wild horses feeds upon it. But yesterday they marched in pride and insolence, scorning us. To-day, they are carrion for the crows overhead, or they flee for safety like the cowards they were born. The Black Partridge has tarried too long among such as these. He has become their blood brother."

[Pg 114]

The taunt was the fiercest she could give, and she gave it from a full heart. In ordinary so gentle and peace-loving she had been roused, for a moment, to a pitch of emotion which astonished even herself. Yet when, as if she had been a fractious child, the chief motioned her to again become seated, she obeyed him at once. She had set her thoughts free, indeed; but she would never presume to fight against the conditions which surrounded her; and obedience to tribal authority was inborn.

"The Snake-Who-Leaps will be at the tepee of my sister each day when the sun climbs to the point overhead. The three horses will be always ready. The children who do not know, and Wahneenah who has, maybe, forgotten how to ride, will practise as he instructs, until there will be no horse they cannot master, or no spot to which a horse may be guided that they do not know. But here first. That is why the store of food and cloths. At the first assault upon our Muck-otey-pokee, mount and ride. Ride as no squaw nor papoose ever rode before. Here the Black Partridge will seek them, and here, if the Great Spirit wills, they may be safe. Enough. Let the Dark-Eye go forward and make the horses ready."

[Pg 115]

The Black Partridge rose as he spoke, and striding toward the sleeping Sun Maid, took her in his arms and left the spot. Gaspar, already darting onward toward the beloved Tempest, paused, for an instant, and regarded his chief anxiously. But when he saw that the little girl had not awakened, he sped forward again, and by the time Wahneenah had disposed of the remnants of the chief's supper and followed, he had loosed the animals and led them to the nearest point for mounting.

Still holding the Sun Maid motionless upon his breast, the Black Partridge leaped to the back of his own magnificent stallion, which whinnied in affectionate welcome of his approach. Then he ordered Gaspar:

"Ride behind me on Tempest, and lead the Snowbird. Wahneenah will follow all on Chestnut."

By the time they were out upon the prairie the wind had risen and the sky was heavily clouded. It was so dark that the boy could not see beyond the head of his own horse, but he could hear the steady, grass-softened footfall of the stallion as, with unerring directness, the Indian chieftain led the way homeward to the village.

When they rode into it, all Muck-otey-pokee seemed asleep; but the perennially young, though still venerable, Snake-Who-Leaps, had been prone before Wahneenah's wigwam, and silently rose from the ground as they drew rein beside him.

[Pg 116]

"Ah, the Sleepless! The Wise Man. Did he think his pupils had ridden away to their own destruction?" asked the squaw, as she stepped down from her saddle.

"No harm can happen the household of my chief save what the Great Spirit wills."

"And you think He will not waste time with three wild runaways?"

"Wahneenah, the Happy, is in good spirit herself. I remembered her not, save as the message may concern. That is for the ear of my friend and the father of his tribe, the Black Partridge."

Handing the Sun Maid into his sister's embrace, he for whom the message waited slipped the bridles of two horses over his arm while the Snake-Who-Leaps led the others. Whatever they had to say was not begun then nor there, and if Wahneenah had any curiosity in the matter it was not to be gratified. Yet she stood, for a moment, listening to the receding sounds as the darkness enveloped the departing group; and in her heart was born a fresh anxiety because of the little one she carried, and for the orphan lad who followed so closely at her skirts as she lifted her tent curtain and entered their home.

But nothing occurred to suggest that the message of the Snake-Who-Leaps had been one of warning. He was at his post of teacher exactly on the hour appointed on the following day, and this time all his pupils conducted themselves with a grave propriety that greatly pleased him; and thereafter, for many days, and even weeks, while the dry season lasted, did he instruct and they perform the marvellous feats of horsemanship which have made the red man famous the world over.

[Pg 117]

"But," said Osceolo one day, tauntingly: "you were the pale-face who would learn nothing from an Indian!"

"Because a person is a fool once, need he remain so always?" answered Gaspar, hotly.

"You were a fool then? I thought so. Once a fool always one."

"Only an Indian believes that."

"How? You taunt me? Fight, then!"

Gaspar Keith was a curious mixture of courage and timidity. His courage came by nature, and his timidity was the result of the terrible scenes through which he had passed now twice, young though he was. The impress of this terror would remain with him forever; and if ever he became a hero in fact, it would be because of his will and not his inclination. At present neither the one nor the other inspired him; and though he eyed the larger boy scornfully, and felt that he could easily whip the bully, if he chose, he now turned his back upon him and walked away haughtily.

[Pg 118]

But Osceolo's sneer followed him:

"The One-Who-Is-Afraid-Of-His-Shadow! Gaspar—Coward!"

No boy could patiently endure this insult, even though it came from one much larger and stronger than himself. Gaspar's jacket was off and his arms bared on the instant; but before he could fling himself against his enemy a strong hand was laid upon his own shoulder, and he was tossed aside as lightly as a leaf.

"Hold! Let there be none of this. It is a time for peace in our village. Wait in patience. The hour is coming, is almost here, when both the pale-face and the son of my tribe will have need of all their prowess. Go. Polish your arrows and point their heads, but let there be none of this."

It was the great chief himself, who had separated the combatants, and as he stalked majestically onward he left behind him two greatly astonished and ashamed young warriors. In common, no grown brave bothered himself over the petty squabbles of striplings; unless, indeed, it might be to incite them to further conflicts. For the Black Partridge to interfere now was significant of something far deeper than a boyish fight.

Gaspar put on his coat and walked thoughtfully home to Wahneenah and Kitty, while Osceolo slunk away to his own haunts, to lie at length upon the grass and plot with a cunning worthy of better ends the various devices by which he could torment the young white lad of whom he was so jealous.

[Pg 119]

Wahneenah heard the tale with a gravity that impressed the chief's action more strongly than before upon the lad's mind; while Kitty took it upon herself to lecture him with all severity about the dreadful "naughtiness of striking that poor, dear Oddy boy."

"Hmm, Sunny Maid! you needn't waste pity on him. He doesn't deserve it."

"Maybe not, Dark-Eye. Maybe not. But heed you the warning. The dwellers in one village should keep that village quiet," interrupted Wahneenah.

"Yes, but they don't. There are almost as many sorts of Indians here as there are people. Some of them are horrible. I see them often watching Kitty and me as if they would like to scalp us. It's been worse within a little while. It grows worse all the time."

"All the more reason why you should be wise and careful. But it is dark in the tepee, and that's a sign the Dust Chief is almost ready to shut up your eyes. Run, Gaspar, son, and Girl-Child. See which will sleep the first. And to the one who does, the bigger lump of my best sugar in the morning."

[Pg 120]

They ran, as she suggested, but there was to be no further haste till Kitty had made Gaspar kneel beside her and repeat with her the "Now I lay me" little prayer, which her Fort mothers had taught her. The short, simple prayer, beloved of childhood the world over, that has carried many a white soul upward to its Father. Even to Wahneenah, though her mission training had been of another creed, the childish petition was full of sacredness and beauty; and as she stood near them, she bowed her head humbly and echoed it with all her heart.

Each was in bed soon after, and each with a lump of the toothsome dainty they loved.

"For Gaspar must have it because he was first; and my Girl-Child because she was the last. That equals everything."

They thought it did, delightfully: if they stayed awake long enough to think at all. But when they were both asleep, and the sound of their soft breathing echoed through the dusky tepee, Wahneenah took her seat at its entrance, and began to sing low and softly, with a

sweetness of voice which rendered even their rudeness musical, the love songs of her girlhood.

As she sang and gazed upward through the trees into the starlit sky, an infinite peace stole over her. Indeed, the joy that possessed her seemed almost startling to herself. All that was sad in her memories dropped from them, and left but their happiness; while the present closed about her as a delight that nothing could disturb. Her love for the Sun Maid had become almost a passion with her, and for her Dark-Eye there was ever an increasing and comprehending affection. [Pg 121]

She remained so long, dreaming, remembering, and planning, that the first grayness of the dawn came before she could go within and take her own bit of sleep. But Muck-otey-pokee was always early astir; and if for no other reason, because the dogs which thronged the settlement would allow no quiet after daybreak. That morning they were unusually restless.

Cried Wahneenah, rising suddenly, and now feeling somewhat the effects of her late sitting: "Can it be sun-up already? The beasts are wild this morning. I have never heard them so deafening."

Nor had anybody else. There was no cessation in their barking.

"It's a regular 'bedlam,' isn't it? That's what the Fort mothers used to say when there was target practice, and the children cheered the shooters. What makes them bark so?" answered Gaspar.

Wahneenah shivered, and suggested: [Pg 122]

"Run out and play. Eh? What's that? The Snake-Who-Leaps? So early, and with the horses, too? But mind him not. Take the Sun Maid out-of-doors, but keep close to the green before the lodge. Where I can see you now and then, while I get breakfast ready."

Everybody was up; and more than one commented upon the strangeness of the three horses being brought to the tepee so early.

The warning message which had come from the south, and had been delivered to his chief by the Snake-Who-Leaps, on that dark night some weeks before, was now to be verified. "What the red men have done to the pale-faces, the pale-faces will now do to them. Retaliation and revenge!"

Yet not one was quite prepared for the events which followed. Followed even so swiftly that the women left their porridge cooking in their kettles and their cows half-milked; while the men of the village promptly seized the nearest weapon, and rushed to the hopeless defence.

The rude sound that had startled every dweller in that pretty settlement was the report of a gun. Then came a galloping troop of cavalry—more firing—incessant, indiscriminate!

There was a babel of shrieks as the women and little ones fell where they stood, in the midst of their work or play. There were the blood-curdling war-whoops of the savages, answering the random shots. Above and through all, one cry rang clear to Wahneenah's consciousness. [Pg 123]

"The horses! The horses! Ride—ride—ride—as I have taught you! For your lives—Ride!"

It was but an instant. Wahneenah and her children were amount and afield. But as, in an anguish of fear for his friends, and no thought of himself, once more the Snake-Who-Leaps shouted his warning, the whistle of a death-dealing bullet came to him where he watched, and struck him down across the threshold of Wahneenah's happy home.

CHAPTER X.

[Pg 124]

THE CAVE OF REFUGE.

Three abreast, the chestnut in the middle, the fugitives from the doomed village of Muck-otey-pokee rode like the wind in a straight, unswerving line across the prairie. After they had left a considerable distance behind them, Wahneenah turned her stern face backward, and scanned the route over which they had passed; and when her keen vision detected something like a group of glistening bayonets—to ordinary sight no larger than a point against the horizon—she abruptly doubled on her course, then made a sharp detour westward. She had early dropped her own bridle, and had since guided her horse by her

low spoken commands, while in either hand she clutched a bit-ring of the Snowbird and Tempest. Her change of direction must have brought her all the more plainly into view of the pursuing soldiers, but in a few moments she had gained the shelter of a group of trees.

These sprang, apparently, out of the midst of the plain, but she knew that they really concealed the entrance to the underground pathway to the cave; and once within their shelter, she paused to breathe and gaze upon the startled faces of her children.

[Pg 125]

That of the Sun Maid was pale, indeed, with the excitement of this mad ride, but showed no fear; while Gaspar's, alas! wore an expression of abject terror. His eyes stared wildly, his teeth were set, his nostrils drawn and pinched. He was, his foster-mother saw, already on the verge of a collapse.

She leaped from her horse, and caught the fainting boy in her arms while she directed the Sun Maid:

"Jump down and tie the horses, as the Snake-Who-Leaps showed you, by their long bridles. In any case, there is little fear but they will stand. Then follow me."

"But what ails my Gaspar, Other Mother?" asked the child, as she sprang from her saddle. "Did somebody hurt him when the guns fired?"

"No. Tie the horses. He will be right soon. It is the fright. Make haste, make haste!"

"Yes, yes, I will. My dear old Feather-man taught Kitty everything. Every single thing about my Snowbird. I can fasten her all tight so she will never, never get away, unless I let her. I will tie Gaspar's, too; and shall your Chestnut stay here with them two?"

But for once Wahneenah did not stop to hear her darling out. She had seen the deftness with which the little girl's small fingers had copied the instructions of her riding-master, and had wondered at it many times. She trusted it now, knowing that the lad needed her first care, and meaning to carry him through the passage into the cave, then return for the other. She knew, also, that if the soldiers she had seen following them should come upon the tethered horses, the fact of their presence would betray her own. But from this possibility there was no escape; and, had she known it, no need for such.

[Pg 126]

She had scarcely laid the unconscious boy down upon the floor of her retreat when Kitty came flying down the tunnel, her task completed.

"So quick, papoose?"

"Yes. Every one is fastened to a pretty tree, and every one is glad. Why did we ride so fast, Wahneenah? It 'most took Kitty's breath out of her mouth. But I did like it till my Gaspar looked so queer. Is he sick, Other Mother? Why doesn't he speak to me?"

"He is ill, in very fact, Girl-Child. Ill of terror. Young as he is, he has seen fearful sights, and they have hurt his tender heart. But he will soon be better; and when he is you must not talk to him of our old home, or of our ride, or of anything except that we are making another little festival here in our cave. One more cup of water, papoose, but take care you do not slip when you dip it from the spring. We will bathe his face and rub his hands, and by and by he will awake and talk."

[Pg 127]

Then, leaving the lad to the ministrations of the child, and under pretence of making "all cosy for the picnic," Wahneenah sped cautiously back through the passage to the edge of the little grove, casting a searching glance in each direction. To her infinite relief, the glistening speck had vanished from the landscape, and she concluded that the white soldiers had ridden but a short distance north of the village, and then returned to it. She noticed with pride how the little maid had fastened each of the brave animals that had served them so well in a spot where the grass was still green and plentiful, and that there was no need of her refastening the straps which held them.

"Surely, her wisdom is more than mortal!" she exclaimed in delight; such as more cultured mothers feel when they discover that their little ones are really gifted with the common intelligence that to them seems extraordinary.

Gaspar was awake, and looking about him curiously, when she got back into the cavern; and, in response to his silent inquiry, she drew a tree-branch before the opening and nodded smilingly:

"That is to keep the sunshine out of the Dark-Eyes."

"But—where are we? Why—oh! I remember! I remember! Must I always, always see such awful things? Is there no place in this world where I can hide?"

[Pg 128]

"Why, yes, Dark-Eye. There is just such a place; and we have found it. Don't you remember our sanctuary? Where the Black Partridge came to eat the fish you caught? Where we have such a store of good things put aside. Rest now, after your ride, and the White Papoose shall make a pillow for you of the rushes I will pull. Then we'll shut the branch in close, like the curtain of our wigwam, and be as safe and happy as a bird in its nest."

Wahneenah's assumed cheerfulness did not deceive, though it greatly comforted, the terrified boy; and the quietude of the sheltered spot, added to its dimness and his own exhaustion, soon overcame him again, and his eyelids closed. But the sleep into which he drifted now was a natural and restful one, and he roused from it, at Kitty's summons, with something of his old courage—the courage which had made him a hero that day when he first rode the black gelding, and had used his boyish strength to do a man's work.

"When Other Mother did make a fire and cook us such a nice breakfast, we must eat it quick. Kitty's ready. Kitty's dreadful hungry, Kitty is. Is you hungry, too, Dark-Eye?"

He had not thought that he was. But now that she mentioned it, he realized the fact. Fortunately, he was so young and healthy that the scenes through which he seemed destined to pass at such frequently-recurring intervals could not really affect his physical condition for any length of time. To see Wahneenah moving about the little cavern as calmly as if it were her daily habit to be there, and to catch the sound of the Sun Maid's joyous laughter, was to make the present seem the only reality.

[Pg 129]

"Why, it's another picnic, isn't it? Did the things actually happen back there as I thought? Were we here all night? I used to have such terrible dreams, when I lived at the Fort, that, when daylight came, I could not forget them. I get confused between the dreams and the true things."

"An empty stomach makes a foolish head. Many a squaw is afraid of her warrior before he breaks his morning fast, and finds him a lamb after it is eaten," said Wahneenah, sententiously.

"Gaspar is my warrior, Other Mother; but I am never afraid of him."

"You are afraid of nothing, Kitty!" reproved the boy.

"But I am! I am afraid I shall get nothing to eat at all, if you don't come!"

So the children ate, and Wahneenah served them. She was herself too anxious to partake of any food, and under her placid exterior she was straining every nerve to listen for any outward sounds which might prove that their refuge had been discovered.

[Pg 130]

But no sounds came to disturb them, and as the hours passed hope returned to her; and when the Sun Maid had fallen asleep, weary of frolic, and Gaspar again questioned her concerning the morning, she answered, in good faith:

"Probably, it was not half so bad as it seemed. There were many bad Indians in the village, and it is likely for them that the white soldiers were searching. They must have gone away long since. By and by, if nothing happens, we will return to our own tepee, and forget this morning's fright. The Snake-Who-Leaps will be proud of his pupils for the way they rode at his bidding."

A shiver ran through the lad's frame, and he crept within the shelter of Wahneenah's arm.

"But did you not see what happened to him? He lies beneath the curtains of your lodge, and he will teach us no more. A white soldier shot him. I saw him fall."

The woman herself had not seen this, and she now sprang to her feet in a fury of indignation.

"A white man killed him! That grand old brave, who should have lived to be a hundred years! It cannot be."

"But it was."

She was the daughter of a mighty chief. Her blood was royal, and she gloried in it. All the race-hatred in her nature roused, and, for the moment only, she glowered upon the pale-faced youth before her, as if he represented, in his small person, all the sins of his own people.

[Pg 131]

Then the paroxysm passed, and her nobler self triumphed. Sitting down again, she sought to draw the boy back into her embrace, but he held himself aloof, and would not. So she began to talk with him there, with a simple wisdom and dignity that she had learned from nature itself.

"Why should we be angry, one with another, my son? The Great Spirit is our Father. No man comes into life nor leaves it by a chance. What the Mighty One decrees, that it is befalls. Between His red-skinned children and His pale-faced ones He has put an undying enmity. I have not always so believed. I have hoped and pleaded for the peace which should glorify the world, even as the sun is glorifying the wide land outside of this dim cavern. But it is not so to be. Even as the chief, the Black Partridge, said: there is a feud which can never be overcome, for it is of the Great Spirit's own planting. He that made us all permits it. Let us, then, in our small place, cease to fight against the inevitable. We have made the compact. We will abide by it. In a tiny corner of the beautiful world we three will live in harmony. Let the rest go. Put away your anger against my people, as I now put aside mine against yours. The Sun Maid is of both races, it seems to me. She is our Bond, our Peacemaker, our Delight. Behold! She wakes. Before her eyes, let no shadow of our mutual trouble fall. I go outside to watch. If all seems well, we may ride home at nightfall."

[Pg 132]

Save for the danger to her young charges, she would have done so even then. Far superior though she had always been to them, her heart yearned over the helpless women of her tribe whom she had left behind.

"But that cannot be. They were tied fast by their motherhood to the homes wherein they may have perished, even as I am tied here by my adopted ones. The beasts, too, are tied; but they, at least, may have a moment's freedom."

So she loosed them, and guided them to the pool where they could drink, and watched them curiously, to see if they would avail themselves of the liberty she had thus offered. But they did not. They quaffed the clear water, then tossed their velvet nostrils about its depths till it was soiled and worthless; yet they turned of their own accord away from the wind-swept prairie into the shelter of the trees, and grouped themselves beneath one, as if uniting against some common, unseen enemy.

"They are wiser than their masters," said Wahneenah, patting her Chestnut's beautiful neck; and seeing a deeper glade, where they might spend the night even more safely, she led them thither and fastened them again. Under ordinary circumstances she would have left them untethered; but she knew not then at what moment she might again need them, as they had been needed earlier in the day.

[Pg 133]

When the darkness fell, Wahneenah put aside the brushwood door which she had placed before the entrance to the cave, and sat down upon the withering branch to watch and wait. The children were both asleep, and she knew that if the Black Partridge were still alive and able he would seek her there, as he had promised on that day in the past when they had discussed the possibility of what had really now occurred.

She was not to be disappointed. While she sat, contrasting the happiness that had been hers on just the night before with the uncertainty of this, there sounded in the sloping tunnel the tread of a moccasined foot. Also, she could hear the crowding of a stalwart figure against its sides, and there was something in both sounds which told her who was coming.

"My brother is late."

"It is better thus, it may be, than not at all."

"The voice of the Black Partridge is sorrowful."

"The heart of the chief is broken within him."

[Pg 134]

For a space after that neither spoke. Then Wahneenah rose and set a candle in a niche of the wall and lighted it. By its flame she could see to move about and she presently had brought some food in a dish and placed a gourd of water by the chief's side.

The water he drank eagerly and held the cup for more; but the food he pushed aside, relapsing into another silence.

Finally, Wahneenah spoke.

"Has the father of his tribe no message for his sister?"

"Over what the ear does not hear, the heart cannot grieve."

"That is a truth which contradicts itself."

"The warrior of Wahneenah judged well when he chose this cavern for a possible home."

"It is needed, then? As the Black Partridge foretold."

"It is needed. There is no other."

The words were quietly spoken; but there was heart-break in each one.

“Our village? The home of all our people? Is it not still safe and a refuge for all unfortunates among the nations?”

“Where Muck-otey-pokee laughed by the waterside, there is now a heap of ruins. The river that danced in the sunlight is red with the blood of the slain and of all the lodges wherein we dwelt, not one remains!” [Pg 135]

“My brother! Surely, much brooding has made you distraught. Such cannot be. There were warriors, hundreds of them in the settlement and before their arrows the pale-faces fall like trees before the woodman’s axe.”

“If the arrows are not in the quiver, can the warrior shoot? Against the man who steals up in the rear, can one be prepared? It was a short, sharp battle. The innocent fell with the guilty, and the earth receives them all. Where Muck-otey-pokee stood is a blackened waste. Those who survived have fled, to seek new homes wherever they may find them. In her pathways the dead faces stare into the sky as even yet, among the sandhills, lie and stare the unburied dead of the Fort Dearborn massacre. It is fate. It is nature. It is the game of life. To-day one wins, to-morrow another. In the end, for all—is death.”

For a while after that, Wahneenah neither moved nor spoke, and the Black Partridge lapsed into another profound silence. Finally, the woman rose, and going to the fireplace, took handfuls of its ashes and strewed them upon her head and face. Then she drew her blanket over her features, and thus, hiding her sorrow even from the witness of the night, she sat down again in her place and became at once as rigid and impassive as her brother. [Pg 136]

Thus the morning found them. Despite their habit of wandering from point to point, the village of Muck-otey-pokee was the rallying-place of the Pottawatomies, their home, the ancient burial-ground of their dead. Its destruction meant, to the far-seeing Black Partridge, also the destruction of his tribe. Therefore, as he had said, his spirit was broken within him.

But at the last he rose to depart, and still fasting. With the solemnity of one who parted from her forever, he addressed the veiled Wahneenah and bade her:

“Put aside the grief that palsies, and find joy in the children whom the Great Spirit has sent you. They also are homeless and orphaned. There are left now no white soldiers to harry and distress. This cavern is warmer than a wigwam, and there is store of food for many more than three. Remain here until the springtime and by then I may return. I go now to my brother Gomo, at St. Joseph’s, to counsel at his fireside on what may yet be done to save the remnant of our people. You are safer here than in any village that I know. Farewell.”

But, absorbed in his own gloomy reflections, the Black Partridge for once forgot his native caution; and without waiting to reconnoitre, he mounted his horse and rode boldly away from the shelter of the brush into the broad light of the prairie and so due north toward the distant encampment of his tribesmen. [Pg 137]

Yet the glittering eyes of a jealous Indian were watching him as he rode. An Indian who had been sheltered by the hospitality of the great chief, and for many months, in Muck-otey-pokee; but who had neither gratitude nor mercy in his heart, wherein was only room for treachery and greed.

As Black Partridge rode away from the cave by the river, the other mounted his horse and rode swiftly toward it.

CHAPTER XI.

[Pg 138]

UNDER A WHITE MAN’S ROOF.

The log cabin of Abel and Mercy Smith stood within a bit of forest that bordered the rich prairie.

As homes went in those early days, when Illinois was only a territory, and in that sparsely settled locality, it was a most roomy and comfortable abode. The childless couple which dwelt in it were comfortable also, although to hear their daily converse with one another a stranger would not so have fancied. They had early come into the wilderness, and had, therefore, lived much alone. Yet each was of a most social nature, and the result, as their few neighbors said, of their isolated situation was merely “a case of out-talk.”

When Mercy's tongue was not wagging, Abel's was, and often both were engaged at the same moment. Her speech was sharp and decisive; his indolent, and, to one of her temperament, exceedingly aggravating. But, between them, they managed to keep up almost a continuous discourse. For, if Abel went afield, Mercy was sure to follow him upon various excuses; unless the weather were too stormy, when, of course, he was within doors.

[Pg 139]

However, there were times when even their speech lagged a little, and then homesickness seized the mistress of the cabin; and after several days of preparation she would set out on foot or on horseback, according to the distance to be traversed, for some other settler's cabin and a wider exchange of ideas.

On a late November day, when the homesickness had become overpowering, Mercy tied on her quilted hood and pinned her heavy shawl about her. She had filled a carpet bag with corn to pop and nuts to crack, for the children of her expected hostess and had "set up" a fresh pair of long stockings to knit for Abel. She now called him from the stable into the living room to hear her last remarks.

"If I should be kep' over night, Abel, you'll find a plenty to eat. There's a big pot of baked beans in the lean-to, and some apple pies, and a pumpkin one. The ham's all sliced ready to fry, and I do hope to goodness you won't spill grease 'bout on this rag carpet. I'm the only woman anywhere 's round has a rag carpet all over her floor, any way, and the idee of your sp'ilin' it just makes me sick. I—"

"But I hain't sp'iled it yet, ma. You hain't give me no chance. If you do—"

"If I do! Ain't I leavin' you to get your own breakfast, in case I don't come back? It might rain or snow, ary one, an' then where'd I be?"

[Pg 140]

"Right where you happened to be at, I s'pose," returned Abel, facetiously.

But it was wasted wit. The idea of being storm-stayed now filled the housewife's mind. She was capable, and full of New England gumption; but her husband "was a born botch." True, he could split a log, or clear a woodland with the best; and as for a ploughman, his richly fertile corn bottom and regular eastern-sort-of-garden testified to his ability. But she was leaving him with the possibility of woman's work to do; and as she reflected upon the condition of her cupboard when she should return and the amount of cream he would probably spill, should he attempt to skim it for the churning, her mind misgave her and she began slowly to untie the great hood.

"I believe I won't go after all."

"Won't go, ma? Why not?"

"I'm afraid you'll get everything upset."

"I won't touch a thing more 'n I have to. I'll set right here in the chimney-corner an' doze an' take it easy. The fall work's all done, an' I'd ought to rest a mite."

"Rest! Rest? Yes. That's what a man always thinks of. It's a woman who has to keep at it, early an' late, winter an' summer, sick or well. If I should go an' happen to take cold, I don't know what to the land would become of you, Abel Smith."

[Pg 141]

"I don't either, ma."

There was a long silence, during which Mercy tied and untied her bonnet-strings a number of times; and each time with a greater hesitancy. Finally, she pulled from her head the uneasy covering and laid it on the table. Then she unpinned her shawl, and Abel regarded these signs ruefully. But he knew the nature with which he had to deal; and the occasional absences that were so necessary to Mercy's happiness were also seasons of great refreshment to himself. During them he felt almost, and sometimes quite, his own master. He loafed, and smoked, and whittled, and even brought out his old fiddle and just "played himself crazy"—so his wife declared. Even then he was already recalling a tune he had heard a passing teamster whistle and was longing to try it for himself. He abruptly changed his tactics.

Looking into Mercy's face with an appearance of great gladness, he exclaimed:

"Now ain't that grand! Here was I, thinkin' of myself all alone, and you off havin' such a good time, talkin' over old ways out East an' hearin' all the news that's going. There. Take right off your things an' I'll help put 'em away for you. You've got such a lot cooked up you can afford to get out your patchwork, and I'll fiddle a bit and—"

[Pg 142]

"Abel Smith! I didn't think you'd go and begrudge me a little pleasure. Me, that has slaved an' dug an' worked myself sick a help-meetin' an' savin' for you. I really didn't."

"Well, I'm not begrudging anybody. An' I don't s'pose there is much news we hain't heard. Though there was a new family of settlers moved out on the mill-road last week, I don't reckon they'd be anybody that we'd care about. Folks have to be a mite particular, even out here in Illinois."

Mercy paused, with her half-folded shawl in her hands. Then, with considerable emphasis, she unfolded it again, and deliberately fastened it about her plump person.

"Well, I'm goin'. It's rainin' a little, but none to hurt. I've fixed a dose of cough syrup for Mis' Waldron's baby, an' I'd ought to go an' give it to her. Them new folks has come right near her farm, I hear. If you ain't man enough to look out for yourself for a few hours, you cert'nly ain't enough account for me to worry over. But take good care of yourself, Abel. I'm goin'. I feel it my duty. There's a roast spare-rib an' some potatoes ready to fry; an' the meal for the stirabout is all in the measure an'—good-by. I'll likely be back to-night. If not, by milkin' time to-morrow morning."

[Pg 143]

Abel had taken down the almanac from its nail in the wall and had pretended to be absorbed in its contents. He did not even lift his eyes as his wife went out and shut the door. He still continued to search the "prognostics" long after the cabin had become utterly silent, not daring to glance through the small window, lest she should discover him and be reminded of some imaginary duty toward him that would make her return.

But, at the end of fifteen minutes, since nothing happened and the stillness remained profound, he hung the almanac back in its place, clapped his hands and executed a sort of joy-dance which was quite original with himself. Then he drew his splint-bottomed chair before the open fire, tucked his fiddle under his chin, and proceeded to enjoy himself.

For more than an hour, he played and whistled and felt as royal and happy as a king. By the end of that time he had grown a little tired of music, and noticed that the drizzle of the early morning had settled into a steady, freezing downpour. The trees were already becoming coated with ice and their branches to creak dismally in the rising wind.

"Never see such a country for wind as this is. Blows all the time, the year round. Hope Mercy'll be able to keep ahead of the storm. She's a powerful free traveller, Mercy is, an' don't stan' for trifles. But—my soul! Ain't she a talker? I realize *that* when her back's turned. It's so still in this cabin I could hear a pin drop, if there was anybody round hadn't nothin' better to do than to drop one. Hmm, I s'pose I could find some sort of job out there to the barn. But I ain't goin' to. I'm just goin' to play hookey by myself this whole endurin' day, an' see what comes of it. I believe I'll just tackle one of them pumpkin pies. 'Tain't so long since breakfast, but eatin' kind of passes the time along. I wish I had a newspaper. I wish somethin' would turn up. I—I wouldn't let Mercy know it, not for a farm; but 'tis lonesome here all by myself. I hain't never noticed it so much as I do this mornin'. Whew! Hear that wind! It's a good mile an' a half to Waldron's. I hope Mercy's got there 'fore this."

[Pg 144]

Abel closed the outer door, and crossed to the well-stocked cupboard. As he stood contemplating its contents, and undecided as to which would really best suit his present mood, there came a sound of somebody approaching the house along the slippery footpath. This was so unexpected that it startled the pioneer. Then he reflected: "Mercy. She's come back!" and remained guiltily standing with his hand upon the edge of a pie plate, like a school-boy pilfering his mother's larder.

[Pg 145]

"Rat-a-tat-a-tat!"

"Somebody knockin'! That ain't Mercy! Who the land, I wonder!"

He made haste to see and opened the heavy door to the demand of a young boy, who stood shivering before it. At a little distance further from the house was, also, a woman wrapped in a blanket that glistened with sleet, and which seemed to enfold besides herself the form of a little child.

"My land! my land! Why, bubby! where in the world did you drop from? Is that your ma? No. I see she's an Indian, an' you're as white as the frost itself. Come in. Come right in."

But the lad lingered on the threshold and asked with chattering teeth, which showed how chilled he was:

"Can Wahneenah come too?"

"I don't know who in Christendom Wahneeny is, but you folks all come straight in out of the storm. 'Twon't do to keep the door open so long, for the sleet's beating right in on Mercy's carpet. There'd be the dickens to pay if she saw that."

Gaspar, for it was he, ran quickly back toward the motionless Wahneenah, and, clutching

the corner of her blanket, dragged her forward. She seemed reluctant to follow, notwithstanding her half-frozen condition and she glanced into Abel's honest face with keen inquiry. Yet seeing nothing but good-natured pity in it, she entered the cabin, and herself shut the door. Yet she kept her place close to the exit, even after Gaspar had pulled the blanket apart and revealed the white face of the Sun Maid lying on her breast.

[Pg 146]

"Why, why, why! poor child! Poor little creatur'. Where in the world did you hail from to be out in such weather? Didn't you have ary home to stay in? But, there. I needn't ask that, because there's Mercy off trapesing just the same, an' her with the best cabin on the frontier. I s'pose this Wahneeny was took with a gossipin' fit, too, an' set out to find her own cronies. But I don't recollect as I've heard of any Indians livin' out this way."

By this time the water that had been frozen upon the wanderers' clothing had begun to melt, and was drip-dripping in little puddles upon Mercy's beloved carpet. Abel eyed these with dismay, and finally hit upon the happy expedient of turning back the loose breadth of the heavy fabric which bordered the hearth. Upon the bare boards thus revealed he placed three chairs, and invited his guests to take them.

Gaspar dropped into one very promptly, but the squaw did not advance until the boy cried:

"Do come, Other Mother. Poor Kitty will wake up then, and feel all right."

[Pg 147]

The atmosphere of any house was always uncomfortable to Wahneenah. Even then, she felt as if she had stepped from freedom into prison, cold though she was and half-famished with hunger. Personally, she would rather have taken her bit of food out under the trees; but the thought of her Sun Maid was always powerful to move her. She laid aside the wet blanket, and carried the drowsy little one to the fireside, where the warmth soon revived the child so that she sat up on her foster-mother's lap, and gazed about her with awakening curiosity. Then she began to smile on Abel, who stood regarding her wonderful loveliness with undisguised amazement, and to prattle to him in her accustomed way.

"Why, you nice, nice man! Isn't this a pretty place. Isn't it beau'ful warm? I'm so glad we came. It was cold out of doors, wasn't it, Other Mother? Did you know all the time what a good warm fire was here? Was that why we came?"

"I knew nothing," answered Wahneenah, stolidly.

"But I did!" cried Gaspar. "As soon as I saw the smoke of your chimney I said: 'That is a white man's house. We will go and stay in it.' It's a nice house, sir, and, like Kitty, I am glad we came. Do you live here all alone?"

"No. My wife, Mercy, has gone a visitin'. That's why I happen to be here doin' nothin'. I mean—I might have been to the barn an' not heard you. You're lookin' into that cupboard pretty sharp. Be you hungry? But I needn't ask that. A boy always is."

[Pg 148]

"I am hungry. We all are. We haven't had anything to eat in—days, I guess. Are those pies—regular pies, on the shelves?"

"Yes. Do you like pies?"

"I used to. I haven't had any since I left the Fort."

"Left what?"

"The Fort. Fort Dearborn. Did you know it?"

"Course. That is, about it. But there ain't no Fort now. Don't tell stories."

"I'm not. I'm telling the truth."

If this was a refugee from that unhappy garrison, Abel felt that he could not do enough for the boy's comfort. He could not refrain his suspicious glances from Wahneenah's dark face, but as she kept her own gaze fixed upon the ground, he concluded she did not see them. In any case, she was only an Indian, and therefore to be treated with scant courtesy.

Mercy would have been surprised to see with what handiness her husband played the host in her absence and now he whipped off the red woollen cover from the table and rolled it toward the fireplace. But she would not have approved at all of the lavishness with which he set before his guests the best things from her cupboard. There was a cold rabbit patty, the pot of beans, light loaves of sweet rye bread, and a pat of golden butter. To these he added a generous pitcher of milk, and beside Gaspar's own plate he placed both a pumpkin and a dried-apple pie.

[Pg 149]

"I'd begin with these, if I was you, sonny. Baked beans come by nature, seems to me, but pies are a gift of grace. Though I must say my wife don't stint 'em when she takes it into

her head to go gallivantin' an' leaves me to housekeep. 'Pears to think then I must have somethin' sort of comfortin'. I'd start in on pie, if I was a little shaver, an' take the beans last."

This might not have been the best of advice to give a lad whose fast had been so long continued as Gaspar's, but it suited that young person exactly. Indeed, in all his life he had never seen so well spread a table, and he lost no time in obeying his entertainer's suggestion. But he noticed with regret that his foster-mother did not touch the proffered food, and that she ministered even gingerly to Kitty's wants.

Yet there was nobody, however austere or unhappy, who could long resist the happy influence of the little girl, and least of all the woman who so loved her. As the Sun Maid's color returned to her face, and her stiffened limbs began to resume their suppleness, something of the anxiety left Wahneenah's eyes, and she condescended to receive a bowl of milk and a slice of bread from Abel's hand. [Pg 150]

The fact that she would at last break her own fast made all comfortable; and as soon as Gaspar's appetite was so far appeased that he could begin upon the beans, the settler demanded:

"Now, sonny, talk. Tell me the whole endurin' story from A to Izzard. Where'd you come from now? Where was you bound? What's your name? an' her's? an' the little tacker's? My! but ain't she a beauty! I never see ary such hair on anybody's head, black or white. It's gettin' dry, ain't it; an' how it does fly round, just like foam."

"I'm not 'sonny,' nor 'bubby.' I'm Gaspar Keith. I was brought up at Fort Dearborn. After the massacre, I was taken to Muck-otey-pokee. I—"

But the lad's thoughts already began to grow sombre, and he became so abruptly silent that Abel prompted him.

"Hmm, I've heard of that—that—Mucky place. Indian settlement, wasn't it? Took prisoner, was you?"

"No. I wasn't a prisoner, exactly. I was just a—just a friend of the family, I guess." [Pg 151]

"Oh? So. A friend of an Indian family, sonny?"

"If you'd rather not call me Gaspar, you can please say 'Dark-Eye.' That's my new Indian name; but I hate those other ones. They make me think I am a baby. And I'm not. I am a man, almost."

"So you be. So you be," agreed Abel, admiring the little fellow's spirit. "I 'low you've seen sights, now, hain't you?"

"Yes, dreadful ones; so dreadful that I can't talk about them to anybody. Not even to you, who have given us this nice food and let us warm ourselves. I would if I could, you see; only when I let myself think, I just get queer in the head and afraid. So I won't even think. It doesn't do for a boy to be afraid. Not when he has his mother and sister to take care of."

There was the faintest lightening of the gloom upon the Indian woman's face as Dark-Eye said this. But he was, apart from his terror of bloodshed and fighting, a courageous lad, and had, during their past days of wandering, proved the good stuff of which he was made. Many a day he had gone without eating that the remnant of their food might be saved for the Sun Maid; and though it was, of course, Wahneenah who had taken all the care of the children, if it pleased him to consider their cases reversed he should be left to his own opinion. [Pg 152]

"You're right, boy. I'll call you Gaspar, easy enough. Only, you see, I hain't got no sons of my own an' it kind of makes things seem cosier if I call other folk's youngsters that way. Every little shaver this side of Illinois calls me 'Uncle Abe,' I reckon. But go on with your yarn. My, my, my! Won't Mercy be beat when she comes home an' hears all that's happened whilst she was gone. Go on."

So Gaspar told all that had occurred since the Black Partridge parted from his sister in the cavern and rode away toward St. Joseph's. How that very day came one of the visiting Indians who had been staying at Muck-otey-pokee and whose behavior toward the neighboring white settlers had been a prominent cause of bringing the soldiers' raid upon the innocent and friendly hosts who had entertained him.

The wicked like not solitude, and in the train of this traitor had followed many others. These had turned the cave into a pandemonium and had appropriated to their own uses the stores which Black Partridge had provided for Wahneenah. When to this robbery they had added threats against the lives of the white children, whose presence at the Indian village they in [Pg 153]

their turn declared had brought destruction upon it, the chief's sister had taken such small portion of her own property as she could secure and had set out to find a new home or shelter for her little ones.

Since then they had been always wandering. Wahneenah now had a fixed dread of the pale-faces and had avoided their habitations as far as might be. They had lived in the woods, upon the roots and dried berries they could find and whose power to sustain life the squaw had understood. But now had come the cold of approaching winter and the Sun Maid had shown the effects of her long exposure. Then, at Gaspar's pleading, Wahneenah had put her own distrust of strangers aside and had come with him to the first cabin of white people which they could find.

"And now we're here, what will you do with us?" concluded the lad, fixing his dark eyes earnestly upon his host's face.

Abel fidgetted a little; then, with his happy faculty of putting off till to-morrow the evil that belonged to to-day, he replied:

"Well, son—bub—I mean, Gaspar; we hain't come to that bridge yet. Time enough to cross it when we do. But, say, that little creatur' looks as if she hadn't known what 'twas to lie on a decent bed in a month of Sundays. She's 'bout dried off now; an' my! ain't she a pretty sight in them little Indian's togs! S'pose your squaw-ma puts her to sleep on the bed yonder. Notice that bedstead? There ain't another like it this side the East. I'll just spread a sheet over the quilt, to keep it clean, an' she can snooze there all day, if she likes. I'll play you an' Wahneeny a tune on my fiddle if you want me to."

[Pg 154]

Gaspar was, of course, delighted with this offer but the chief's sister was already tired of the hot house and had cast longing glances through the small window toward the barn in the rear. That, at least, would be cool, and from its doorway she calculated she could keep a close watch upon the door of the cabin, and be ready at a second's notice to rush to her children's aid should harm be offered them. Meanwhile, for this dark day, they would have the comfort to which their birthright entitled them. So she went out and left them with Abel.

The hours flew by and the storm continued. Abel had never been happier nor jollier; and as the twilight came down, and he finally gave up all expectation of Mercy's immediate return, he waxed fairly hilarious, cutting up absurd antics for the mere delight of seeing the Sun Maid laugh and dance in response, and because, under these cheerful conditions, Gaspar's face was losing its premature thoughtfulness and rounding to a look more suited to his years.

[Pg 155]

"Now, I'll dance you a sailor's hornpipe, and then I must go out and milk. If ma'd been home, it would have been finished long ago. But when the cat's away the mice will play, you know; so here goes."

Unfortunately, at that very moment the "cat" to whom he referred, Mercy, in fact, approached the cabin from a direction which even Wahneenah did not observe, and opened a rear door plump upon this unprecedented scene.

Abel stopped short in his jig, one foot still uplifted and his fiddle bow half drawn, while the Sun Maid was yet sweeping her most graceful curtsy; and even the serious Gaspar had left his seat to prance about the room to the notes of Abel's music.

Mercy also remained transfixed, utterly dumfounded, and doubting the evidence of her own senses; but after a moment becoming able to exclaim:

"So! This is how lonesome you be when I leave you, is it?"

CHAPTER XII.

[Pg 156]

AFTER FOUR YEARS.

Despite a really warm and hospitable heart, it was not pleasant for Mercy Smith to find that her submissive husband had taken upon himself to keep open house in this fashion for all who chose to call; and, as she often expressed it, the settler's wife "hated an Indian on sight."

Upon her unexpected entrance, there had ensued a brief silence; then the two tongues which were accustomed to wag so nimbly took up their familiar task and a battle of words

followed. Its climax came rather suddenly, and was not anticipated by the housewife who declared with great decision:

"I say the children may stay for a spell, till we can find a way to dispose of 'em. The boy's big enough to earn his keep, if he ain't too lazy. Male creatur's mostly are. An' the girl's no great harm as I see, 'nless she's too pretty to be wholesome. But that red-face goes, or I do. There ain't no room in this cabin for me an' a squaw to one time. You can take your druther. She goes or I do"; and she glanced with animosity toward Wahneenah, who, when hearing the fresh voice added to the other three, had come promptly upon Mercy's return to take her stand just within the entrance. There she had remained ever since, silent, watchful, and quite as full of distrust concerning Mercy as Mercy could possibly have been toward herself.

[Pg 157]

"Well," said Abel, slowly, and there was a new note in his voice which aroused and riveted his wife's attention. "Well—you hear me. I don't often claim to be boss, but when I do I mean it. Them children can stay here just as long as they will. For all their lives, an' I'll be glad of it. The Lord has denied us any little shavers of our own, an' maybe just because in His providence He was plannin' to send them two orphans here for us to tend. As for the squaw, she's proved her soul's white, if her skin is red, an' she stays or goes, just as she elects—ary one. That's all. Now, you'd better see about fixing 'em a place to sleep."

Because she was too astonished to do otherwise, Mercy complied. And Wahneenah wisely relieved her unwilling hostess of any trouble concerning herself. She followed Abel to the barn, to attend him upon his belated "chores," and to beg the use of some coarse blankets which she had found stored there. Until she could secure properly dressed skins or bark, these would serve her purpose well enough for the little tepee she meant to pitch close to the house which sheltered her children.

[Pg 158]

"For I must leave them under her roof while the winter lasts. They are not of my race, and cannot endure the cold. But I will work just so much as will pay for their keep and my own. They shall be beholden to the white woman for naught but their shelter. For that, too, I will make restitution in the days to come."

"Pshaw, Wahneeny! I wouldn't mind a bit of a sharp tongue, if I was you. Ma don't mean no hurt. She's used to bein' boss, that's all; an' she will be the first to be glad she's got another female to consort with. I wouldn't lay up no grudge. I wouldn't."

But the matter settled itself as the Indian suggested. It was pain and torment to her to hear Mercy alternately petting and correcting her darlings, yet for their sakes she endured that much and more. She even failed to resent the fact that, after a short residence at the farm, the Smiths both began to refer to her as "our hired girl, that's workin' for her keep an' the childern's."

It did not matter to her now. Nothing mattered so long as she was still within sight and sound of her Sun Maid's beauty and laughter; and by the time spring came she had procured the needful skins to construct the wigwam she desired. Her skill in nursing, that had been well known among her own people, she now made a means of sustaining her independence. Such aid as she could render was indeed difficult to be obtained by the isolated dwellers in that wilderness; and having nursed Abel through a siege of inflammatory rheumatism, as he had never been cared for before, he sounded her praises far and near, and to all of the chance passers-by.

[Pg 159]

For her service among those who could pay she charged a very moderate wage, but it sufficed; and, for the sake of pleasing her children, she adopted a dress very like that worn by all the women of the frontier. Kitty, also, had soon been clothed "like a Christian" by Mercy's decision; but Wahneenah still carefully preserved the dainty Indian costume Katasha had given the child; along with the sacred White Bow and the priceless Necklace.

As for the three horses on which she and the two children had stolen away from their enemies in the cave of refuge, Abel had long ago decided that they were but kittle cattle, unfitted for the sober work of life which his own oxen and old nag Dobbin performed so well. So they were left in idleness, to graze where they pleased, and were little used except by their owners for a rare ride afield. The Chestnut, however, carried Wahneenah to and fro upon her nursing trips; for, unless the case were too urgent to be left, she always returned at nightfall to her own lodge and the nearness of her Sun Maid.

[Pg 160]

Thus four uneventful years passed away, and it had come to the time of the wheat harvest.

"And it's to be the biggest, grandest frolic ever was in this part of the country," declared the settler, proudly.

Whereupon, days before, Mercy began to brew and bake, and even Wahneenah

condescended to assist in the household labor. But she did this that she might if possible lighten that of her Sun Maid, who had now grown to a "real good-sized girl an' just as smart as chain lightning."

This was Abel's description. Mercy's would have been:

"Kitty's well enough. But she hates to sew her seam like she hates poison. She'd ruther be makin' posies an' animals out my nice clean fresh-churned butter than learn cookin'. But she's good-tempered. Never flies out at all, like Gaspar, 'cept I lose patience with Wahneeny. Then, look sharp!"

"Well, I tell you that out in this country a harvestin' is a big institution!" cried Abel to Gaspar as, early on the morning of the eventful day, they were making all things ready for the accommodation of the people who would flock to the Smith farm to assist in the labor and participate in the fun. "If there's some things we miss here, we have some that can't be matched out East. Every white settler's every other settler's neighbor, even though there's miles betwixt their clearin's. All hands helpin' so makes light work of raisin' cabins or barns, sowin', reapin', or clearin'. I—I declare I feel as excited as a boy. But you don't seem to. You're gettin' a great lad now, Gaspar, an' one these days I'll be thinkin' of payin' you some wages. If so be I can afford it, an'—"

[Pg 161]

"And Mercy will let you!"

"Hi, diddle diddle! What's struck you crosswise, sonny?"

"I'm tired of working so hard for other people. I want a chance to do something for myself. I'm not ungrateful; don't think it. But see. I am already taller than you and I can do as much work in a day. Where is the justice, then, of my labor going for naught?"

"Why, Gaspar. Why, why, why!" exclaimed the pioneer, too astonished to say more.

Gaspar went on with his task of clearing the barn floor and arranging tying places for the visitors' teams; but his dark face was clouded and anxious, showing little of the anticipation which Abel's did.

"I'm going to ask you, Father Abel, to let me try for a job somewhere else; that is, if you can't really pay me anything, as your wife declares. Then, by and by, when I can earn enough to get ahead a little, I'd pay you back for all you've spent on us three."

[Pg 162]

Abel's face had fallen, and he now looked as if he might be expecting some dire disaster rather than a frolic. But it brightened presently.

"Yes, Gaspar; I know you're big, and well-growed. But you're young yet—dreadful young —"

"I'm near fifteen."

"Well, you won't be out your time till you're twenty-one."

"What 'time'?" asked the lad, angrily, though he knew the answer.

"Hmm. Of course, there wasn't no regular papers drawed, but it was understood; it was always understood between ma and me that if we took you all in, and did for you while you was growin' up, your service belonged to us. Same's if you'd been bound by the authorities."

"Get over there, Dobbin!"

"Pshaw! You must be real tried in your mind to hit a four-footed creatur' like that. I hain't never noticed that you was short-spoke with the stock—not before this morning. I wish you wouldn't get out of sorts to-day, boy! I—well, there's things afoot 'at I think you'd like to take a share in. There. That'll do. Now, just turn another edge on them reapin' knives, an' see that there's plenty o' water in the troughs, an' feed them fatten' pigs in the pen, an'— Shucks! He's off already. I wonder what's took him so short! I wonder if he's got wind of anything out the common!"

[Pg 163]

The latter part of Abel's words were spoken to himself, for Gaspar had taken his knives to the grindstone in the yard and was now calling for Kitty to turn the stone for him, while he should hold the blades against its surface.

But it was Mercy who answered his summons, appearing in the doorway with her sleeves rolled up, her apron floured, and her round face aglow with haste and excitement.

"Well? well, Gaspar Keith? What you want of Kit?"

"To help me."

"Help yourself. I can't spare her."

"Then I can't grind the knives. That's all." He tossed them down to wait her pleasure, and Mercy groaned.

"If I ain't the worst bestead woman in the world! Here's all creation coming to be fed, an' no help but a little girl like Kit an' a grumpy old squaw 't don't know enough to 'preciate her privileges. Hey! Gaspar! Call Abel in to breakfast. An' after that maybe sissy can turn the stun. Here 'tis goin' on six o'clock, if it's a minute, an' some the folks'll be pokin' over here by seven, sure!"

Then Mercy retreated within doors and directed the Sun Maid to:

[Pg 164]

"Fly 'round right smart now an' set the house to one side. Whisk them flapjacks over quicker 'an that, then they'll not splish-splash all over the griddle. When I was a little girl nine years old I could fry cakes as round as an apple. No reason why you shouldn't, too, if you put your mind to it."

The Sun Maid laughed. No amount of fret or labor had ever yet had power to dim the brightness of her nature. Was it the Sun Maid, though? One had to look twice to see. For this tall, slender girl now wore her glorious hair in a braid, and her frock was of coarse blue homespun.

Her feet were bare, and her plump shoulders bowed a little because of the heavy burdens which her "mother Mercy" saw fit to put upon them.

"But I guess I don't want to put my mind to it. I can't see anything pretty in 'jacks which are to be eaten right up. Only I like to have them taste right for the folks. That's all."

Abel and Gaspar came in, and Kitty placed a plate of steaming cakes before them. Mercy hurried to the big churn outside the door and began to work the dasher up and down as if she hadn't an ounce of butter in her dairy and must needs prepare this lot for the festival. As she churned she kept up a running fire of directions to the household within, finally suggesting, in a burst of liberality due to the occasion:

[Pg 165]

"You can fry what flapjacks you want for yourself, Wahneeny. An' I don't know as I care if you have a little syrup on 'em to-day—just for once, so to speak."

However, Wahneenah disdained even the cakes, and the syrup-jug was deposited in its place with undiminished contents.

"Be you all through, then? Well, Kit, fly 'round. Clear the table like lightning, an' fetch that butter bowl out the spring, an' see if the salt's all poun' an' sifted; an' open the draw's an' lay out my clothes, an'—Dear me! Does seem 's if I should lose my senses with so much to do an' no decent help, only——"

"Hold on, Mercy! What's the use of rushin' through life 's if you was tryin' to break your neck?"

"Rushin'! With all that's comin' here to-day!"

"Well, let 'em come. We'll be glad to see 'em. Nobody gladder 'n you yourself. But you fair take my breath away with your everlastin' hurry-skurry, clitter-clatter. Don't give a man a chance to even kiss his little girl good-mornin'. Do you know that, Sunny Maid? Hain't said a word to your old Daddy yet!"

The child ran to him and fondly flung her arms as far as they would go around the settler's broad shoulders. It was evident that there was love and sympathy between these two, though they were to be allowed short space "for foolin'" that day, and Mercy's call again interrupted them:

[Pg 166]

"Come and take this butter down to the brook, Kit, an' wash it all clean, an' salt it just right—here 'tis measured off—an' make haste. I do believe you'd ruther stand there lovin' your old Abel—homely creatur'!—than helpin' me. Yet, when I was a little girl your age, I could work the butter over fit to beat the queen. Upon my word, I do declare I see a wagon movin' 'crosst the prairie this very minute! Oh! what shall I do if I ain't ready when they get here!"

Catching at last something of the pleasurable excitement about her, Kitty lifted the heavy butter-tray and started for the stream. The butter was just fine and firm enough to tempt her fingers into a bit of modelling, such as she had picked up for herself; and very speedily she had arranged a row of miniature fruits and acorns, and was just attempting to copy a

flower which grew by the bank when Wahneenah's voice, close at hand, warned her:

"Come, Girl-Child. The white mistress is in haste this morning. It is better to carry back the butter in a lump than to make even such pretty things and risk a scolding."

"But father Abel would like them for his company. He is very fond of my fancy 'pats'."

[Pg 167]

"But not to-day. Besides, if there is time for idleness, I want you to pass it here with me, in my own wigwam."

The Sun Maid looked up. "Shall you not be at the feasting, dear Other Mother? You have many friends among those who are coming."

"Friendship is proved by too sharp a test sometimes. The way of the world is to follow the crowd. If a person falls into disfavor with one, all the rest begin to pick flaws. More than that: the temptation of money ruins even noble natures."

"Why, Wahneenah! You sound as if you were talking riddles. Who is tempted by money? and which way does the 'crowd' you mean go? I don't understand you at all."

"May the Great Spirit be praised that it is so. May He long preserve to you your innocent and loyal heart."

With these words, the Indian woman stooped and laid her hand upon the child's head; then slowly entered her lodge and let its curtains fall behind her. There was an unusual sternness about her demeanor which impressed Kitty greatly; so that it was with a very sober face that she herself gathered up her burdens and returned to the cabin.

Yet on the short way thither she met Gaspar, who beckoned to her from behind the shelter of a haystack, motioning silence.

[Pg 168]

"But you mustn't keep me, Gaspar boy. Mother Mercy is terribly hurried this morning, and now, for some reason, Other Mother has stopped helping and has gone home to the tepee. If I don't work, it will about crush her down, Mercy says."

"Hang Mercy! There. I don't mean that. I wish you wouldn't always look so scared when I get mad. I am mad to-day, Kit. Mad clear through. I've got to be around amongst folks, too, for a while; but the first minute you get, you come to that pile of logs near Wahneenah's place, and I'll have something to tell you."

"No you won't! No you won't! I know it already. I heard father Abel talking. There is to be a horse race, after the harvesting and the supper are over. There is a new man, or family, moved into the neighborhood and he is a horse trader. I heard all about it, sir!"

"You heard that? Did you hear anything else? About Wahneenah and money?"

"Only what she told me herself"; repeating the Indian woman's words.

"Then she knows, poor thing!" cried Gaspar, indignantly.

CHAPTER XIII.

[Pg 169]

THE HARVESTING.

Kitty had no time to ask further explanation. Already there was an ox team driving up to the cabin and, scanning the prairies, she saw others on the way, so merely stopped to cry, eagerly:

"They've come! The folks have come!" before she hastened in with the butter and to see if she could in any way help Mercy dress for the great occasion.

She was just in time, for the plump housewife was vainly struggling to fasten the buttons of a new lilac calico gown which she had made:

"A teeny tiny mite too tight. I didn't know I was gettin' so fat, I really didn't."

"Oh! it's all right, dear Mother Mercy. It looked just lovely that day you tried it on. I'll help you. You're all trembling and warm. That's the reason it bothers."

She was so deft and earnest in her efforts that Mercy submitted without protest, and in this manner succeeded in "making herself fit to be seen by folks" about the moment that they arrived to observe. Then everything else was forgotten, amid the greetings and gayety that

[Pg 170]

followed. For out of what purported to be a task the whole community was making a frolic.

While the men repaired to the golden fields to reap the grain the women hurried to the smooth grassy place where the harvest-dinner was to be enjoyed out-of-doors.

Most of the vehicles—which brought whole families, down to the babe in long clothes—were drawn by oxen, though some of the pioneers owned fine horses and had driven these, groomed with extraordinary care and destined, later on, to be entered in the races which should conclude the business and fun of the day.

Both horses and oxen were, for the present, led out to graze upon a fine pasture and were supposed to be under the care, while there, of the young people. These were, however, more deeply engaged in playing games than in watching, and for once their stern parents ignored the carelessness.

“Oh, such bright faces!” cried the Sun Maid to Mercy. “And yours is the happiest of all, even though you did have such a terrible time to get ready. See, they are fixing the tables out of the wagon boards, and every woman has brought her own dishes. They’re making fires, too, some of the bigger boys. What for, Mother Mercy?”

“Oh! don’t bother me now. It’s to boil the coffee on, and to bake the jonny-cakes. ‘Journey-cakes,’ they used to call them. Mis’ Waldron, she’s mixin’ some this minute. Step acrost to her table an’ watch. A girl a’most ten years old ought to learn all kinds of housekeepin’.”

[Pg 171]

Kitty was nothing loath. It was, indeed, a treat to see with what skill the comely settler of the wilderness mixed and tossed and patted her jonny-cake, famous all through that countryside for lightness and delicacy; and as she finished each batch of dough, and slapped it down upon the board where it was to cook, she would hand it over to Kitty’s charge, with the injunction:

“Carry that to one of the fires, an’ stand it up slantin’, so ’s to give it a good chance to bake even. Watch ’em all, too; an’ as soon as they are a nice brown on one side, either call me to turn ’em to the other, or else do it yourself. As Mercy Smith says, a girl can’t begin too early to housekeep.”

“But this is out-door keep, isn’t it?” laughed the Sun Maid, as, with a board upon each arm, she bounded away to place the cakes as she had been directed.

In ordinary, Mercy Smith was not a lavish woman; but on such a day as this she threw thrift to the wind and, brought out the best she could procure for the refreshment of her guests; and everybody knows how much better food tastes when eaten out-of-doors than in regular fashion beside a table. The dinner was a huge success; and even Gaspar, whom Kitty’s loving watchful eyes had noticed was more than usually serious that day, so far relaxed his indignation as to partake of the feast with the other visiting lads.

[Pg 172]

But, when it was over and the women were gathering up the dishes, preparatory to cleansing them for their homeward journey, the child came to where Mercy stood among a group of women, and asked:

“Shall I wash the dishes, Mother Mercy?”

“No, sissy, you needn’t. We grown folks’ll fix that. If you want something to do, an’ are tired of out-doors, you can set right down yonder an’ rock Mis’ Waldron’s baby to sleep. By and by, Abel’s got a job for you will suit you to a T!”

Kitty was by no means tired of out-doors, but a baby to attend was even a greater rarity than a holiday; so she sat down beside the cradle, which its mother had brought in her great wagon, and gently swayed the little occupant into a quiet slumber. Then she began to listen to the voices about her, and presently caught a sentence which puzzled her.

“Fifty dollars is a pile of money. It’s more ’n ary Indian ever was worth. Let alone a sulky squaw.”

“Yes it is. An’ I need it. I need it dreadful,” assented Mercy, forgetful of the Sun Maid’s presence in the room.

[Pg 173]

“Well, I, for one, should be afraid of her,” observed another visitor, clattering the knives she was wiping. “I wouldn’t have a squaw livin’ so near my door, an’ that’s a fact.”

Kitty now understood that these people were speaking of Wahneenah, and listened intently.

“Oh! I ain’t afraid of her. Not that. But I never did like her, nor she me. She’s sullen an’ top-lofty. Why, you’d think I wasn’t no better than the dirt under her feet, to see her sometimes. She was good to the childern, I’ll ’low, afore me an’ Abel took ’em in. But that’s four years

ago, an' I've cared for 'em ever since. Sometimes I think she's regular bewitched 'em, they dote on her so. If you believe me, they'll listen to her leastest word sooner 'n a whole hour of my talk!"

"I shouldn't be surprised," quietly commented one young matron, who was jogging her own baby to sleep by tipping her chair violently back and forth upon its four legs.

Continued Mercy:

"She wouldn't eat a meal of victuals with me if she was starvin'. Yet I've treated her Christian. Only this mornin' I give her leave to fry cakes for herself, an' even have some syrup, but she wouldn't touch to do it. Yes; fifty dollars of good government money would be more to me 'n she is, an' she'd be took care of, I hear, along with all the rest is caught. It's time the country was rid of the Indians an' white folks had a chance. There's all the while some massacrein' an' fightin' goin' on somewhere."

[Pg 174]

"Oh! I guess the government just puts 'em under lock an' key, in a guard-house, or some such place, till it gets enough to send away off West somewheres. I'd get the fifty dollars, if I was you, and march her off. She'll be puttin' notions into the youngsters' heads first you see an' makin' trouble."

"I don't know just how to manage it. Abel, he's queer an' sot. He's gettin' tired, though, of some things, himself."

"Manage it easy enough. Like fallin' off a log. My man could do you that good turn. She could be took along in our wagon as far as the Agency. Then, next time he comes by with his grist on his road to mill, he could fetch you the money. I'd do it, sure. I only wish I had an Indian to catch as handy as she is." Having given this advice, Mercy's guest sat down.

There was a rush of small feet and the Sun Maid confronted them. Her blue eyes blazed with indignation, her face was white, and her hair, which the day's activity had loosed from its braid, streamed backward as if every fibre quivered with life. With heaving breast and clenched hands, she faced them all.

[Pg 175]

"Oh, how dare you! How dare you! You are talking of my Wahneenah; of selling her, of selling her like a pig or a horse. Even you, Mrs. Jordan, though she nursed your little one till it got well, and only told you the truth: that if you'd look after it more and visit less it wouldn't have the croup so often. You didn't like to hear her say it, and you do not love her. But she is good, good, good! There is nobody so good as she is. And no harm shall come to her. I tell you. I say it. I, the Sun Maid, whom the Great Spirit sent to her out of the sky. I will go and tell her at once. She shall run away. She shall not be sold—never, never, never!"

The women remained dumfounded where she left them, watching her skim the distance between cabin and wigwam, scarcely touching the earth with her bare feet in her haste to warn her friend of this new danger which threatened her and her race. For it was quite true, this matter that had been discussed. The Indians had given so much trouble in the sparsely settled country that the authorities had offered a price for their capture; and it was this price which money-loving Mercy coveted.

Like a flash of a bird's wing, Kitty had darted into the lodge and out again, with an agony of fear upon her features; and then she saw Gaspar beckoning.

[Pg 176]

As she reached him he motioned silence and drew her away into the shadow of the forest, that just there fringed the clearing behind the tepee.

"But—Wahneenah's gone!" she whispered.

"Don't worry. She's safe enough for the present. Listen to me. Do you remember the horse-racing last year?"

"Course. I remember I got so excited over the horses, and so sorry for the boys that rode and didn't win. But what of that? Other Mother has gone!"

"I tell you she's safe. Safer than you or me. Listen. Abel says *we*, too, will have to ride a race to-day! On Tempest and Snowbird. Even if we win, the money will belong to him; and if we lose—he's going to sell one of our horses to pay his loss. I heard him say it."

"But they are ours!"

"He's kept them all these years, he says. He claims the right to do with them as he chooses. Bad as that is, it isn't the worst. Though Wahneenah is safe, still she will not be always. You and I will have to ride this race—to save her life, or liberty!"

"What do—you—mean?"

"I haven't time to explain. Only—will you do as I say? Exactly?"

"Of course." Kitty looked inquiringly into her foster-brother's face. Didn't he know she loved him better than anybody and would mind him always? [Pg 177]

"When we are on the horses if I say to you: 'Follow me!' will you?"

"Of course. Away to the sky, over yonder, if you want me."

"Even if any grown folks should try to stop you? Even if Abel or Mercy?"

"Even"—declared the little girl, sincerely.

"Now go back to the house, or anywhere you please till Abel calls you, or I do. Then come and mount. And then—then—do exactly as I tell you. Remember."

He went away, back to the group of men about the barn, and Kitty sat down in the shady place to wait. But it was not for long. Presently she heard Mercy calling her, and saw Abel, with Gaspar, leading the black gelding and pretty Snowbird out of the stable toward a ring of other horses. She got up and passed toward the cabin very slowly. Oddly enough, she began to feel timid about riding before all those watching, strange faces; yet did not understand why. Then she thought of Wahneenah, and her returning anger made her indifferent to them.

"Abel wants you, Kit!" cried Mrs. Smith, quite ignoring the child's recent outbreak, and the girl walked quietly toward him. But it was Gaspar who helped to swing her into her saddle, where she settled herself with an ease learned long ago of the Snake-Who-Leaps. The lad, also, found time to whisper: [Pg 178]

"Remember your promise! We are to ride this race for Wahneenah's life—though nobody knows that save you and me. So ride your best. Ride as you never rode before—and on the road I lead you!"

The sons of the new settler and horse dealer were to ride against these two. There were three of these youths, all well mounted, and the course was to be a certain number of times around the great wheat field so freshly reaped. It was a rough route, indeed, but as just for one as another, and in plain sight of all the visitors. The five horses ranged in a row with their noses touching a line, held by two men, that fell as the word was given:

"One—two—three—GO!"

They went. They made the circuit of the field in fair style, with the three strangers a trifle ahead. On the completion of the second heat, the easterners passed the starting-point alone.

"Why, Gaspar! Why, Kitty!" shouted Abel reprovingly. "How's this?"

"Maybe they don't understand what's meant," suggested somebody.

Seemingly, they did not. For neither at the third round did they appear in leading. On the contrary, they had started off at a right angle, straight across the prairie; but now so fast they rode, and so unerringly, that long before their deserted friends had ceased to stare and wonder they had passed out of sight. [Pg 179]

CHAPTER XIV.

[Pg 180]

ONCE MORE IN THE OLD HOME.

"We can rest a little now, Kit. We are so far away that nobody could catch us if they tried. They won't try, any way, I guess. They'll think we'll go back."

"Didn't the horses do finely, Gaspar! I never rode like that, I guess. Where are we going? What did you mean about saving Wahneenah's life? Where is she?"

"Don't ask so many questions. I've got to think. I've got to think very hard. I'm the man of our family, you know, Sun Maid. Wahneenah and you are my women."

"Oh! indeed!" said the girl, moving a little nearer her foster-brother on the grassy hillock where they had slipped from their saddles, to rest both themselves and the beasts.

"You see: we've all run away."

"Pooh! That's nothing. I've always been running away. Black Partridge said I began life that way."

"You're about ten years old, Kit. You're big enough to be getting womanly."

"Father Abel said I was. I can sew quite well. If I'm very, very good, I'm to be let stitch a dickey all alone, two threads at a time, for him. Mercy said so." [Pg 181]

"Do you like stitching shirts for that old man?"

"No. I hate it."

"Poor little Sun Maid. You were made to be happy, and do nothing but what you like all day long. Well, I'll be a man some day, and build a cabin of my own for you and Wahneenah."

"That will be nice. Though I'll be of some use some way, even if I don't like sewing. Where shall we go when we get rested, boy?"

"To the Fort."

"The—Fort! I thought it was all burned up."

"There is a new one on the same old ground. It is our real home, you know. We will be refugees. When we meet Wahneenah, we'll go and claim protection."

"Oh! Gaspar, where is she? I want her terribly. I am afraid something will happen to her."

In his heart the lad was, also, greatly alarmed; but he felt it unwise to show this. So he answered, airily:

"Oh! she's on, a piece. I pointed her the road, and told her where to meet us. At the top of the sandhills, this side the Fort."

"The sandhills! That dreadful place. You must be getting a real 'brave,' Gaspar boy, if you don't mind going there again. I've heard you talk—" [Pg 182]

"I don't want to talk even now, Kit. But I had to have some spot we both knew, where we could meet, and we chose that. I expect she'll be there waiting, and as soon as the horses get cooled a little, and we do, we'll go on."

"I'm hungry. I wish we had brought something to eat."

"I did. It's here in my blouse. I noticed at the dinner that you did more serving than eating. There's water yonder, too; in that clump of bushes must be a spring," and the prairie-wise lad was right.

The supper he produced was an indiscriminate mixture of meats and sweets and, had Kitty not been so really in need of food she would have disdained what she promptly pronounced "a mess." But she ate it and felt rested by it; so that she began to remember things she had scarcely noticed earlier in the day.

"Gaspar, Wahneenah must have known about this—this money being offered for her and other Indians. She had taken everything out of her wigwam. I thought she was terribly grave this morning, and she kept looking at me all the time. Do you think she knew she was going to run away as she was?"

"Course. She's known it some days." [Pg 183]

"And didn't tell me!"

"She couldn't, because she loves you so. She wouldn't do a thing to put you in danger. So I thought the matter over, and I tell you I've just taken the business right out their hands. I was tired, any way. I'm glad we came. I'm almost a man, Kit; and I won't be scolded by any woman as Mercy has scolded me. And when I found Abel was getting stingy, too, and claiming our horses for their keep, when they've really just kept themselves out on the prairie, or anywhere it happened, I—"

"Boy, you talk too fast. I—I don't feel as if I was glad. Except when I remember Other Mother. They were horrid, horrid about her. I hate them for that, though I love them for other things. I wonder what Mother Mercy will say when we don't come home!"

"She'll have a chance to say a lot of things before we do, I guess. Well, we'll be going. I wouldn't like to miss Wahneenah, and I don't know but they close the Fort gates at night."

"Did she ride Chestnut?"

"Course. What a lot of questions you ask!"

The Sun Maid looked into the boy's face. It was too troubled for her comfort, and she exclaimed:

"Gaspar Keith! There's more to be told than you've told me. What is it you are keeping back?"

"I—I wonder if you can understand, if I do tell you?"

[Pg 184]

"I think I can understand a good many things. One is: you are making me feel very unhappy."

"Well, then, I'm going to take Wahneenah to the Fort, and give her up myself!"

They had remounted their horses, and were pacing leisurely along toward the rendezvous, keeping a sharp lookout for the Indian woman; but at this startling statement the Sun Maid reined up short, and demanded:

"What—do—you—mean?"

"Just exactly what I say. I'm going to give her up and get the money."

Kitty could not speak; and with a perplexity that was not at all comfortable to himself, the lad returned her astonished gaze.

"Then—you—are—just—as—mean—as—Mercy—Smith!"

"I am not mean at all! Don't you say it. Don't you understand? I do—or I thought I did. It's this way. She can't be given up but once, can she? Well, I'll do it, instead of an enemy."

"You—wicked—boy! I can't believe it! I won't! You shall not do it; never!"

"Oh, don't be silly! Of course, I'll not keep the money. I'll give it right back to her. Then she can do what she likes with it—make a nice new wigwam near the Fort, and she can get lots of skins, or even canvas, there. Come, let's ride on."

[Pg 185]

But there was a silence between them for some time, and the scheme that had seemed so brilliant, when it had originated in Gaspar's mind, began to lose something of its glitter under the clear questioning gaze of the Sun Maid.

It was fast falling twilight when they came to the sandhills; and though, by all reckoning, Wahneenah should have been long awaiting them there was no sign of the familiar Chestnut or its beloved rider.

"Gaspar, will Wahneenah understand it? Will she believe it is right for you to do what is wrong for another to do? Will the soldier men pay you—just a boy, so—the money, real money, for her, anyway?"

Gaspar lost his patience, with which he was not greatly blessed.

"Kit, I wish you wouldn't keep thinking of things. I didn't tell Other Mother, of course. She might—she might not have been pleased. I acted for the best. That's the way men always have to do."

The argument was not as convincing to the Sun Maid as she herself would have liked; but she trusted Gaspar, and tried to put the money question aside, while she strained her eyes to search the darkening landscape for the missing one.

But there was no trace of her anywhere; even though Gaspar dismounted and scanned the sward for fresh tracks, as his Indian friends had taught him; and when, at length, he felt compelled to hasten to the Fort and seek its shelter for the Sun Maid, his young heart was heavy with foreboding. However, he put the cheerful side of the subject before the little girl, observing:

[Pg 186]

"It's the very easiest thing in the world for people to make mistakes in meeting this way. What seems a certain point to one person may look very different to another. I've noticed that."

"Oh! you have!" commented Kitty. "I think you've noticed almost too much, Gaspar. I—I think it's awful lonely out here, and I don't believe Abel would have let anybody hurt Wahneenah, even if Mercy would. And—I want her, I want her!"

"Sun Maid! Are you afraid?"

"No, I am not. Not for myself. But if some of those dreadful white people whom Wahneenah thought were her friends should overtake her on their way home, and—and—take her prisoner! I can't have it,—I must go back, and search again and again."

"Sing, Kit! If she's anywhere within hearing, she'll come at the sound of your voice. Sing your loudest!"

Obediently, the Sun Maid lifted her clear voice and sang, at the beginning with vigor and hope in the notes, but at the end with a sorrowful trembling and pathos that made Gaspar's heart ache. So, to still his own misgivings, he commanded her, also, to be silent. [Pg 187]

"It's no use, girlie. She's out of hearing somewhere. Maybe she has gone to the Fort already. Any way, it's getting very dark, and the clouds are awful heavy. I believe there's a thunder-shower coming, and if it does, it will be a bad one. They always are worse, Mercy says, when they come this time of year. We would better hurry on to shelter ourselves. If she isn't there, we can look for her in the morning."

"I like a thunder-storm. I believe it would be fine to go under that clump of trees yonder and watch it. I have to go to bed so early, always, that I think it is just grand to be up late and out-of-doors, too."

"You are not afraid of anything, Kitty Briscoe! I never saw a girl like you!" cried the lad, reproachfully.

"But you don't know other girls, boy. Maybe they are not afraid, either. I can't help it if I'm not, can I?"

Gaspar laughed. "I guess I'm cross, child, that's all. Of course I wouldn't want you to be a scared thing. But, let's hurry. The later we get there the more trouble we may have to get in."

"Why—will there be trouble? If there is, let's go home." [Pg 188]

"We can't go home. We've run away, you know. Besides, there would be the same anxiety about Wahneenah. All 's left for us is to go on."

So the Sun Maid settled herself firmly in her saddle and followed Tempest's rather reckless pace forward into the darkness. Memory made the dim road familiar to Gaspar, and soon the garrison lights came into sight.

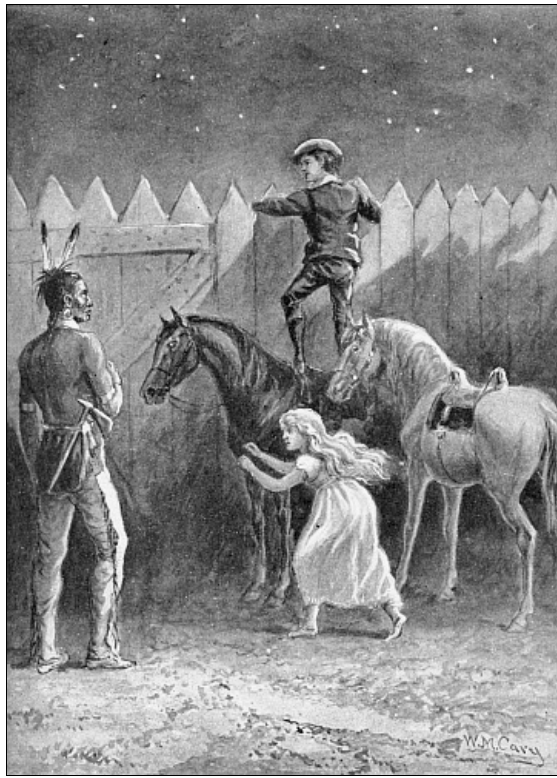
But martial law is strict and the gates had been closed for the night, as the lad had feared. The sentinel on duty did not respond to his first summons with the promptness which the boy desired, so, springing to his feet upon the gelding's back, he shouted, over the stockade:

"Entrance for two citizens of the United States! In the name of its President!"

"Ugh. There is no need for such a noise, pale-face."

These words fell so suddenly upon Gaspar's ears that he nearly tumbled backward from his perch. He was further amazed to see the Sun Maid leap from her horse, straight through the gloom into the arms of a tall Indian who seemed to have risen out of the ground beside them.

In fact, he had merely stepped from a canoe at the foot of the path and his moccasined feet had made no sound upon the sward as he approached. He received the girl's eager spring with grave dignity, and immediately replaced her upon the Snowbird's back. [Pg 189]



GASPAR AND KITTY REACH THE FORT.

Page 188.

"Why, Black Partridge! Don't you know me? Aren't you glad to see me? Four years since we said good-by, that day at poor Muck-otey-pokee."

"I remember all things. Why is the Sun Maid here, at this hour?"

Gaspar had recovered himself and now broke into a torrent of explanation, which the chief quietly interrupted as soon as he had gathered the facts of the case.

"But don't you think, dear Feather-man, that our Wahneenah will soon come?" demanded Kitty, anxiously.

"The gates are open. Let us enter," he answered evasively; and the novelty of her surroundings so promptly engrossed the girl's mind that she forgot to question him further then. Somewhere on the dimly lighted campus a bugle was sounding; and it awakened sleeping memories of her earliest childhood. So did the regular "step-step" of soldiers relieving guard. A new and delightful sense of safety and familiarity thrilled her heart, and she exclaimed, joyfully:

"Oh, Gaspar! it is home! it is home! More than the cabin, more than Other Mother's tepee, this is home!" [Pg 190]

"I hope it will prove so."

"Do you suppose I will find any of the dear white 'mothers' who were so good to me? Or Bugler Jim, who used to play me to sleep under the trees in the corner? I wish it wasn't so dark. I wish——"

"It's all new, Kit. They are all strangers. The rest, you know—well, none of them are here. But these will be kind, no doubt. Yet to me, even in this dark, it seems—it seems horrible! It all comes back: that morning when I first rode Tempest. The massacre——"

The tone of his voice startled her, and she begged at once:

"Let us go right away again. I am not afraid of the storm, nor the darkness, and nothing can harm us if we pray to be taken care of. The Great Spirit always hears. Let us go."

"It is too late. It's beginning to rain and that man is ordering us to dismount, that he may put the horses in the stables. Jump down."

There were always some refugees at the Fort. Just then there were more than ordinary; or, if all were not such, there were many passing travellers, journeying in emigrant trains toward the unsettled west, to make their new homes there, and these used "Uncle Sam's tavern" as an inn of rest and refreshment. [Pg 191]

Amid so many, therefore, small attention was paid to the arrival of these two young people. They were furnished with a plain supper, in the main living room of the building which seemed a big and dreary place, and immediately afterward were dismissed to bed. Kitty was assigned a cot among the women guests and Gaspar slept in the men's quarters.

But neither had very comfortable thoughts, and the talk of her dormitory neighbors kept the Sun Maid long awake. Here, as in Mercy's cabin, the dominant subject was the reward offered for the capture of the Indians, and a fresh fear set her trembling as one indignant matron exclaimed:

"There's one of those pesky red-skins in this very Fort this night. He came with that girl yonder, but I hope he won't be let to get away as easy. The country is overrun with the Indians, and is no place for decent white folks. They outnumber us ten to one. That's why I've got my husband to sell out. We're on our way back East, to civilization."

"Well, if one's come here to-night, I reckon he'll be taken care of! Massacres are more plenty than money, and some man or other'll make out to claim the prize. What sort of Indian was he?"

"Oh, like them all. All paint and feather and wickedness. I wish somebody'd take and hang him to the sally-port, just for an example." [Pg 192]

This was too much for loyal Kitty Briscoe. She could no more help springing up in defence of her friends than she could help breathing.

"You women must not talk like that! There are good Indians, and they are the best people in the world. They won't hurt anybody who lets them alone. That Indian you're talking against is the Black Partridge. He is splendid. He is my very oldest friend, except Gaspar. He wouldn't hurt a fly, and he'd help everybody needed help. It's this horrible offer of money for every Indian caught that has set my precious Other Mother wandering over the country this dark night, and made Gaspar and me homeless runaways."

There was instant hubbub in the room, and no more desire for sleep on anybody's part until Kitty had been made to tell her story, the story of her life as she remembered it, over and over again; and when finally slumber overtook her, even in the midst of her narrative, her dreams were filled with visions of Wahneenah fleeing and forever pursued by uniformed soldiers with glistening bayonets, who fired after her to the merry sound of a bugle and drum.

In the morning she found Gaspar and related her night's experience. He received it gravely, without the sympathy she expected. [Pg 193]

"Kit, I don't understand. What you said was true, and right enough for me to say. But it's not like you to be so bold. Yesterday, you were saucy to the harvest-women and now again to these. Is it because you are growing up so fast, I wonder? All women are not like Other Mother. They might get angry with you, and punish you. If I should go——"

"If what, Gaspar Keith?"

"Kitty, *I can't stay here*. It would kill me. I must get out into the open. I am going away. Right away. Now. This very hour even. You must be brave, and understand."

"Go away? I, too? All right. Only don't look so sober. I don't care. I promised to go anywhere you wished and I will. I'm ready."

"But—but—It's only I, my Kit. Not you."

"You would go away, and—leave me here? Just because you don't like it?"

All the color went out of her fair, round face, and she caught his head between her hands, and turned it so that she could look into his dark eyes, which could not bear to look into her own startled and reproachful ones.

CHAPTER XV.

[Pg 194]

PARTINGS AND MEETINGS.

Gaspar's courage returned, and he led her to a sheltered place under the stockade, where he made her sit beside him for the brief time that was his.

“Not all because I do not like it; but because I am almost a man and I have found the chance of my life. There is one here, a *voyageur*, with his boat. The finest vessel I ever saw, though they’ve not been so many. He is going north into the great woods; will sail this morning. He is a great trader and hunter and he has asked me to apprentice myself to him. He promises he will make my fortune. He has taken as great a liking to me, I reckon, as I have to him. We shall get on famously together. In that broad, free life I shall grow a full man, and soon. I can earn money, and make a home for you and Wahneenah, and many another lonely, helpless soul. Yes, I must go. I can’t let the chance pass. And you must be brave, and the Sun Maid still, and forever. I shall want to think of you as always bright and full of laughter. Like yourself. But you are not like yourself now, Girl-Child. Why don’t you speak? Why don’t you say something?”

[Pg 195]

“I guess there isn’t any ‘say’ left in me, Gaspar,” answered the girl, in a tone so hopelessly sad that it almost made the lad waver in his determination. Only that wavering had no portion in the character of the ambitious youth, and he looked far forward toward a great good beyond the present pain.

When the day was well advanced, the schooner sailed away, from the dock at the foot of the path from fort to lake, with Gaspar upon her deck, trying to look more brave and manly than he really felt. But a forlorn little maid watched with eyes that shed no tears, and a pitiful attempt at a smile upon her quivering lips till the vessel became a mere speck, then disappeared.

After a long while, she was aroused by something again moving over the water.

“He’s coming back! My Gaspar’s coming back!” she cried, and tossed back the hair which the wind blew about her face that she might see the clearer. A moment later her disappointment found words: “It’s nothing but a common Indian canoe!”

However, she remembered her foster-brother had set her a task to do. She must begin it right away. She was to be as helpful to everybody she ever should meet as it was possible. Here might be one coming who hadn’t heard about that dreadful fifty-dollar prize money. She must call out and warn him. So she did, and never had human voice sounded pleasanter to any wayfarer. But her own intentness discovered something familiar in the appearance of the young brave, paddling so cautiously toward her and keeping so well to the shore. She began to question herself where she had seen him, and in a flash she remembered. Then, indeed, did she shout, and joyfully:

[Pg 196]

“Osceolo! Osceolo! Don’t you know me? Kitty? The Sun Maid? The daughter of your own tribe? Osceolo!”

“By the moccasins of my grandfather! You here? How? When? No matter. The brother of the Sun Maid rejoices. Never a friend so convenient. Run around to the edge of the wharf. There must be talk between us, and at once.”

He pushed his little boat close under the shadow of the pier that had long since been deserted of those who had come down to watch, as Kitty had done, the sailing of the northern-bound schooner. There was none to hear them, yet Osceolo chose to muffle his tones and to make himself mysterious. In truth, he was fleeing from justice, having been mixed up in a raid upon a settler’s homestead a few miles back; in which, fortunately, there had been no bloodshed, though a deal of thieving and other dirty work which would make it uncomfortable for the young warrior should he be caught just then. The story he was prepared to tell was true as far as it went; and the Sun Maid was too innocent to suspect guile in others. She thought he was referring to the prize money when he spoke of quite other matters; and after the briefest inquiry and answer as to what had befallen either since their parting at doomed Muck-otey-pokee, he concluded:

[Pg 197]

“Now, Sister-Of-My-Heart, Blood-Daughter-Of-My-Chief, you must help me. You must give me, or lend me, a horse; and you must bring me food. Then I will ride to fetch you back Wahneenah.”

“Oh! You know where she is? Can you do it and not be taken?”

“Is not the Brother of the Sun Maid now become a mighty warrior?”

“You—you don’t look so very mighty,” returned the girl, truthfully.

Osceolo frowned. “That is as one sees. Fetch me the horse and the meat, if you would have your Other Mother restored.”

“I will. I will!” she cried, and ran back to the Fort. She went first to the kitchen, and begged a meal “for a stranger that’s just come,” and the food was given her without question. Strangers were always coming to be fed; herself, also, no longer ago than the last evening.

[Pg 198]

From the kitchen to the stables, where a bright thought came to her. She would lead the Tempest to Osceolo, and herself ride the Snowbird. Together they would go to find Wahneenah.

"The black gelding?" asked the soldier of whom she sought assistance. "The hostler can maybe tell you. But I think the Black Partridge rode away on him before daybreak."

"The Black Partridge! Oh! I had forgotten him in my trouble about Gaspar. Did any harm come to him, sir?"

"No. What harm should? If every red-skin in Illinois was like him there'd be little need of us fellows out here in this mud-hole. But you look disappointed. If you want to take a ride, there's the white mare you came on. But you'd better not go far away. It isn't safe for a child like you."

"I'm not afraid, but—Well, if Tempest's gone, I can't. That's all."

So the Snowbird was brought out, and she led the pretty creature away behind the shelter of the few trees which hid the spot where Osceolo had bade her meet him.

"I tried to get Tempest for you, but the Chief has ridden him away. I meant to go with you. But you'll have to go alone. Tell my darling Other Mother that I am here, and waiting. Tell her about Gaspar, and that he said he had found out she would be quite safe here. Why, so, I suppose, would you. I didn't think."

[Pg 199]

"No, I shouldn't," returned the young Indian hastily. Then, noting her surprise, explained:

"I'm a warrior, you see. That makes a difference."

"It will be all right, though, I think. And if you cannot come back with Wahneenah, do hurry and send her by herself. Will you?"

"Oh, I'll hurry!" answered the youth, evasively, and leaped to the Snowbird's back. The food he had stuffed within his shirt till a more convenient season, and with a cry that even to Kitty's trusting ears sounded in some way derisive, he was off out of sight along the lakeside.

As the Snowbird disappeared, Kitty felt that the last link between herself and her friends had been severed, and for a moment the tears had sway. Then, ashamed of her own weakness and remembering her promise to Gaspar that she would be "just the sunniest kind of a girl, and true to her name," she brushed them away and entered the busy Fort, to proffer her services to the women in charge.

These had already learned her story and had reprimanded her for running away from her protectors, the Smiths; but it was nobody's business to return her and, meanwhile, she was safe at the Fort until they should choose to call for her.

[Pg 200]

"Well, there is always plenty of work in the world for the hands that will do it," said an officer's wife, with a kindly smile. "You seem too small to be of much practical use; but, however, if you want a task, there are some little fellows yonder who need amusing and comforting. Their mother has died of a fever, and their father is more of a student and preacher than a nurse. I guess his wife was the ruling spirit in the household, and now that she has left him, he is sadly unsettled. He doesn't know whether to go on and take up the claim he expected or not. He and you, and the oddly-named little sons, may all yet have to become wards of the Government."

"I'm very sorry for him."

"You well may be. Yet he's a gentle, blessed old man. No more fit to marry and bring that flock of youngsters out here into the wilderness than I am to command an army. She was much younger than he, and felt the necessity of doing something toward providing for their children and educating them. But the more I talk, the more I puzzle you. Run along and lend them a hand. The very smallest Littlejohn of the lot has filled his mouth with dirt, and is trying to squall it out. See if a drink of water won't mend matters."

Kitty hastened to the child, and begged;

[Pg 201]

"My dear, don't cry like that. You are disturbing the people."

"Don't care. I ain't my dear; I'm Four."

"You're what?"

"Just Four. Four Littlejohns. What pretty hair you've got. May I pull it?"

"I'd rather not. Unless it will make you forget the dirt you ate."

But the permission given, the child became indifferent to it. He pointed to three other lads crouching against the door-step, and explained:

"They're One, Two, and Three. My father, he says it saves trouble. Some folks laugh at us. They say it's funny to be named that way. I was eating the dirt because I was—I was mad."

"Indeed! At whom?"

"At everybody. I'm just mis'able. I don't care to live no longer."

The round, dimpled face was so exceedingly wholesome and happy, despite its transient dolefulness, that Kitty laughed and her merriment brought an answering smile to the four dusty countenances before her.

"Wull—wull—I is. My father, he's mis'able, too. So, course, we have to be. He's a minister man. He can't tell stories. He just tells true ones out the Bible. Can you tell Bible stories?"

"No. I—I'm afraid I don't know much about that book. Mercy had one, but she kept it in the drawer. She took it out on Sundays, though. She didn't let Gaspar nor me touch it. She said we might spoil the cover. That was red. It was a reward of merit when she was a girl. It had clasps, and was very beautiful. It had pictures in it, too, about saints and dead folks; but I never read it. I couldn't read it if I tried, you know, because I've never been taught."

[Pg 202]

This was amazing to the four book-crammed small Littlejohns. One exclaimed, with superior disgust:

"Such a great big girl, and can't read your Bible! You must be a heathen, and bow down to wood and stone."

"Maybe I am. I don't remember bowing down to anything, except when I say my prayers."

"Your prayers! Then you can't be a real heathen. Heathens don't say prayers, not our kind. Hmm. What lovely eyes you've got and how pretty you are! All the women never saw such wonderful hair as yours, nor the men either. I heard them say so. If I had a sister, I'd like her to look just like you. But it's wicked to be vain."

"What do you mean, you funny boy?"

"I'm not funny. I'm serious. My mother—my mother said—my mother—Oh! I want her! I want her!"

Religion, superiority, priggishness, all flew to the winds as his real and fresh grief overcame him; and it was a heart-broken lad that hurled himself against the shoulder of this sympathetic-looking girl who, though so much taller, was not so very much older than he.

[Pg 203]

The Sun Maid's own heart echoed the cry with a keen pain, and she received the orphan's outburst with exceeding tenderness. Now, whatever One, the eldest, did the other young numerals all imitated, so that each was soon weeping copiously. Yet, from very excess of energy, their grief soon exhausted itself and they regarded each other with some curiosity. Then Three began to smile, in a shamefaced sort of way, not knowing how far his recovery of composure would be approved by sterner One.

After a habit familiar to him the latter opened his lips to reprove but, fortunately, refrained, as he discovered a tall, stoop-shouldered man crossing the parade-ground.

This gentleman seemed oddly out of place amid that company of immigrants and soldiers. Student and bookworm was written all over his fine, intellectual countenance, and his eyes had that absent expression that had made the commandant's wife call him a "dreamer."

His bearing impressed the Sun Maid with reverent awe; a feeling apparently not shared by his sons. For Three ran to him and shook him violently, to secure attention, as he eagerly exclaimed:

[Pg 204]

"Oh, father! We've found one of 'em already! A heathen. Or, any way, a heatheny sort of a girl, but not Indian. She doesn't know how to read, and she hasn't any Bible. Come and give her one and teach her quick!"

"Eh? What? A heathen? My child, where?"

"Right there with my brothers. That yellow-headed girl. She's nice. Are all the heathen as pretty as she is?"

"My son, that young person? Surely, you are mistaken. She must be the daughter of some

resident at the Fort, or of some traveller like ourselves.”

“I don’t believe she is. She’s been taking care of herself all day. I haven’t heard anybody tell her ‘Don’t’ once. If she belonged to folk they’d do it wouldn’t they?”

“Very likely. Parents have to discipline their young. Don’t drag me so. I’m walking fast enough.”

“That’s what I say, father. ‘Don’t’ shows I belong to you. But I do wish you’d come. She might get away before you could catch her.”

“Catch her, Three? I don’t understand.”

“I know it. My mother used to say you never did understand plain every-day things. That’s why she had to take care of you the same as us. Oh! I wish we’d never come to this horrid place.”

[Pg 205]

The reference to his wife and the child’s grief roused the clergyman more completely than even an appeal for the heathen. Laying his thin hand tenderly upon the small rumped head, he stroked it as he answered:

“In my flesh I echo that wish, laddie; but in my spirit I am resigned to whatever the Lord sends. If there is a heathen here, there is His work to do, and in that I can forget my own distress. I will walk faster if you wish.”

The other small Littlejohns, with Kitty, now joined their father and Three, the girl regarding him with some curiosity, for he was of a stamp quite different from any person she had ever seen. But he won her instant love as, holding out his hands in welcome, he exclaimed:

“Why, my daughter! Surely the lads were jesting. You look neither ignorant nor heathen, and in personal gifts the Lord has been most kind to you.”

“Has He? But I am rather lonely now.”

“And so am I. Therefore, we will be the better friends. Why, sons, this is just what we need to make our group complete. Maybe, lassie, your parents will spare you to us, now and then.”

“I have no parents. I am a ward of Government, though I don’t understand it. I wish—are you too busy to hear my story, and will you advise me? Gaspar told me some things, but he’s not old and wise like you, dear sir.”

[Pg 206]

“Old I am, indeed, but far from wise. Though, so well as I know I will most gladly counsel you. Let us go yonder, to that shady place beside the great wall, where there are benches to rest on and quiet to listen in.”

Now small Four Littlejohns had heard a deal about heathen. They had been the dearest theme of all the stories told him, and he caught his father’s hand with a detaining grasp:

“She might eat you all up, father!”

“Boy, what are you saying?”

“She isn’t like the picture in my story-book of the heathen that lived in India, and all the people worshipped, that was named a god, One told me when I asked him; but I guess heathens can change like fairies; and, please don’t go, father, don’t!”

“Nonsense, Four. What trash are you talking? It is you who are the heathen now.”

“I, father? *I!*”

In horror of a possible change in his person, the child began to feel of his plump face and pinch his fat body. He even imagined he was stiffening all over. Suddenly, he drew his wide mouth into a grotesque imitation of the engraving as he remembered it, planting his feet firmly and setting up a tragic wail.

[Pg 207]

“I’m not like him. I won’t be. I won’t, I won’t, I won’t!”

Kitty understood nothing but the evident distress, which she attempted to soothe and merely aggravated.

“Get away! Don’t you touch me! You go away home and sit on a table with your legs all crooked up—so; and stop playing you’re a regular girl. Leave go my father’s hand, I say!”

Then One came to the rescue. As soon as he could stop laughing, he explained the situation to the others, and though the incident seemed a trivial one to the younger people to the good Doctor it was weighty with reproach for the ignorance he had permitted in his own

household. It also had its far-reaching results; for it led him to observe the Sun Maid critically, and, when he had heard her simple story, to ask out of the fulness of his own big heart:

“Will you come and share our home with us, my daughter? Surely, you have much good sense and many wonderful gifts. The Lord has thrown us into one another’s company, and I believe you can, in large measure, take their mother’s place to these sons of mine. Will you come and live in our home, dear Sun Maid?”

“Indeed, I will! And love you for letting me!” cried the grateful girl, catching the Doctor’s hand and kissing it reverently. [Pg 208]

But it did not occur to either of these innocents that there was, at that time, no home existing for them.

CHAPTER XVI.

[Pg 209]

THE SHUT AND THE OPEN DOOR.

“They are all unfitted to take care of themselves, though the girl has the best sense of the lot. The Fort is always overfull. They would be happier by themselves, and it will be a blessing to have such a good man among us. Let us build them a log cabin and instal them in it.”

Such was the Fort commandant’s decision and, as he suggested, it was quickly done. The old maxim of many hands and light work was verified, for in a magically short time the little parsonage was reared and the few belongings of the household moved into it.

“That’s what it seems to me,”—cried the Sun Maid, as the last stroke was given, and a soldier climbed to the roof-peak to thrust a fresh green branch into the crevice,—“as if yesterday we dreamed we wanted a home, and now it’s ours. If only Wahneenah and Gaspar were here, I should be almost too happy to live. Yes, and poor Mercy Smith, who says she never did have a good time in her life; and Abel, and Black Partridge; and——”

“Everybody! I guess you’re wanting,” reproved the elder son of the minister. For, during the time of building, short though it was, the orphan girl had become wholly identified with the Littlejohns’ household and felt as full a right to the cabin as if it had been her own especial property. [Pg 210]

Now, suddenly, as she stood in the doorway there came into her mind the prophecy of old Katasha; and she looked afar, as if she saw visions and heard voices denied to the others. So rapt did her gaze become that little Four stole his pudgy hand into hers and inquired, beneath his breath:

“What is it, Kitty? What do you see?”

“I see crowds and crowds of people. Of all sorts, all forms, all colors, all races. Crowding, crowding, and yet not crushing. Only coming, more—and more—and more. I see strange buildings. Bigger than any pictures in that book you showed me yesterday. They keep rising and spreading out on every side. I see ships on the lake; curious ones, with tall masts, a hundred times taller than that in which my Gaspar sailed away. They are so laden with people and stuff that I—I—it seems to choke me!”

She did not notice that the Doctor had drawn near and was listening intently; and even when his hand touched her shoulder she found it difficult to comprehend what he was saying.

“Wake up, lassie! Why, what is this? My practical new daughter growing a star-gazer, like the foolish old man? That won’t do for our little housekeeper.” [Pg 211]

“Won’t it, sir? I guess I’ve been dreaming. But I know I shall see all that some day, right here in this spot. This is the lake where the big ships sail, and this the ground where the houses stand.”

One was at hand with his ever-ready reproof.

“That’s all nonsense, Kitty Briscoe. A person can’t see more than a person can. There are neither houses nor ships, such as you talk about, and you are sillier than any fairy story I ever read.”

Yet long afterward he was to remember that first hour in the new home, and the rapt face of the girl gazing skyward.

Then they all went in to supper, which had been provided by the thoughtful friends at the Fort across the river; but which, the Sun Maid assured the busy women there, must be the only meal supplied that was ready prepared.

“For, if I’m to be housekeeper I mean to learn all about that, even before I do the books, which the Doctor will teach me and that I am so eager to study. But I’ll be his home-maker first, and I’ll give them jonny-cake for breakfast. Mercy said it was cheap and wholesome, and we have to be very careful of the Doctor’s little money.”

How wholesome, rather how most unwholesome, that first jonny-cake proved, Kitty never after liked to recall; but she was not the only young house mistress who has made mistakes; and, fortunately, the master of the house was not critical. And how far the study-craving girl would have carried out her own plan of housewifery before reading is not known; for, having done the best she could, and having, at least, swept and dusted the rooms carefully she took little Four by the hand and set out to ask instruction of her Fort friends against the dinner-getting.

[Pg 212]

Now the fascinating dread and interest of this little fellow was an Indian; and, trudging along through the dirt, he scanned the horizon critically, then suddenly gripped her hand hard and tight.

“Kitty! I do believe—there are—some coming! Run! Run!”

“Why should I run? The Indians are my best and oldest friends. It might even be——”

She paused so long, shading her eyes from the sunlight and gazing fixedly across the landscape with a gathering surprise and delight upon her face, that the child clutched her frock, demanding:

“What is it, Kitty? What do you see? What do you see?”

“The horses! White, black, and—Chestnut! It’s Wahneenah! Wahneenah!”

Four watched her disappear behind a clump of bushes that hid the sandhills from his lower sight, then hurried back to the new cabin, crying out:

[Pg 213]

“Father, father! She’s run away again! We’ve lost her!”

Before the minister could be made to comprehend his son’s excited story, voices without drew him to the entrance. Even to him the name of Indian had, in those days, a sinister significance. Yet, as he reached the threshold, there were the Sun Maid’s arms about his neck and her ecstatic declaration:

“It’s my darling Other Mother! She’s come! She’ll live with us! And the Black Partridge; and Osceolo, and Tempest, and Snowbird, and the Chestnut! Oh, all together again; how happy we shall be!”

“Eh? What? Yes, yes, of course,” assented the Doctor, though he cast a rather perplexed glance about his limited apartments. “Well, if it’s to be part of my work, I am ready,” he added resignedly, and not without thought of the quiet study which would be out of the question in a tenement so crowded.

The chief and the clergyman had met before, during the former’s last visit to the Fort, and they greeted each other suavely, as would two white gentlemen of culture and unquestioned standing. Then, while the Sun Maid drew Wahneenah aside and exhibited the cabin, the two men talked together and rapidly became friends.

[Pg 214]

“The Lord never shuts one door but He opens another. I came here to instruct, hoping to pass far onward into the wilderness. Behold! the heathen are at my very threshold. He took away my wife and sent me a daughter. Now, at her heels, follows a woman of the race I came to help, who looks more noble than most of her white sisters. As the Sun Maid said, shall we not do? Only—where to house them?”

“That is soon settled. Neither the chief’s daughter nor the youth, Osceolo, could sleep beneath the tight roof of the pale-face. Their wigwams shall be pitched behind this cabin, and there will they abide. So will I arrange with the people at the Fort, who are my friends. Yet, let the great medicine-man keep a sharp eye to the young brave, Osceolo. He is my kinsman. There is good in the youth, and there is, also, evil—much evil. He lies upon the ground to dream wild schemes, then rises up to practise them. He is like the pale-faces—by birth a liar. He is not to be trusted. Only by fear does he become as clay in the hands of the potter. If my brother, the great medicine-man, will accept this charge I ask of him there

shall be always venison in plenty, and bear's meat, and the flesh of cattle, at his door. He shall have corn from the fields of the scattered Pottawatomies, and the fuel for his hearth-fire shall never waste. How says my brother, the wise medicine-man?"

[Pg 215]

"What can I say but that the Black Partridge is as generous as he is brave, and that his readiness to support a minister of the gospel amazes me? In that more settled East, from which I came, the rich men gave grudgingly to their pastor of such things as themselves did not need, and I was always in poverty. Therefore, for the sake of my sons, I came hither. Truly, in this wilderness, I have received evil at the hand of the Lord; but I have, also, received much good. If He wills, from this humble tenement shall go forth a blessing that cannot be measured. Leave the woman and the undisciplined youth with me. I will deal with them as I am given wisdom."

This was the beginning of a new, rich life for the Sun Maid. It opened to Wahneenah, also, a period of unbroken happiness. The minister, over whose household affairs she promptly assumed a wise control, honored her with his confidence and abided by her clear-sighted counsel. She was constantly associated with her beloved Girl-Child, and could watch the rapid development of her intellect and all-loving heart.

Indeed, Love was the keynote to Kitty Briscoe's character; and out of love for everybody about her, and especially in hope to be of use to her Indian friends, sprang the greatest incentive to study.

[Pg 216]

"The more I know, the better I can help them to understand," she said to Wahneenah, who agreed and approved.

The years sped quietly and rapidly by, as busy years always do. Some changes came to the little settlement of Chicago, but they were only few; until, one sunny day in spring, there reached the ears of the Sun Maid a sudden cry that seemed to turn all the months backward, as a scroll is rolled.

Bending above her table, strewn with the Doctor's notes which she was copying, in the pleasant room of a big frame house that was one of the few new things of the town, she heard the call; dimly at first, as an out-of-door incident which did not concern herself. When it was repeated, she started visibly, and cried out:

"I know that voice! That's Mercy Smith! There was never another just like it!"

She sprang up and ran to answer, shouting in return:

"Halloo! What is it?"

"Help!"

A few rods' run beyond the clump of trees that bordered the garden revealed the difficulty. A heavy wagon, loaded with bags of grain, was mired in the mud of the prairie road. A woman stood upright in the vehicle, lashing and scolding the oxen, which tried, but failed, to extricate the wheels from the clay that held them fast.

[Pg 217]

"I'm coming! I'm Kitty! And, Mercy—is it really you?"

"Well, if I ain't beat! You're Kitty, sure enough! But what a size!"

"Yes. I'm a woman now, almost. How glad I am to see you! How's Abel? Where is he?"

"Must be glad, if you'd let so many years go by without once comin' to visit me."

"I didn't know that you'd be pleased to have me. I didn't treat you well, to leave you as I did. But where's Abel?"

"Home. Trying to sell out. My land! How pretty you've growed! Only that white dress and hair a-streamin'; be you dressed for a party, child?"

"Oh, no, indeed! I'll run and get something to help you out with, if you'll be patient."

"Have to be, I reckon, since I'm stuck tight. No hurry. The oxen'll rest. I've heard about you, out home—how 't you'd found a rich minister to take you in an' eddicate you, an' your keepin' half-Indian still. Might have taught you to brush your hair, I 'low; an' from appearances you'd have done better to have stayed with me. You hain't growed up very sensible, have you?"

The Sun Maid laughed, just as merrily and infectiously as when she had first crept for shelter into Mercy Smith's cabin.

[Pg 218]

"Maybe not. I'm not the judge. I'll test my wisdom, though, by trying to help you out of that

mud. I'll be back in a moment."

She turned to run toward the house, but Mercy remonstrated:

"You can't help in them fine clothes. Ain't there no men around?"

"A few. Most of them are out of the village on a big hunting frolic. We'll manage without."

"Humph! They'd better be huntin' Indians."

The girl looked up anxiously. "Is there any trouble?"

"Always trouble where the red-skins are."

Kitty departed, and the settler's wife watched her with feelings of mingled admiration, anger, and astonishment.

"She's grown, powerful. Tall an' straight as an Indian, an' fair as a snowflake. Such hair! I don't wonder she wears it that way, though I wouldn't humor her by lettin' on. I've heard she did it to please her 'tribe' an' the old minister. Well, there's always plenty of fools. They're a crop 'at never fails."

The Sun Maid reappeared. She had not stopped to change her white gown, but she brought a pair of snow-shoes, and carried three or four short planks across her strong, firm shoulder. [Pg 219]

"My sake! Ain't you tough! I couldn't lift one them planks, rugged as I call myself, let alone four. But—snow-shoes in the springtime?"

"Yes. I've learned a way for myself of helping the many who get mired out here. See how quickly I can set you free."

Putting on the shoes, the girl walked straight over the mud, and throwing down the planks before the animals, encouraged them to help themselves.

"What are their names? Jim and Pete? Come on, my poor beasts; and, once clear, you shall have a fine rest and feed."

"Shucks! There! Go on! Giddap! Gee! Haw!"

There followed a time of suspense, but at last the oxen gained a little advance, when Kitty promptly moved the planks forward, and in due time the wagon rolled out upon a firmer spot.

"Well, Kitty girl, you may not have sense, but you've got what's better—that's gumption. And that's Chicago, is it?"

"Yes. I hope you like it."

"I've got to, whether or no. I'm in awful trouble, Kitty Briscoe, an' it's all your fault."

"What can you mean?"

"Abel—Abel——"

"Yes—yes! What is it?" [Pg 220]

"Ever sence you run away he's been pinin' to run after you. Said the house wasn't home no more. 'Twasn't; though I wouldn't let on to him. We've kept gettin' comfortabler off, an' I jawed him from mornin' to night to make him contented. But he wouldn't listen. Got so he wouldn't work home if he could help it, but lounged round the neighbors'. Got hankerin' to go somewheres, an' keep tavern, like his father afore him. Now, we've got burnt out——"

"Burned out! Oh, Mercy, that *is* trouble, indeed! Tell me—No, wait. Let us go and get something to eat first; and what were you intending to do with that load of stuff?"

"Ship it East, if I can. I've heard there was consid'able that business bein' done. Or sell it to the Fort folks."

"I think they'll be glad of it; they are always needing everything. I'll go with you there, and your team can be left there, too, till Abel comes."

"Abel! You don't think I'd leave him to manage *business*, do you?"

"I thought you said he was now staying behind to sell out—to 'manage.'"

"He's stayin' to try. There's a big difference 'twixt tryin' an' doin'. He can't sell, not easy. And some day, when this whim of his is over, we'll go back an' settle again, or move farther [Pg 221]

on. It's gettin' ruther crowded where we be for comfort, these days."

"Crowded? Are there many new neighbors?"

"Lots. Some of 'em ain't more 'n a mile away, an' I call that too close for convenience. Don't like to have folks pokin' their noses into my very door-yard, so to speak."

"How will you endure it here, where, according to your ideas, the houses are so very close?"

"I don't expect to like it. But, pshaw! They be thick, ain't they? I declare it makes me think of out East, an' our village; only that wasn't built on the bottomless pit, like this."

"This is the Fort. After you've finished your business with the officer in charge, we'll go home and get our dinner."

The stranger observed with surprise and some pride the great respect with which this girl, who had once been under her own care, was treated by all she met. The few soldiers on duty that morning saluted her with a smile and military precision, while the women hailed her coming with exclamations of:

"Oh, Kitty! You here? I'm so glad; for I wanted to ask you about my work"; or: "Say, Kit! There are a lot of new newspapers, only a week old, that I've hidden for you to read first before the others get hold of them."

[Pg 222]

One called after her, as they started homeward:

"How are the sick ones to-day?"

"What did she mean?" demanded Mercy.

"Oh, that house on the edge of the village is a sort of hospital and school combined. I am there most of the time, though my real home is with the Littlejohns, just as it has always been; though the Doctor is not rich, as you fancied, in anything save wisdom and goodness."

"You're a great scholar now, Kitty, I s'pose—could even do figurin' an' writin' letters."

"I can do that much without being a 'scholar.' I've learned all sorts of things that came my way, from civil engineering—enough to survey lots for people—to a little Greek. The surveying was taught me by a man who was in our sick-room, and in gratitude for the care we gave him. It's very useful here."

"Can you sing, or play music?"

"I always sang, you know; and I can play the violin to guide the hymns 'in meeting.'"

"What's that? A fiddle—to hymns!"

"Yes. Why not, since it's the only instrument we have?"

"My land! You'll be dancin' at worship next!"

"Maybe. There *are* religious people who dance at their services. But here we are. This is the Doctor's house, and you'll meet Wahneenah."

[Pg 223]

"Wahneeny! You don't tell me that good, pious parson is consortin' with that bad-tempered Indian squaw!"

"Wait, Mercy. You must not speak like that of her, nor think so. She is as my very own mother. She is nobility itself. Everybody acknowledges that. I want there should be peace, even if there can't be love, between you two. It's better, isn't it, to understand things in the beginning?"

"Hmm! You can speak your mind out yet, I see. But that's all right. I don't care, child. I don't care. It does my old eyes good just to look at you; an', for once, I'll 'low Abel was right in wantin' to move out here. I'm lookin' for him 'fore night, by the way. But hold on! Who's that out in the back yard, with feathers in his hair, an' a blue check shirt, grinnin' like a hyena, an' a knife stickin' out his pocket? Wait till I get hold of him, my sake!"

Mercy's words poured out without breathing-space or stop, and the Sun Maid laughed as she replied:

"Why, that's only Osceolo. Do you know him?"

"Kitty Briscoe! All the wild horses in Illinois can't make me believe no different but 'twas him set our barn afire!"

[Pg 224]

"When? He's not been away—for some days."

"Wait till he catches sight of me!"

But when the young Indian did turn around, and saw the pair watching him, he coolly walked toward them, regarding Mercy as if she were an utter stranger, and one whom he was rather pleased to meet.

"Friend of yours, Sun Maid? Glad to see her."

"Glad to see me, be you? Wait till Abel Smith comes an' identifies you. Then see which side the laugh's on, you—you——"

"Osceolo is my name, ma'am."

Foreseeing difficulties, the girl guided her guest into the kitchen, where Wahneenah was preparing dinner, and where the Indian woman greeted her old acquaintance with no surprise and, certainly, without any of the effusiveness that, for once, rather marked Mercy's manner toward her former "hired girl."

"Well, it's a real likely house, now, ain't it? I'd admire to see the minister. It's years since I saw one. Is he about?"

Kitty answered:

"Yes. He is studying. I rather hate to disturb him; but at dinner you will meet him."

"Studying! Studying what? Why, I thought he was an old man."

[Pg 225]

"He is. So old, I sometimes fear we will not have him with us long."

"What's the use learnin' anything more, then?"

"One can never know too much, I fancy. Just at present he is writing a dictionary of the Indian dialects, so far as he has been able to obtain them."

"The—Indian—language! He wouldn't be so silly, now come!"

"He is just so wise. It is a splendid work. I am proud to be his helper, even by just merely copying his papers."

"Well! You could knock me down with a feather! One thing—I sha'n't never set under his preachin'. I wouldn't demean myself. The idee!"

"Mercy, do you remember the red-covered Bible? Have you it still?"

"Course. I wouldn't let anything happen to that. It was a reward of merit. It's wrote in the front: 'To Mercy Balch, for being a Good Girl.' That was me afore I was married. It's in my carpet-bag. I mean to have it buried with me. I wouldn't never sp'ile it by handlin'."

"I hope you'll use it now, for it's so easy to get another. The Doctor will give you one at any time. The Bible Society in the East furnishes all he needs."

[Pg 226]

Dinner was promptly ready, and, after it was over, the Sun Maid carried her old friend away with her to the government building, which was not only hospital, but schoolhouse and land-office all in one. Everything here was so new and interesting to Mercy that surprise kept her silent; until, happening to glance through the window, she beheld a rough-looking man approaching on horseback.

"Pshaw! there's Abel! Wait an' see him stick where I stuck!" she chuckled. "Well, he sold out sudden, didn't he? He'd better come in the wagon, but he 'lowed he'd enjoy a ride all by himself. I reckon he's had it. See him stare and splash! There he goes! See that old nag flounder!"

Kitty sprang up and ran to welcome him, the heartiest of love in her clear tones.

"Why, bless my soul! If I thought it could be, I should say it was my own lost little Kit!"

As he gazed his rugged face grew beautiful in its wondering joy.

"Oh, Abel! That's the way Chicago receives her new citizens! She plants them so deep in the mud that they can't get away! But wait. I'll help you out the same way I did Mercy, and then I'll get my arms about your neck, you dear old Abel!"

"Help me out? Not much! Not when there's such a pretty girl a few feet away waitin' to kiss my homely face!" and, with a spring that was marvellous to see, the woodsman leaped from his horse and landed on the higher sod beside his "Kit."

[Pg 227]

"Well, well! To think it! Just to think it once! Well, well, well! How big you are, Kit! My, my, my; and as sweet to look at as a locust tree in bloom, with your white frock, an' all. I've got here at last! I can't scarce believe it. And, lassie, are you as close-mouthed as you used to be when you made a promise? Then—don't tell Mercy; but—*I done it a-purpose!*"

"Did what? Let us get the poor horse out of the mud before we talk."

"Shucks! He ain't worth pullin' out. If he ain't horse enough to help himself, let him stay there a spell, an' think it over. He'll flounder round——"

"You don't know our mud, Abel."

"He's all right. He's helpin' himself. He's makin' a genuine effort. A man—or horse—that does that is sure to win. That's how I put it to myself. After I'd wrestled with the subject up hill an' down dale, till I couldn't see nothin' else in the face of natur', I done it. Out in the East, where I come from, they'd 'a' had me up for it; an' I don't know but they will here. But I had to, Kit, I had to. I was dead sick an' starvin' for a sight of you an' the boy, an' mis'able with blamin' myself that I hadn't treated you different when I had you, so you wouldn't have run away. You was a master hand at that business, wasn't you, girl? I hope you've quit now, though."

[Pg 228]

"I think so. Here I was born, and here I hope to stay. All my runnings have begun and ended here. But what did you do, Father Abel?"

"Oh, Sis! that name does me good. Promise you'll never tell,—not till your dyin' day."

"I can't promise that; but I'll not tell if I can help it."

"Well, you always had a tender conscience. Yet I can trust your love better 'n ary promise. Well—*I—burnt—it!*"

"Burned it? Your house? Your home? Yours and Mercy's? Why—Abel!"

The pioneer squared his mighty shoulders, and faced her as a defiant child might an offended mother.

"Yes, I did. The house, the bed-quilts, the antiquated bedstead, the whole endurin' business. It was the only way. Year after year she'd keep naggin' for me to move on further into the wilderness. *Me*, that was starvin' for folks, an' knew she was! It was just plumb lonesomeness made her what she is: a nagger. So, at last—you've heard about worms turnin', hain't you? I watched, an' when she'd gone trudgin' off on a four-mile tramp, pretendin' somebody's baby was sick, but really meanin' she was that druv to hear the sound of another woman's voice, I took pity on her—an' myself—an' set fire to that hateful old heirloom of a bedstead; an' whilst it was burnin' I just whipped out the old fiddle, an' I played—my! how I played! Every time a post fell into the middle, I just danced. 'So much nearer folks!' I thought. And the rag-carpet an' the nineteen-hunderd-million-patch-bedsread—Kit, I've set there, day after day, an' seen Mercy cuttin' up whole an' decent rags, an' sewin' 'em together again, till I've near gone stark mad. Fact. I used to wonder if it wasn't a sort of craziness possessed her to do that foolishness. Now, it's all over. She lays the fire to an Indian feller that I've spoke fair to, now an' again, an' that had been round our way huntin' not long before. I don't know where he come from, an' I never asked him. He never told. Pretended he couldn't talk Yankee. Don't know as he could, but he could talk chicken or little pig fast enough. Leastways, I missed such after he'd been there. Well, it wasn't him. *It was—me!* I burnt the bedstead, an' now we're free folks!"

[Pg 229]

"But, Abel, why not have brought the bedstead with you, if she loved it so? Why destroy ___"

"Sissy, you don't know Mercy—not as I do. It was that furniture kept her. So long as she had it, so long as she could kind of boast it over her neighbors, there she'd set. We couldn't have moved it. She near worried herself into her grave gettin' it into the wilderness, first off, an' she ain't so young now as she was then. She'd ruther lost a leg than had it scratched. I saved that load of feed, an' the ox team, an' the old horse. Yes, an' my fiddle. Mercy's got money. She had it hid. I'm goin' to settle here an' keep tavern, if I can. If not here, then somewheres else. Anywhere where there's folks. Trees are nice; prairies are nice; a clearin' of your own is nice; but human natur' is nicer. Don't tell Mercy, though, or there'll be trouble! Now, Kit, where's Gaspar?"

[Pg 230]

"*Oh, Abel! Only the dear Lord knows!*"

[Pg 231]

CHAPTER XVII.

A DAY OF HAPPENINGS.

“Abel! Abel Smith! Here I am. Right here, in our little Kitty’s own house. How’d you get along? Did the man buy?”

“Shucks!” groaned the pioneer, as these words reached him where he stood beside the Sun Maid, eager to hear what she could tell him of the lad Gaspar. “Shucks! I’ve had a right peaceful sort of day, me and old Dobbin, and I’d most forgot it couldn’t last. Say, Kit, you look like a girl could do a’most ary thing she tried to. Just put your shoulder to the wheel, won’t you, and shut the power off Mercy’s tongue. Tell her ‘tain’t the fashion for women to talk much or loud, not in big settlements like this. She’s death on the fashion, Mercy is. Why, that last gown of hers, cut out a piece of calico a neighbor brought from the East—you’d ought to see it. She got hold a picture-book, land knows when or where, and copied one the pictures. Waist clean up to her neck, it’s so short, and sleeves big enough to make me a suit of clothes. Fact! Wait till you see it. She’s a sight, I tell you. But so long ‘s she thinks it’s a touch beyond, why she’s happy. But don’t let her talk so much. ‘Tain’t proper; not in settlements.”

[Pg 232]

The Sun Maid set her head on one side and regarded her old friend critically; then frankly, if laughingly, remarked:

“Abel, you dear, you can beat Mercy talking, by a great length. It’s funny to hear you blaming her for the very thing you do. But I like it. You can’t guess how I like it, and how it brings back my childish days in the forest. Now come in and get something to eat. Then we can have another talk.”

“I ain’t hungry. I had some doughnuts in my saddle-bags, and I munched them along the road. Say, Kit. Don’t tell Mercy; but I didn’t try to sell. Just put the question once, so to satisfy her when she asked. We hain’t no need. She’s got a lot of money in a buckskin bag tied round her waist. The land’s all right. It’s a good investment. I’ll let it stand. This country is bound to grow. Some day it will be worth a power, and then I’ll sell out, if I’m livin’; and if I ain’t, you can. One of the reasons I came was to fix things up for you. I always meant to make you my legatee. We’ve no kith nor kin nigh enough to worry about, Mercy an’ me; an’ I ‘low she’d be agreeable. So we’ll let the land lie. Oh, bosh! There she is, calling again. May as well go in for she won’t stop till we do.”

After all, there was real pleasure in the faces of both husband and wife at their reunion, short though their separation had been, and bitter though their words sounded to a stranger; and, already, there was a personal pride in Mercy’s tones as she exhibited the house over which the Sun Maid presided, and explained the details—supplied by her own imagination—of its purposes.

[Pg 233]

“But about Gaspar, Mercy. Has she told you anything about him yet? I’m ‘lowing to have him help me keep tavern if he’s grown up as capable as he promised when he was a little shaver.”

“No. She hain’t said a word. Fact is, I hain’t asked. We’ve been too busy with other things. Likely he’s round somewheres. Maybe off hunting with them lazy soldiers. Shame, I think. The Government keepin’ ‘em just to loaf away their time.”

“Hmm! What on earth else could they do with it? I met a man, coming along, said there’d been a right sharp lot of wolves prowlin’ this winter an’ spring. They’re gettin’ most too neighborly for comfort for the settlers across the prairies, so the military are trying to clear them out. That’s not a bad idee. But don’t it beat all! That little sissy, that used to have to stand on a three-legged stool to turn the stirabout, grown like she has? I never saw a finer woman, never; and her hair’s the same dazzlin’ kind it always was. I ‘low I’m proud of her, and no mistake. Hello! What’s yonder? An Indian, on horseback, a-stoppin’ to this place! What’s he after? His face is painted black, too. There’s Sunny Maid going out to talk with him, and Wahneeny, too. Must be somethin’ up.”

[Pg 234]

“There’s always somethin’ up, where there’s an Indian. I hate ‘em, an’ they know it.”

“I guess they do, ma. Wahneeny, for instance, and—Shucks! That long, lanky, copper-face out back there, settin’ flat on the ground, trying to pitch jack-knives with a lot of other boys, white ones; he’s the chap that hung around our place so much—the chicken-stealer. I’m going to speak to him.”

“And I’m going to get him took up, just as soon as the Captain gets back, for setting our house afire. It wouldn’t have happened if I’d been home; but you never could be trusted to

look after things.”

Abel thought it time to change the subject, and retreated, while Mercy’s attention became riveted upon the group before the house. The faces of all three were very grave, and Wahneenah, who had come across to nurse a sick child, paid no heed to its fretful calls for her. The Indian horseman tarried but a brief time, then wheeled about and rode westward over the prairie, avoiding the regular road and the mud where the Smiths had suffered such annoyance.

[Pg 235]

Wahneenah returned to her charge, and the Sun Maid disappeared in the direction of the Fort. Before Mercy could decide whether to follow or not, the girl reappeared, and her old friend viewed her with amazement. She had mounted the Snowbird, which looked no older than when Mercy had watched her gallop away across the prairie, and had slung the famous White Bow upon her saddle horn. About her floating hair she had wound a fillet of white beads and feathers, and fastened the White Necklace of Lahnwenah, the Giver, around her fair throat. She sat her horse as only one trained to the saddle from infancy could have done, and her commanding figure seemed perfect in every outline.

“To the land’s sake! Ain’t she splendid! I never saw such a sight. Never. Never. Abel! Abel! A-b-e-l!!”

“Yes, yes; what? Mercy, Mercy Smith, hold your tongue! Don’t you know folks can’t bawl in a settlement as they do in the backwoods? What ails you? I’m coming as fast as a man in reason can. Hey? Kitty? Well, why didn’t you say so? Where? Out front? My—land! Well, well, well! It ain’t—it can’t be—it is! Well, Kitty girl, you beat the Dutch!”

The young horsewoman rode up to the front door of her house, and paused to let her old friends admire her to their satisfaction. But their admiration aroused neither surprise nor vanity in her simple, straightforward mind. Years before, the old clergyman had said to her, upon their first meeting, that the Lord had been very good to her in giving her a beauty so remarkable and impressive; and under his wise instruction she had accepted the fact as she did all the others of her life. Only she had striven to keep her soul always worthy of the glorious form in which it was housed and to use all her gifts and graces for good. So she stood a while, letting the honest couple inspect and comment, and finally answering Abel’s curiosity, in honest modesty.

[Pg 236]

“Why am I so dressed up? Because I have a mission to perform, and I need to make myself as beautiful as possible.”

“Kit—ty Bris—coe! I’ve read in my red Bible that ‘favor is deceitful and beauty is vain.’ I’m amazed at you. Livin’ with a minister, too. Well, *he* can’t preach to *me*. I’d despise to set under him.”

Abel’s eyes twinkled, but the gravity of the Sun Maid’s face did not lessen. She explained gently, yet with unshaken decision, that her self-adornment was right, and gave her reasons.

“You will remember, dears, that I am a ‘Daughter of the Pottawatomies.’ They believe that I have supernatural gifts, and that I am a spirit living in a human form.”

[Pg 237]

“And you let ‘em, Kit, you let ‘em?”

“I couldn’t prevent it if I tried. And I do not try. That idea of theirs is far too powerful a factor for good. Even Wahneenah, who knows better and is to me as a real mother, even she treats me a little more deferentially when I attire myself like this.”

“Put on your war paint, eh?”

“No, indeed: my peace paint,” laughed the girl. “The messenger you saw talking with Wahneenah and me is from an encampment a dozen miles or so to the westward. There are about five hundred Indians in the camp, and they are getting restless. They are always restless, it seems to me,” and she sighed profoundly. “It is such a problem, isn’t it? They think they have right on their side, and the whites think *they* have; and there is so much that is good, so much that is evil, on both. Well, the red people are planning treachery. The brave you saw is a real friend to the pale-faces, and one of my closest confidants. He came to warn me. His tribe, or the mixed tribes in the camp, are getting ready for an attack upon us, or some other near-by settlement. I must go out and stop it,—find out their grievance and right it if I can. If not—Well, I must make peace. I may be gone for several days, and I may be back before morning. You must make yourselves comfortable somewhere. Ask Doctor Littlejohn. If he is too absorbed in his studies, then talk with One, his eldest son. He is a fine fellow, and knows everything about this village. Good-by.”

[Pg 238]

“But, child alive! You ain’t going alone, single-handed, to face five hundred bloody Indians!

You must be crazy!”

“Oh, no, I’m not. It is all right. I am not afraid. There isn’t an Indian living who would harm a hair of my head, if he knew me; and almost all in Illinois do know me, either by sight or reputation. I am very happy with them and shall have a pleasant visit; that is, after I have dissuaded them from this proposed attack.”

“Kit, you couldn’t do it. ’Tain’t in nature. A young girl, alone, pretty as you are—You *sha’n’t* do it,—not with my consent; not while I’m alive and can set a horse or handle a gun. No, sirree. If you go, I go, and that’s the long and short of it.”

“No, dear Father Abel; you must not go; indeed you must not. It would ruin everything. It makes me very sad to have these constant broils and ill-feelings coming up between my white-faced and red-faced friends; yet the Lord permits it, and I try to be patient. But I tell you again, and you must believe it, that I am as safe out yonder in that camp of savages as I am here, this minute, with you. I am the Sun Maid, the Unafraid, the Daughter of Peace, the Snowflake. They have as many names for me as I am years old, I fancy. Each name means some noble thing they think they see in my character, and so I try to live up to it. It’s hard work, though, because I’m—well, I’m so quick-tempered and full of faults. But I suppose if God didn’t mean me to do this work, be a sort of peacemaker, He wouldn’t have made me just as I am or put me in just this place. That’s what the Doctor says, and so I do the best I can. After all, it’s a great honor, I think, to be let to serve people in this way, and so—Good-by, good-by!”

[Pg 239]

The Snowbird sprang forward at a word and, by experience trained to shun the sloughs and mud-holes, skimmed lightly across the prairie and out of sight. The Smiths stood and watched its disappearance, and the erect white figure upon its back, till both became a speck in the distance. Then, completely dumfounded by the incident, Abel sat down near the door-step to reflect upon it, while the more energetic Mercy departed for the Fort, declaring:

“I’ll see what that all means, or I’ll never say another word’s long as I live! The idee! *Men*—folks calling themselves *men*—and wearing government breeches, as I suppose they do, letting a girl like that go to destruction without a soul to stop her! But, my land! she was a sight to see, and no mistake!”

[Pg 240]

Meanwhile that was happening down at the little wharf which set all tongues a-chatter and fascinated all eyes.

“A fleet is coming in! A regular fleet of schooners, from the north and the upper lakes!”

Those who had not gone hunting crowded to the shore, and even the women caught their babies up and followed the men, Abel among the others, roused from his anxious brooding over the Sun Maid’s daring and catching the excitement.

“Shucks! Something must be up down that direction. Beats all. Here I’ve been only part of a day, and more things have gone on than would at our clearing in a month of Sundays. I—I’m all of a fluster to kind of keep my head level an’ my judgment cool. ’Twouldn’t never do to let on to ma how stirred up I be. Dear me! Seems as if I wouldn’t never get there. I do hope they’ll wait till I do.”

After all, it was the quietest and drowsiest of little hamlets, dropped down in the mud beside a great waterway; and the “fleet,” which had roused so much interest, was but a modest one of a half-dozen small schooners, laden with furs and peltries and manned by the smallest of crews.

However, to Abel, and to many another, it was a memorable event; and he made a pause at the Fort, which in itself was an object of great interest to him, to inform Mercy of the spectacle she was losing.

[Pg 241]

“Come on, ma! It’s a regular show down there. Real sailors and ships—we hain’t seen the like since we left the East and the coast of old Massachusetts.”

“Ships? My heart! I never expected to look upon another. Just to think it!”

The foremost vessel came to shore and was made fast; and there upon its deck stood a tall, dark-bearded man, who appeared what he was—the commander of the fleet; and he gave his orders in a clear, ringing voice that was instantly obeyed. His manner was grave, even melancholy; and his interest in the safe landing seemed greater than in any person among the expectant groups. He had tossed his hat aside and waited bareheaded in the sunshine till all was ready, when he stepped quietly ashore.

Then, indeed, he cast an inquiring glance around, in the possibility, though not probability,

of meeting a familiar face. All at once, his dark eyes brightened and his bearing lost its indifference. Pushing his way rapidly through the crowd, he approached Abel and Mercy and extended his hands in greeting.

"Hail, old friends! Well met!"

[Pg 242]

"Hey? What? Ruther think you've got the better of me, stranger," said the pioneer, awkwardly extending his own hardened palm.

"Probably the years since we met have made a greater change in me than in you. You both look exactly as you did that last day I saw you at the harvesting."

"Hey? Which? When? I can't place you, no how. I ain't acquainted with ary sailor, so far forth as I remember."

"But Gaspar, Father Abel? Surely, you and Mercy remember Gaspar Keith, whom you sheltered for so many years, and who treated you so badly at the end?"

"Glory! It ain't! My soul, my soul! Why, Gaspar—*Gaspar!* If it's you, I'm an old man. Why, you was only a stripling, and now——"

"Now, I'm a man, too. That's all. We all have to grow up and mature. I feel older than you look. And Mercy, the years have certainly used you well. It is good, indeed, to see your faces here, where I looked for strangers only."

"Them's us, lad. Them's us. *We're* the strangers in these parts. Just struck Chicago this very day. Got stuck in the mud, and had to be fished out like a couple of clams. And who do you think done the fishing? Though, if you hadn't spoke that odd way just now, I'd have thought you would have known first off. Who do you suppose?"

[Pg 243]

"Oh, he'll never guess. A man is always so slow," interrupted Mercy, eagerly. "Well, 'twas nobody but our own little Kit! The Sun Maid, and looking more like a child of the sunshine even than when you run off with her so long ago."

"The—Sun—Maid! *Kit-ty, my Kitty?*"

Gaspar's face had paled at the mention of the Sun Maid to such a grayness beneath its brown that Mercy reached her hand to stay him from falling; but at his second question her womanly intuition told her something of the truth.

"Yes, Gaspar, boy. Your Kitty, and ours. We hadn't seen her till to-day, neither; not since that harvestin'. But the longing got too strong and, when we was burnt out, we came straight for her. Didn't you know she was here yet? Or didn't you know she was still alive?"

"No. No, I didn't. That very next winter after I went away—and that was the next day after we came here together—an Indian passed where I was hunting with my master and told me she had died. He was one we had known at Muck-otey-pokee—the White Pelican. He said a scourge of smallpox had swept the Fort and this settlement and that my little maid had passed out of the world forever. But you tell me—*she is alive?* After all these years of sorrow for her, she is still alive? I—it is hard to believe it."

[Pg 244]

Mercy laid her hand upon the strong shoulder that now trembled in excitement.

"There, there, son; take it quiet. Yes, she's alive, and the most beautiful woman the good Lord ever made. Never, even in the East, where girls had time to grow good-looking, was there ever anybody like her. I ain't used to it myself, yet. I can't realize it. She's that well growed, and eddicated, and masterful. Why, child, the whole community looks up to her as if she were a sort of queen. I've found that out in just the few hours I've been here, and from just the few I've met. Even Wahneeny—she's here, too; has been most all the time. The Black Partridge, Indian chief, he that was her brother, that took care of you two children when the massacre was, he didn't expect she'd ever come again; but still, it appears, just on the chance of it, he rode off up country somewhere, and he happened to strike her trail, and that Osceolo's—the scamp—that had run off with Kitty's white horse, and fetched 'em all back. The women in the Fort was tellin' me the whole story just now. I hain't got a word out of Wahneeny, yet. She's as close-mouthed as she ever was; but there's more to hear than you could hark to in a day's ride, and—Where you going, Gaspar?"

[Pg 245]

"To find my Kitty."

"Well, you needn't. And I don't know as she's any more yours than she is ours, seein' we really had the credit of raisin' her. For she's took her life in her hand, and has gone alone, without ary man to protect her, out across the prairie to face five hunderd Indians on the war-path, and—Hold on! What you up to?"

The sailor, or hunter, whichever he might be, had started along the footpath to the Fort, and halted, half angrily, at this interruption.

“Well? What? I’ll see you by and by. I must find Kitty!”

“Right you are, lad. Find her, and fetch her back. And, say! Mercy says your own old Tempest horse is in the stable at the Fort; that it now belongs to the Sun Maid, and she’s the only one who ever rides it. The Captain gave it to her because she grieved so about you. I wouldn’t wonder if he’d travel nigh as fast as he used—when he run away before. I never saw the beat of you two young ones! As fast as a body catches up to you, off you run!”

Even amid the anxiety now renewed in Abel’s mind regarding Kitty, the humorous side of the situation appealed to him; but there was no answering smile on Gaspar’s face; only an anxiety and yearning beyond the comprehension of either of these honest, simple souls.

[Pg 246]

“Well, go on, then. Run your beatingest, in a bee line, due west. That’s the way she took, and that’s the trail you’ll find her on, if so be you find her at all.”

Those at the Fort looked, wondered, but did not object, as this dark *voyageur* strode straight into the stables and to a box stall where Tempest enjoyed a life of pampered indolence. They realized that this was no stranger, but one to whom all things were familiar—even the animal which answered so promptly to the cry:

“Tempest, old fellow!”

It was a voice he had never forgotten. The black gelding’s handsome head tossed in a thrill of delight, and the answering neigh to that love call was good to hear. In a moment Gaspar had found a saddle, slipped it into place, and, scarcely waiting to tighten its girth, had leaped upon the animal’s back.

“Forward, Tempest! Be true to your name!”

Those who saw the rush of the gallant creature through the open gates of the stockade acknowledged that he would be.

CHAPTER XVIII.

[Pg 247]

WESTWARD AND EASTWARD OVER THE PRAIRIE.

“**F**ast, Tempest, fast!”

The sunshine was in his eyes, and a warmer sunshine in his heart, as Gaspar urged the gelding forward.

Fast it was. The faithful creature recognized the burden he carried, and his clean, small feet reeled off the distance like magic, till the village by the lake was left far behind, and only the limitless prairie stretched beyond. Yet still there was no sign of the Snowbird along the horizon, nor any point discernible where an Indian encampment might be.

At length the rider paused to consider the matter.

“It’s strange I don’t see her. If she were crossing the level, anywhere, I should, for my eyes are trained to long distances. It must be that Abel gave me the wrong direction. I’ll turn north, and try.”

But, keen-sighted though he was, for once the woodsman blundered. Between him and the lowering sun the prairie dipped and rose again, the two borders of the hidden valley seeming to meet in one unbroken plain. It was in this little depression that the wigwams were pitched, and among them the Sun Maid was already moving and pleading with her friends for patience and peace.

[Pg 248]

Meanwhile, Gaspar continued on his chosen route, at a direct right angle from that he should have followed, till the twilight came down and the whole landscape was swathed in mist. For there had been heavy rains of late, and the vapor rose from the soaked and sun-warmed earth like a great white pall, filling the hunter’s nostrils and blinding his sight.

“Well, this is hopeless. I might ride over her and not find her in this fog. But I can’t stay here. It’s choking. Heaven grant my Kitty’s safe under shelter somewhere. My own safety is to keep moving. Good boy, Tempest! Take it easy, but don’t stop.”

After that, there was nothing to do but trust the horse’s instinct to find a path through the

mist and to be grateful that the ground was so level.

"It's a long lane that has no turning. It must be that we'll strike something different after a while; if not a settler's house, at least a clump of trees. Any shelter would be better than none, in this creeping moisture. It would be easy to get lost; and what a situation! Oh! if I knew that she was out of it. A messenger to the Indians, eh? My little Kit, my dainty foster-sister!"

The gelding's nose was to the ground and, as a dog would have done, he picked his way, cautiously, yet surely, straight north where lay, though Gaspar did not know it, a settler's clearing and comfortable cabin. The rider's thoughts passed from his present surroundings back to the past and forward to the future; and when there sounded, almost at his feet, a cry of distress he did not hear it in his absorption.

[Pg 249]

But Tempest did. At the second wail he stopped short, and it was this that roused Gaspar from his reverie.

"Tired, old Tempest, boy? It won't do to rest here. Take a breath, if you like, and get on again. Keeping at it is salvation."

"Mamma! I want—my—mamma!"

"Whew! What's that? Hello!"

The sound was not repeated, and yet Tempest would not advance.

"Hello!" shouted Gaspar; and after a moment of strained listening, again he caught the echo of a child's sob.

"My God! A baby—here! Lost in this fog!"

He was off his horse and down upon his knees, reaching, feeling, creeping—calling gently, and finally touching the cold, drenched garment of the child he could not see.

In its terror at this fresh danger the little one shrieked and rolled away; but the man lifted it tenderly, and soothed it with kind words till its shrieks ceased and it clung close to its rescuer.

[Pg 250]

"There, there, poor baby! How came you here? Don't be afraid. I'll take you home. Tempest will find the way. Feel—the good horse knows. It was he that found you; we'll get on his back and ride straight to mamma, for whom you called."

Climbing slowly back into his saddle, because of the little one he held so carefully, Gaspar laid its cold hand upon the gelding's neck, but it slid listlessly aside and he realized that he had come not a moment too soon.

All night they wandered, the child lying on Gaspar's breast wrapped in his coat, while the mist penetrated his own clothing and seemed to creep into his very thoughts, numbing them to a sort of despair that no effort could cast off. The wail of the child lost in that dreariness had brought back, like a lightning's flash, the earliest memories of his life and revived his never-dying hatred of his parent's slayers.

"An Indian's hand was in this work!" he mused. "Doubtless, the mother for whom it grieved has met the fate which befell my own. And Abel said that it was among such as these my Sun Maid had gone!"

Then justice called to mind his knowledge of Wahneenah, of the Black Partridge, old Winnemeg, and others, and his mood softened somewhat; but still memory tormented him and the white fog seemed a background for ghastly scenes too awful for words. Above all and through all, one consciousness was keener and fiercer than the others:

[Pg 251]

"My Kitty is among them at this moment! O, God, keep her!"

It was the strongest cry of his yearning heart; yet underneath lay an impotent rage at his own powerlessness to help in this preservation.

"For what is my manhood or my courage worth to her now? And even the Deity seems veiled by this deadening, suffocating mist!"

But Tempest moved steadily on once more, and the little child warmed to life on his breast; and by degrees the man's self-torment ceased. Then he lifted his eyes afresh and struggled to pierce the gloom.

What was that? A light! A little yellow spot in the gray whiteness, which the horse was first to see and toward which he now hastened with a firmer speed.

"It's a fire. No, a lamp in a house window. There, it's gone. A will-o'-the-wisp by some hidden pool. It shines again. Well, Tempest sees it and believes in it."

The man lacked the animal's faith, and even when they had come to within a short distance of the glow, the clouds of vapor swept between it and them and Gaspar checked Tempest's advance. But at last a slight wind rose, and the mist which rolled toward them was tinged with the odor of smoke, so the rider knew that his first surmise had been correct.

[Pg 252]

"It is a fire. A settler's cabin, probably once this lost child's home. The red man's work!"

When he reached the very spot there were, indeed, the remnants of a great burning, yet in the circle of the light Gaspar saw a house still standing. He was at its threshold promptly, and entered through its open door upon a scene of desolation. A woman crouched by the hearth that was strewn with ashes, and her moans echoed through the gloom with so much of agony in them that the stranger's worst fears were confirmed. Then he caught her murmured words, and they were all of one tenor:

"My baby! my baby! my baby! My one lost little child! The wolves—my little one—my all!"

Gaspar strode into the room, lighted only by the fitful glare from the ruins without, and gently spoke:

"Don't grieve like that! The child is safe. It is here in my arms."

"What? Safe! safe!"

The mother was up, and had caught the little one from him before the words had left her lips, and the passion of her rejoicing brought the tears to the man's eyes as her sorrow had not done.

After a moment, she was able to speak clearly and to demand his story. Then she gave hers.

[Pg 253]

"I was here alone. My husband had gone hunting, and I went into the barn to seek for eggs. The loft was dark——"

"Spare yourself. I can guess. The Indians."

"The Indians? No, indeed. Myself. My own carelessness. I carried a candle, and dropped it. The hay caught. I barely escaped from having my clothing burned on me; but I did. Then I forgot everything except my terrible loss and my husband's anger when he returns. I began to fight the fire. I remember my little one crying with fright, but I paid no attention, and when at length I realized that it was too late for me to save our stock I stopped to look for him. Fortunately, the cabin was too far from the barn to catch easily, and there was a wind blowing the other way. That's all that saved the home; yet, when I missed my baby, I wished that it would burn, too, and me with it. Life without him would be a living death. And he would have died, any way. The wolves are awful troublesome this spring. We've lost more than twenty of our hogs and the only pair of sheep we had. So husband joined a party and went out to hunt them. What will he say, what will he say, when he comes back!"

In Gaspar's heart there sprang up a great happiness. The ill which had happened here was so much less than he had anticipated that he took courage for himself. After all, the Sun Maid might be safe, as Abel had declared she said she should be. He remembered, at last, that not all men are evil, even red ones; and in the reaction of his own feelings, he exclaimed:

[Pg 254]

"What can he say, but give thanks that no worse befell him!"

However, now that her child was safe within her arms, the woman began to suffer in advance the torment she would have to undergo when she faced her indignant husband; and she retorted sharply:

"Worse! Well, I suppose so. But I don't see why in the name of common sense I was let to be such a fool in the first place. He won't, neither. It's all very well when you've lost half your property to give thanks for not losing your life, too; but I don't see any cause for losing any one."

This sounded so like Mercy and her philosophy that Gaspar threw back his head and laughed; which angered his new friend first, and then affected her, also, with something of his mirth.

"I can't see a thing to laugh at, I, for one," she remarked, trying to be stern.

"Oh! but I can. And I'm not a laughing man, in ordinary. But there's one thing I know—I'm powerful hungry. Can't we make another fire, one that we can control, and get a bit of supper? If there's anything in the house to cook, I can cook it while you tend baby. Then

[Pg 255]

we'll talk over your affairs."

"There's plenty to cook, but you'll not cook it, sir. I owe you my child's life, and now things are getting straighter in my muddled mind. I lost the barn for Jacob, and I must help replace it. I've been a hard worker always, but I can stretch another point, I guess. Pshaw! I believe it's getting daylight. It'll be breakfast instead of supper, this time."

It was daylight, indeed; and in a half-hour the simple meal was smoking on the table, and Gaspar sitting to eat it with the hearty appetite of a man who has lived always out-of-doors. But he could talk as fast as eat, when he was anxious as on that morning; and before he had drained his last cup of the "rye coffee" he had learned from his hostess that the Indian encampment he sought lay well to the southwestward of her cabin, and that by a way she could direct him he could reach it easily in a two-hours' ride. This to Tempest, who had rested and fed, would be nothing, if he was anything the horse he used to be, and Gaspar believed, from the past night's experience, that sometimes even a horse can improve with age.

"Well, I'll be off, then. I'm anxious to get there. If all goes well I'll get around this way again before long. Thank you for my entertainment, and here's a trifle for the baby." [Pg 256]

He tossed a gold piece on the table and was leaving the cabin. But she restrained him.

"No, sir, I can't take that, nor let the little one. And as for thanking me, I shall never cease to thank you, and the Lord for you, that you lost your way last night. But let me beg you, sir, to take a second thought. Jacob says the Indians are getting ready for an outbreak. It is like running your neck into a halter to go among them just now. I—I wish you wouldn't. I couldn't bear to have harm come to you after what you've done for me."

"Thank you, but I must go. I am not much afraid for myself at any time, for I've known the red-skins always and—trusted them never! But a girl—did you ever hear of the Sun Maid?"

"Hear of her? Her? Well, I guess so! Who hasn't, in these parts? Why?"

"It was to find her and protect her that I started last night from the Fort."

"To *protect* her? Well, you could have saved your trouble. I wish that I was as safe in this wild country as she is. There is an old saying that her life is charmed; that nothing evil can ever happen to her; and so far it has proved true. As for the Indians, even the wickedest in the whole race would die to save her life. I hope you'll find her, sir, all right; but if there's any protecting to be done, she'll protect you, not you her. Well, good-by, and good luck!" [Pg 257]

Gaspar bared his head and rode away, on a straight trail this time, and with the exhilaration of the morning tingling through his healthful veins. On every side the great clouds of white mist rose and rolled apart. Blue violets and white windflowers began to peep upward at him from his path, and he remembered Kitty's love for them. Then the sun broke through, and only those who have thus ridden across a dew-drenched prairie, at such an hour in such a season, can picture what that ride was like.

The spirit of life and love and that glorious morning thrilled both horse and master as they leaped forward and still forward till, on the top of a grassy rise, a sudden halt was made.

For what was this coming out of the west?—this fair white creature on her snowy mount, with the golden sunlight on her yellow hair, her glowing face, her modest maiden breast. Flowers wreathed her all about and a White Bow gleamed at her saddle horn. Behind her, and one on either side, rode dusky warriors, brave in their finest trappings and turning a reverent, attentive ear to the Maid's words. Their horses' footfalls deadened by the sodden grass, slowly they came into fuller view, as a picture grows under the painter's brush. [Pg 258]

Still the man on the black horse facing them sat still, spellbound. Could this be Kitty, his Kitty; to whom his thoughts had turned as to a half-grown, playful child, and over whom he had domineered with the masterful pride of boyhood? He was a man now, boyhood was past; but he had quite forgotten that girlhood also passes and the child becomes a woman.

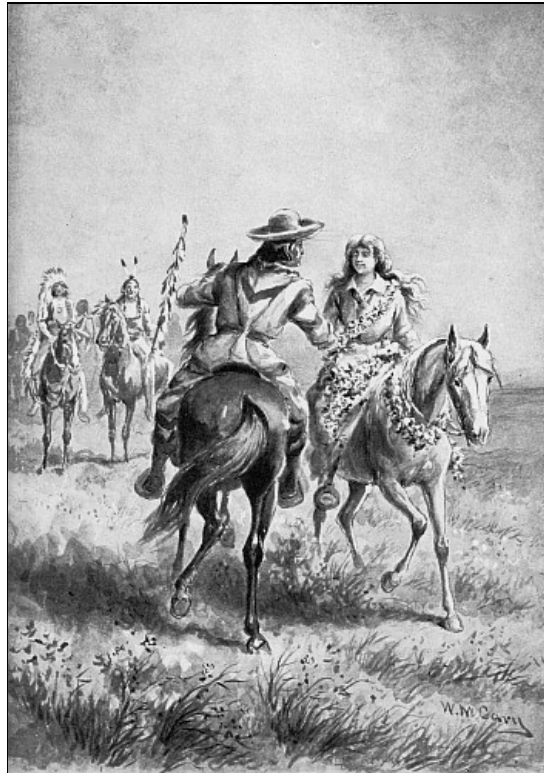
He had grown rich and strong. After her supposed death he had devoted himself wholly to money-getting with the singleness of purpose that never fails of its object. He had come back to his old home to spend the fortune he had gained, feeling himself a master among men and his strength that of wisdom as well as wealth.

Now all his pride and arrogance passed from him before the nobility of this woman approaching. For on her youthful face sat the dignity which is higher than pride and from her beautiful eyes gleamed the beneficent love more far-reaching than wealth.

After a moment Gaspar rode slowly forward again, and soon espying, but not recognizing, him, the Sun Maid advanced. Then all at once the black horse and the white galloped to a

meet.

“Kitty! My Kitty!”



“KITTY! MY KITTY!” Page 258.

“Gaspar!”

[Pg 259]

Their hands closed in a clasp that banished years of separation, and the black eyes searched the blue, questioning for the one sweet answer that rules all the world. There was a swift self-revelation in both hearts; a consciousness that this was what the God who made them had meant from the beginning. With a grave exaltation too deep and too high for words, the pure man and the pure woman came to their destiny and accepted it. Then their hands fell apart, the black Tempest wheeled into place beside the white Snowbird, and, as on a day long in the past, the pair passed swiftly and lightly eastward toward the lakeside village and their home.

“Ugh! The Sun Maid has found her mate!” muttered the foremost warrior grimly, and followed with his company at a soberer pace.

CHAPTER XIX.

[Pg 260]

THE CROOKED LOG.

“I tell you what, Chicago’s a-growing. First *we* come; then Gaspar; then Kitty and him get married; and I go to keeping tavern in the parson’s house; and his son, One, goes up north to take a place in Gaspar’s business; and Gaspar sends Two and Three east to study law and medicine; and Four and his pa come to board in our tavern; and Osceolo—”

“For the land’s sake, Abel Smith, do hold your tongue. Here you’ve got to be as big a talker as old Deacon Slim, that I used to hear about, who begun the minute he woke up and never stopped till his wife tied his mouth shut at night. Even then—”

“Mercy, Mercy! Take care. Set me a good example, if you can; but don’t go to denying that this is a growin’ village.”

“I’ve no call to deny it. Why should I? But, say, Abel, just step round to the store, won’t you, an’ buy me some of that turkey red calico was brought in on the last team from the East. I’d admire to make Kitty a rising sun quilt for her bedroom. ‘Twould be so ‘propriate, too.”

[Pg 261]

“Fiddlesticks! Not a yard of stuff will I ever buy for you to set an’ snip, snip, like you used to in the woods. We’ve got something else to do now. As for Kit, between the Fort folks and

the Indians, she's had so many things give her a ready, she won't have room to put 'em. The idee! Them two children gettin' married. Seems just like play make believe."

"Well, there ain't no make believe. It's the best thing 't ever happened to Chicago. Wonderful how they both 'pear to love the old hole in the mud," answered Mercy.

"Yes, ain't it? To hear Gaspar talk, you'd think he'd been to Congress, let alone bein' President. All about the 'possibilities of the location,' the 'fertility of the soil,' the 'big canawl,' and the whole endurin' business; why, I tell you, it badgers my wits to foller him."

"Wouldn't try, then, if I was you. Poor old wits 'most wore out, any how, and better save what's left for this tavern business. Between you and your fiddle, thinkin' you've got to amuse your guests, I'm about beat out. All the drudgery comes on *me*, same's it always did."

"Drudgery, Mercy? Now, come. Take it easy. Hain't Kitty fetched you a couple of squaws to do your steps and dish washin'? All you have to do is to cook and——"

[Pg 262]

"Oh! go along, Abel, and get me that calico. Don't set there till you take root. I ain't a-complainin', an' I 'low I'm as much looked up to here in Chicago without my bedstead as I was in the woods with it."

"Looked up to? I should say so. There ain't a woman in the settlement holds her head as top-lofty as you do. And with good reason, I 'low. I don't praise you often, ma, but when I do, I mean it. If you hadn't been smarter 'n the average, and had more gumption to boot, you'd never been asked in to help them army women cook Kitty's weddin' supper. By the way, where are the youngsters now? I hain't seen 'em to-day."

"Off over the prairie on their horses, just as they used to be when they were little tackers. I never saw bridal folks like them; from the very first not hangin' round by themselves, but mixing with everybody, same's usual, and beginning right away to do all the good they can with Gaspar's money. Off now to see some folks burned their own barn up——"

"W-H-A-T?" demanded Abel, with paling face.

"What ails you? A fool of a woman took a lighted candle into her hay loft and ruined herself. That happened the night Gaspar found Kitty; and they call it part of their weddin' tower to go there and lend the farmer the money to replace it. Gaspar was for giving it outright, though he's a shrewd feller too, but Kit wouldn't. 'They aren't paupers, and it would hurt their pride,' she said. 'Lend it to them on very easy terms, and they'll respect themselves and you.'"

[Pg 263]

"Well, of course he done it."

"Sure. When a man gets a wife as wise as Kitty he'd ought to hark to her."

"I'll go and get the calico now, Mercy," said Abel, and left rather suddenly.

At nightfall the young couple rode homeward once more, facing the moonlight that whitened the great lake and touched the homely hamlet beside it with an idealizing beauty; and looking upon it, the Sun Maid recalled her vision concerning it and repeated it to her husband.

"Ever since then, my Gaspar, the dream comes back to me in some form or shape. But it is always here, right here, that the crowds gather and the great roar of life sounds in my ears. In some strange way we are to be part of it; part of it all. In the dream I see the tall spires of churches, thick and shouldering one another like the trees in the forest behind us."

"But, my darling, you have never seen a church of any sort. How, then, can you dream of them?"

[Pg 264]

"That I don't know, unless it is from the pictures in the good Doctor's books. I have learned so much from the pictures always. But, oh! I wish I could make you know some of the delight I felt when first I could read!"

"I do know it, sweetheart. I, too, craved knowledge and dug it out for myself, up there in the northern forests, from the few books that came my way and the rare visit of a man who could teach. The first dollar I had that was all my own I put aside for you. That was the beginning of our fortune. The second I invested in a spelling-book. The study, dear, was all that helped me bear the pain of your death. But you are not dead! Rather the most alive of any human being whom I ever saw."

"That is true, Gaspar. I *am* alive. I just quiver with the force that drives me on from one task to another, from one point reached to one beyond. And now, with you beside me, there

is no limit, it seems, to the help we can be to every single person who will come within our reach. Wasn't the woman glad and grateful; and don't you see, laddie, that it is better as I planned? You say you have been penurious, saving every cent not expended for your books and necessaries: and yet, now that you are happy again, you are ready to rush to the other extreme and throw your money away in thoughtless charity."

[Pg 265]

She looked so young, so childlike, in the glimmering moonlight that the tall woodsman laughed.

"To hear my little Kit teaching her elders!"

"The elders must listen. It is for our home. You must spend every dollar you have, but you must do it in such a way that somebody will be helped. We don't want money, just money, for itself. To hold it that way would make us ignoble. It's the wealth we spend that will make us rich."

"Kit, there's some dark scheme afloat in that fair head of yours. Out with it!"

"Just for a beginning of things—this: There was a family came to the Fort to-day. The father is a skilled wood-carver. He is not over strong and his wife is frailer than he. They have a lot of little children and he must earn money. It has cost them more than they expected to get as far as this, even, and they should not go farther. Yet he is a man, a master workman. It would be an insult to offer him money. But give him work and you feed his soul as well as his body."

"How, my love? Who that dwells in a log cabin needs fine carvings or would appreciate them if they had them?"

"Educate them to want and appreciate them. Open a school for just that branch. I myself will be his pupil. I remember with what delight I used to mould Mercy's butter. Well, I've been moulding something ever since."

[Pg 266]

"Your husband, for instance."

"He's a little difficult material; but time will improve him! Then there are the Doctor's botanical treatises and specimens. Open a school. If you have to begin with a few only, still *begin*. Lay the seed. From our little workroom and classroom may grow one of those mighty colleges that have made Englishmen great and are making Americans their equals."

"Hello there, child! Hold on a bit. Their equals? And you a soldier's daughter!"

"Since I am a soldier's daughter, I can afford to be just, and even generous. It is all nonsense, because we have gained our independence, to say we are better than our fathers were. For they were our fathers, surely; and they had had time in their rich country, with their ages of instruction, to grow learned and great. But we Americans are their children, and, just as is already proving, each generation is wiser than the one which went before. So presently we shall be able to do even better than they——"

"Give them another dose of Yankee Doodle?"

"If they require it, yes. But come back to just right here in this little town. Besides the schools for white children, can't we have those for the Indians?"

[Pg 267]

"No, dear; not here. Not anywhere, I fear, that will ever result in permanent good. At least, the time is not yet ripe for that part of your dreaming to come true."

"But think of Wahneenah. She is teachable and there is none more noble. Yet she is an Indian."

"She is one, herself. In all her race I have seen none other like her. There is Black Partridge, too, and Gomo, and old Winnemeg. They are exceptions. But, my love, there are, also, the Black Hawk and the Prophet."

He did not add his opinion, which agreed with that of the wisest men he knew, that Illinois would know no real prosperity till the savages, which disturbed its peace, were removed from its borders. For she loved them, hoped for them, believed in them; even though her own common sense forced her to agree with him that the time was not ripe then, if it ever would be, for their civilization. So he held his peace and soon they were at home.

"Heigho! There are lights in our cabin. Hear me prophesy: Mother Mercy has come over with a roast for our supper and Mother Wahneenah has quietly set it aside to wait until her own is eaten. Ho there within!" he called merrily. "Who breaches our castle when its lord is absent?"

Mercy promptly appeared in the doorway. She was greatly excited and hastily led them to

[Pg 268]

the rear of the house, pointing with both hands to an animal fastened behind it.

"There's your fine Indian for you! See that?"

"Indeed I do!" laughed Kitty. "An ox, Jim, isn't it? with the Doctor's saddle on his back and his botanizing box, and—What does it mean? I knew he was absent-minded, but not like this."

"Absent-minded. Absent shucks! That's Osceolo—*that* is!" in a tone of fiercest indignation. "He's such a crooked log he can't lie still."

"Is that his work? He dared not play his tricks on the dear Doctor!"

"Yes, it's his'n. The idee! There was Abel went and gave old Dobbin to the parson, to save his long legs some of their trampin' after weeds and stuff and 'cause he was afraid to ride any other horse in the settlement. And there was Osceolo, that for a feller's hired out to a regular tavern-keeper like us, to be a hostler and such, he don't earn his salt. All the time prankin' round on some tomfoolery. And Abel's just as bad. A man with only two or three little weeny tufts o' hair left on his head and mighty little sense on the inside, at his time of life, a-fiddlin' and cuttin' up jokes, I declare—I declare, I'm beat, and I wish——"

"But what is it?" demanded Kitty, bringing her old friend back to facts.

[Pg 269]

"Why, nothing. Only when the dominie came home and stopped here, as he always does after he's been a-prairieing, to show you his truck and dicker, Osceolo happens along and is took smart! The simpleton! Just set old Dobbin scamperin' off back into the grass again and clapped the saddle and tin box and what not on to the ox's back. Spected he'd see the parson come out and mount and never notice. 'Stead of that, along comes Abel—strange how constant he has to visit to your house!—and sees the whole business. Well, he'd caught some sort of a wild animal, and—say, Kitty Briscoe, I mean Keith!—*that Indian'd drink whiskey, if he got a chance*, just as quick as one raised in the woods, instead of one privileged to set under such a saint as the Doctor all his days. I tell you—Well, what you laughing at, Gaspar Keith? Ain't I tellin' the truth?"

"Yes, Mother Mercy, doubtless you are. But it isn't so long back, as Abel says, that you objected to 'setting under' the Doctor yourself."

"Suppose it wasn't? I didn't know him then, not as I do now. He's orthodox, I found out, and that's all I wanted. But I know what I'm talkin' about. Osceolo, he's always beggin' for Abel to keep liquor: an' we teetotallers! An' he's teased so much that the other day Abel thought he'd satisfy him. So he got an old bottle, looked as if some tipsy Indian had thrown it away, and filled it with a dose of boneset tea. He made a terrible mystery of the whole matter, pretendin' to be sly of me, and took it out from under his coat and gave it to Ossy out behind in the stable, like it was a wonderful secret. Do you know, that Indian hain't never let on a single word about that business yet? Oh! he's a master hand for bein' close-mouthed. They all be. They just *do*—but don't talk."

[Pg 270]

"Mercy, if *you* were only a little more talkative, you'd be better company!" teased Gaspar, who was eager for the finish of the story and his supper.

"Now—you! Well, laugh away. I don't mind. All is, when Abel saw the trick Ossy had played on the Doctor, he plays one on Ossy. He'd caught a queer sort of animal, as I said, and he was fetchin' it to Kit. Everybody brings her everything, from rattlesnakes up. But when he saw that ox, he just opens the tin box and claps the creature inside and then hunts up Ossy. He says: 'There's something in that box pretty suspicious, boy. You might look an' see what 'tis but don't let on.' He's that curiosity, Osceolo has, that he forgot everything else and stuck his hand in sly. I expect he thought it was something to eat, or likely to drink, and he got bit. Hand's all tore and sore, and now Abel's scared and gone off with him to the surgeon at the Fort, and there'll be trouble. Ossy was muttering something about the 'Black Hawk coming and that he'd had enough of the white folks. He was born an Indian, and an Indian he'd die'; and to the land! I hope he will! He makes more mischief in this settlement than you can shake a stick at!"

[Pg 271]

"'It's hard for a bird to get away from its tail,'" quoted Gaspar, lightly. "Osceolo began life wrong and his reputation clings to him. I'll take the saddle off Jim, and let's go in to supper. None of my Sun Maid's tribe is to be feared, I think, no matter how direly they may threaten."

Yet the young husband glanced toward his wife with an anxiety that he would not have liked her to see. During the weeks since his return to the village he had learned much more than he had told her of a movement far beyond the Indian encampments she was accustomed to visit, which would bring serious trouble, if not complete disaster, upon their

beloved home. Osceolo was the Sun Maid's devoted follower; yet the prank he had played upon the old Doctor, whom she so revered, showed that he was already throwing aside the restraints of his enforced civilization; and the sign was ominous.

CHAPTER XX.

[Pg 272]

ENEMIES, SEEN AND UNSEEN.

But the time passed on and the rumors died away, or ended in nothing more serious than had always disturbed the dwellers in that lonely land. Now and again a friendly, peace-loving chief would ride up to the door of the Sun Maid's home, and, after a brief consultation she would put on her Indian attire and ride back with him across the prairies. As of old, she went with a heart full of love for her Indian friends, but it was not the undivided love that she had once been able to give them.

Over her beautiful features had settled the brooding look which wifedom and motherhood gives; and though she listened as attentively as of old and counselled as wisely, she could not for one moment forget the little children waiting for her by her own hearthside or the brave husband who was so often away on his long journeys to the north; and the keen intelligence of the red men perceived this.

"She is ours no longer," said a venerable warrior, after one such visit. "She has taken to herself a pale-face, he who met her on the prairie in the morning light, and her heart has gone from her. It is the way of life. The old passes, the new comes to reign. We are her past. Her Dark-Eye is her present. Her papooses are her future. The parting draws near. She is still the Sun Maid, the White Spirit, the Unafraid. As far as the Great Spirit wills, she will be faithful to us; but now when she rides homeward from a visit to our lodge it is no longer at the easy pace of one whose life is all her own, but wildly, swiftly, following her heart which has leaped before."

[Pg 273]

Each morning, nearly, as the Sun Maid ministered to her little ones or busied herself among the domestic duties of her simple home she would joyfully exclaim to Wahneenah:

"I don't believe there was ever a woman in the world so happy as I am!" And the Indian foster-mother would gravely reply:

"Ask the Great Spirit that the peace may long continue."

Till, on one especial day, the younger woman demanded:

"Well, why should it not, my Mother? It is now many weeks since I have been called to settle any little quarrel among our people. Surely they are learning wisdom fast. Do you know something? I intend that some of the squaws who are idle shall make my baby, Gaspar the Second, a little costume of our own tribe. It shall be all complete; as if he were a tiny chief himself, with his leggings and head-dress, and—yes, even a little bow and quiver. I'll have it finished, maybe, before his father comes down from this last trip into the far-away woods. Oh! I shall be glad when my 'brave' can trust all his business of mining and fur-buying and lumbering to somebody else. I miss him so. But won't he be pleased with our little lad in feathers and buckskin?"

[Pg 274]

Wahneenah's dark eyes looked keenly at her daughter's face.

"No, beloved; he will not be pleased. In his heart of hearts, the white chief was ever the red man's enemy. Me he loves and a few more. But let the White Papoose" (Wahneenah still called her foster-child by the old love names of her childhood) "let the White Papoose hear and remember: the day is near when the Dark-Eye will choose between his friends and the friends of his wife. It is time to prepare. There is a distress coming which shall make of this Chicago a burying-ground. Our Dark-Eye has bought much land. He is always, always buying. Some day he will sell and the gold in his purse will be too heavy for one man's carrying. But first the darkness, the blood, the death. Let him choose now a house of refuge for you and the little children; choose it where there are trees to shelter and water to refresh. Let him build there a tepee large enough for all your needs,—a wigwam, remember, not a house. Let him stock it well with food and clothing and the guns which protect."

[Pg 275]

"Why, Other Mother! What has come over you? Such a dismal prophecy as that is worse than any which old Katasha ever breathed. Are you ill, Wahneenah, dearest?"

"There is no sickness in my flesh; yet in my heart is a misery that bows it to the earth. But I

warn you. If you would find favor in the eyes of your brave, clothe not his son in the costume of the red man."

Kitty was unaccountably depressed. Hitherto she had been able to laugh aside the sometimes sombre auguries of the chief's sister; but now something in the woman's manner made her believe that she knew more than she disclosed of some impending disaster. However, it was not in her nature, nor did she believe it right, that she should worry over vague suggestions. So she answered once more before quite dismissing the subject:

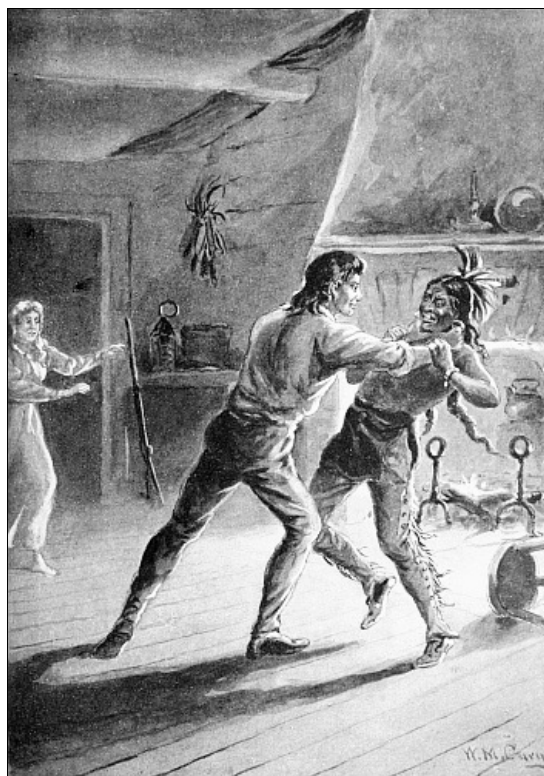
"Well, we were already discussing the comfort of having another home out in the forest, and Abel has suggested that we build it on the land which was his farm and which Gaspar has bought. We both liked that; to have our own children play where we played as children. I want my little ones to learn about the wild things of the woods, and the dear old Doctor is still alive to teach them. You will like it, too, Other Mother. When the days grow hot and long we will ride to the 'Refuge'; and I think the wigwam idea is better, after all, than the house; though I do not know what my husband will decide."

[Pg 276]

"Before the days grow long, the 'Refuge' must be finished, and the earlier the better. It is rightly named, my daughter, and the time is ripe."

Ere many hours had passed, and most unexpectedly to his wife, Gaspar returned. In the first happiness of welcoming him she did not observe that his face was stern and troubled; but she did notice, when bedtime came, that he did what had never before been done in their home: he locked or bolted the doors and stoutly barred the heavy wooden shutters. He had also brought Osceolo with him, from Abel's tavern, and had peremptorily bidden the Indian to "Lie there!" pointing to a heap of skins on the floor beside the fire.

Toward morning Kitty woke. To her utter amazement, she saw in her living room her Gaspar and Osceolo engaged in what seemed a battle to the death. Then she sprang up and ran toward them, but her husband motioned her back.



OSCEOLO AND GASPAR. Page 276.

"Leave him to me. I'll fix him so that he'll do no more mischief for the present."

[Pg 277]

"But, Gaspar! What is it?"

"Treachery, as usual. Get into your clothes, my girl, and call Wahneenah. Let the children be dressed,—warmly, for the air is cool and we may have to leave suddenly."

"What is it?"

"An outbreak! The settlers are flocking into the Fort in droves. Black Hawk and his followers have come too close for comfort. This miserable fellow has been tampering with the stores. He couldn't get at the ammunition, but he's done all the evil he could. I caught him hobnobbing with a low Sac; a spy, I think. There. He's bound, and now I'll fasten him in

the wood-shed. He knows too much about this town to be left in freedom."

Yet, after all, they did not have to flee from home, as Gaspar had feared, though the Sun Maid put on her peace dress and unbound her glorious hair, ready at any moment to ride forth and meet the Indians and to try her powers of promoting good-feeling. The Snowbird stood saddled for many days: yet it was only upon errands of hospitality and charity that he was needed.

Gaspar, however, was always in the saddle. When he was not riding far afield, scouting the movements of the Black Hawk forces, he was searching the countryside for provisions and himself guiding the wagons that brought in the scant supplies. One evening he returned more cheerful than he had seemed for many days and exclaimed as he tossed aside his cap:

[Pg 278]

"This has been a good trip, for two reasons."

"What are they, dear?"

"Starvation is staved off for a while and the Indians are evidently in grave doubts of their own success in this horrid war."

"Starvation, Gaspar? Has it been as bad as that?"

"Pretty close to it. But I've found a couple of men who had about a hundred and fifty head of cattle, and they've driven them here into the stockade. As long as they last, we shall manage. The other good thing is—that the Black Hawks are sacrificing to the Evil Spirit."

"They are! That shows they are hopeless of their own success."

"Certainly very doubtful of it. It is the dog immolation. I saw one instance myself and met a man who had come from the southwest. He has passed them at intervals of a day's journey; always the same sort. The wretched little dog, fastened just above the ground, the nose pointing straight this way and the fire beneath."

"Oh, Gaspar, it's dreadful!"

[Pg 279]

"That they are discouraged? Kit, you don't mean that?"

"No. No, no! You know better. But that they are such—such heathen!"

Another voice broke in upon them:

"Heathen! Heathen, you say? Well, if ever you was right in your life, you're right now. I never saw such folks. Here I've been cookin' and cooking till I'm done clean through myself; and in there's come another lot, just as hungry as t'others. Dear me, dear me! Why in the name of common sense couldn't I have stayed back there in the woods, and not come trapesing to Chicago to turn head slave for a lot of folks that act as if I'd ought to be grateful for the chance to kill myself a-waitin' on them. And say, Gaspar Keith, have you heard the news? When did you get home?"

It was Mercy, of course, who had rushed excitedly into the house, yet had been able to rattle off a string of sentences that fairly took her hearers' breath away, if not her own.

But Kitty was at her side at once, tenderly removing the great sun-bonnet from the hot gray head and offering a fan of turkey wings, gayly decorated with Indian embroideries of beads and weavings.

"No, Kit. No, you needn't. Not while I know myself; there ain't never no more red man's tomfoolery going to be around me! Take that there Indian contraption away. I'd rather have a decent, honest cabbage-leaf any day. I'm beat out. My, ain't it hot!"

[Pg 280]

"Yes, dear, it is awfully hot. Sit here in the doorway, in this big chair, and get what little breeze there is. Here's another fan, which I made myself; plain, good Yankee manufacture. Try that. Then, when you get cooled off, tell us your 'news.'"

"Cooled off? That I sha'n't never be no more; not while I've got to cook for all creation."

"Mother Mercy, Mother Mercy! You are a puzzler. You won't let the people go anywhere else than to your house as long as there's room to squeeze another body in; and——"

"Ain't it the tavern?"

"Of course. But people who keep taverns usually take pay for entertaining their guests."

"Gaspar Keith! You say that to me, after the raisin' I gave you? The idee! When not a blessed soul of the lot has got a cent to bless himself with."

"But I have cents, plenty of them; and I want you to let me bear this expense for you. I

insist upon it."

"Well, lad, I always did think you was a little too sharp after the money. But I didn't 'low you'd begrudge folks their *blessings*, too."

"Blessings? Aren't you complaining about so much hard work, and haven't you the right? I know that no private family has cared for so many as you have, and——" [Pg 281]

"Oh, do drop that! I tell you *I* ain't a private family; I'm a tavern. Oh! I don't know what I am nor what I'm sayin'. I—I reckon I'm clean beat and tuckered out."

"So you are, dear. But rest and I'll make you a cup of tea. If you leave those people to themselves and they get hungry again they'll cook *for* themselves. They'll have to. But to a good many of these refugees this is a sort of picnic business. They have left their homes, it's true; but they haven't seen so many human faces in years and——"

"They haven't had such a good time! I noticed that. They seemed as bright as children at a frolic. Well, we ought to help them get what fun they can out of so serious a matter," commented Gaspar.

"Serious! I should say so. That's what sent me here. Abel, he was on the wharf, and he says the ships are coming down the lake full of soldiers; and what with them and the folks already here and only a hundred and fifty head to feed 'em with, and some of these refugees eat as much as any parson I ever saw, and the old Doctor trying to preach to 'em, sayin' it's the best opportunity—my land! The way some folks can get sweet out of bitter is a disgrace, I declare. And as for that Ossy, the dirty scamp, he's broke more dishes, washing them, than I've got left. And I run over to see if you'd let me have any dish you've got, or shall I give 'em their stuff right in their hands? And how long have I got to go on watchin' that wild Osceolo? I wish you'd take him back and shut him up in your wood-shed again." [Pg 282]

"But, Mother Mercy, it was you who begged his release. And I'm sure it's better for him in your kitchen, working, than lying idle in an empty building, plotting mischief. Hello, here's Abel. And he seems as excited as—as you were," said Gaspar.

"Glory to government, youngsters! The military is coming! The General's in sight! Now hooray! We'll show them pesky red-skins a thing or two. If they ain't wiped clean out of existence this time my name's Jack Robinson. Say, Kit, don't look so solemn. Likely they'll know enough to give up licked without getting shot; and they're nothin' but Indians, any how."

The Sun Maid came softly across and held up her little son to be admired. Her face was grave and her lips silent. All this talk of war and bloodshed was awful to her gentle heart, that was torn and distracted with grief for both her white and her red-faced friends.

But there was only grim satisfaction on the countenance of her young husband; and he turned to Abel, demanding: [Pg 283]

"Are you sure that this good news is true? Are the soldiers coming? Who saw them?"

"I myself, through the commandant's spy-glass. They're aboard the ships, and I could almost hear the tune of *Yankee Doodle*. They're bound to rout the enemy like chain lightning. Hooray!"

The soldiers were coming indeed; but alas! an enemy was coming with them far more deadly than the Indians they meant to conquer.

CHAPTER XXI.

[Pg 284]

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH.

"Oh, Kit; I can't bear to leave you behind! It breaks my old heart all to flinders!" lamented Abel, laboriously climbing into the great wagon which Jim and Pete were now to draw back to their old home and wherein were already seated Mercy, with Kitty's children. "If it wasn't for these babies of yours, I'd never stir stick nor stump out this afflicted town."

"Well, dear Abel, the babies *are*, and must be cared for. I know that you and Mother Mercy will spoil them with kindness; but I hope we'll soon be all together again. Good-by, good-by."

The Sun Maid's voice did not tremble nor the light in her brave face grow dim, though her heart was nearer breaking than Abel's; in that she realized far more keenly than he the peril in which she was voluntarily placing herself.

"Well, Kitty, lamb, do take care. Take the herb tea constant and keep your feet dry."

"That will be easy to do, if this heat remains," answered the other quietly, looking about her as she spoke upon the sun-parched ground and the hot, brazen sky. "And you must not worry, any of you. Gaspar says the tepees are as comfortable as the best log cabins, though so hastily put up. You will have plenty of air and the delicious shade of the trees; the blessed spring water, too; and if you don't keep well and be as happy as kittens, I—I'll be ashamed of you. I declare, Mercy dear, your face is all a-beam with the thought of the old clearing, and the bleaching ground, and all. So you needn't try to look grave, for, as soon as we can, Wahneenah and I will follow."

[Pg 285]

Then she turned to speak to Gaspar, who sat on Tempest close at hand, his handsome face pale with anxiety and divided interests, but stern and resolute to do his duty as his young wife had shown it to him. And what these two had to say to one another is not for others to hear; for it was a parting unto death, it might be, and the hearts of the twain were as one flesh.

Also, if Mercy's face was alight with the glow of her home returning, it was moved by the sight of the two women—Wahneenah and her daughter—who were taking their lives in their hands for the service of their fellow-men.

Never had the Indian woman's comeliness shown to such advantage; and her bearing was of one who neither belittled nor overrated the dignity of the self-sacrifice she was making. She wore a white cotton gown, which draped rather than fitted her tall figure, and about her dark head was bound a white kerchief that seemed a crown. With an impulse foreign to her, Mercy held out her hand; because in ordinary she "hated an Indian on sight."

[Pg 286]

"Well, Wahneeny, I'd like to shake hands for good-by. There hain't never been no love lost 'twixt you an' me, but I 'low I might have been more juster than I was. I think you're—you're as good as ary white women I ever see, savin' our Kit, of course; an'—an'—I—I wish you well."

There was a moment's hesitation on Wahneenah's part; then her slim brown hand was extended and closed upon Mercy's fat palm with a friendly pressure.

"In the light of the Unknown Beyond, the little hates and loves of earth must disappear. You have judged according to the wisdom that was in you, and if I bore you a grudge, it is forgotten. Farewell."

Then the foster-mother slipped her arm about the waist of her beloved Sun Maid and supported her firmly as the oxen moved slowly forward, the heavy wheels creaking and the three children shouting and clapping their hands in innocent glee, quite unconscious of the tragedy of the parting they had witnessed.

Abel gee-ed and haw-ed indiscriminately and confusingly, then belabored his patient beasts because they did not understand conflicting orders. Mercy sat twisted around upon the buffalo-covered seat, her arms holding each a child as in a vise and her neck in danger of dislocation, as long as her swimming eyes could catch one glimpse of the two white-robed women left on the dusty road.

[Pg 287]

"They look as pure as some them Sisters of Charity I've seen in Boston city. And they won't spare themselves no more, neither. Poor Gaspar boy! How'll he ever stand it without his Kit, and if—ah, if—she should catch—Oh, my soul! oh—my—soul! I wonder if he's takin' it terrible hard!"

But though she brought her body back to a normal poise, her morbid curiosity was doomed to disappointment, for Tempest had already borne his master out of sight at a mad pace across the prairie.

The enemy which had come with the infantry over the great water was the most terrible known,—a disease so dread and devastating that men turned pale at the mere mention of its name—the Asiatic cholera.

When it appeared, the garrison was crowded with the settlers who had fled before the anticipated attacks of the Indians and, as has been said, every roof in the community sheltered all it could cover. But when the soldiers began to die by dozens and scores the refugees were terrified. Death by the hand of the red man was possible, even probable; but death of the pestilence was certain.

[Pg 288]

The town was now emptied far more rapidly than it had filled; and early in this new disaster Gaspar had hastened to the old clearing of the Smiths and had made Osceolo, aided by a few more frightened, willing men, toil with himself to erect wigwams enough to accommodate many persons. He had then returned for his household and had been met by his wife's first resistance to his will.

"No, Gaspar, I cannot go. I have no fear. I am perfectly 'sound.' Probably no healthier woman ever lived than I am. I have learned much of nursing from Wahneenah, and my place, my duty, is here. I cannot go."

"Kit! my Kitty! Are you beside yourself? Where is your duty, if not to me and to our children?"

"Here, my husband, right here; in our beloved town, among the lonely strangers who have come to save it from destruction and have laid their lives at our feet."

"That is sheer nonsense. Your life is at stake."

"Is my life more precious than theirs?"

"Yes. Infinitely so. It is mine."

"It is God's—and humanity's—first, Gaspar."

[Pg 289]

"Your children, then; if you scorn my wishes."

"Don't make it hard for me, beloved; harder than God Himself has made it. Do you take Mother Mercy and Abel and go to the place you have prepared. The children will be as safe with her as with me; safer, for she will watch them constantly, while I believe in leaving them to grow by themselves. Between them and us you may come and go—up to a certain point; but not to the peril of your taking the disease. The Indians are no less on the war-path because the cholera has come. *Your* duty is afield, guarding, watching, preventing all the evil that a wise man can. Mine is here, using the skill I have learned from Wahneenah and faithfully at her side."

"Wahneenah? Does she wish to stay too; to nurse the pale-faces, the men who have come here to fight her own race?"

"Yes, Gaspar, she is just so noble. Can I do less? I, with my education, which the dear Doctor has given me, and my youth, my perfect health, my entire fearlessness. You forget, sweetheart; I am the Unafraid. Never more unafraid than now, never more sure that we will come out of this trouble as we have come out of every other. Why, dear, don't you remember old Katasha and her prophecy? I am to be great and rich and beneficent. I am to be the helper of many people. Well, then, since I am not great, and rich only through you, let me begin at the last end of the prophecy, and be beneficent. Wait; even now there is somebody coming toward us asking me for help."

[Pg 290]

"Kit, I can't have it. I won't. You are my wife. You shall obey me. You shall stop talking nonsense. You may as well understand. Pick together what duds you need and let's get off as soon as possible. Every hour here is fresh danger. Come. Please hurry."

But she did not hurry, not in the least. Indeed, had she followed her heart wholly, she would never have hastened one degree toward the end she had elected. But she followed it only in part; so she stole quietly up to where the man fumed and flustered and clasped her arms about his neck and laid her beautiful face against his own.

"Love: this is not our first separation, nor our longest. Many a month have you been away from me, up there in the north, getting money and more money, till I hated its very name,—only that I knew we could use it for others. In that, and in most things, I will obey you as I have. In this I must obey the voice of God. Life is better than money, and to save life or to comfort death is the price of this, our last separation."

After that he said no more; but recognizing the nobility of her effort, even though he still felt it mistaken, and with a credulous remembrance of Katasha's saying, he made her preparations and his own without delay and parted from her as has been told.

[Pg 291]

"Well, my dear Other Mother, there is one thing to comfort! Hard as it was to see them all go, we shall have no time to brood. And we shall be together. Let us get on now to our work. There were five new cases this morning; and time flies! Oh, if I were wiser and knew better what to do for such a sickness! The best we can—that's all."

"What the Great Spirit puts into our hands, that we can always lift," replied Wahneenah, and, with her arm still about her darling's waist, they walked together forward. It may be that in the Indian's jealous, if devoted, heart there was just a tinge of thankfulness for even

an evil so dire, since it gave her back her "White Papoose" quite to herself again.

"Well, I can watch her all I choose, and no burden shall fall to her share that I can spare her. The easy part—the watching and the soothing and the Bible reading—that shall be hers. Mine will be the coarsest tasks," she thought, and—as Gaspar had done—reckoned without her host.

"It is turn and turn about, Other Mother, or I will drive you out of the place," Kitty declared; and after a few useless struggles, which merely wasted the time that should have been given their patients, it was so settled; and so continued during the dreadful weeks that followed. [Pg 292]

Until just before midsummer the nurses were almost wholly at the Fort, where it seemed to Kitty that a "fresh case" and a "burial" alternated with the regularity of a pendulum; and then a little relief was gained by taking their sick across to Agency House and its ampler accommodations. But even these were meagre compared to the needs; and more and more as the days went by did the Sun Maid long for greater wisdom.

"That is one of the things Gaspar and I must do. We must have a regular hospital, such as are in Eastern cities; and there must be men and women taught to understand all sorts of diseases and how to care for them. I know so little—so little."

But experience taught more than schools could have done; and many a poor fellow who had come from a far-away home sank to his last rest with greater confidence because of the ministrations of these two devoted women. And at last, very suddenly, there appeared one among them whom both Wahneenah and her daughter recognized with a sinking heart.

"Doctor! Oh, Doctor Littlejohn! I thought you were safe at the 'Refuge' with Mercy and Abel. How came you here? and why? You must go away at once. You must, indeed. Where is the horse you rode?" [Pg 293]

"I rode no horse, my dear. If I had asked for one, I should have been prevented,—even forcibly, I fear. So I walked."

"Walked? In this heat, all that distance? Will you tell me why?"

But already, before it was spoken, the Sun Maid guessed the answer.

"Because, at length, through all the shifting talk about me, it penetrated to my study-dulled brain that there was a need more urgent than that the Indian dialects should be preserved; that I, a minister of the gospel, was letting a woman take the duty, the privilege, that was mine. I have come, daughter of my old age, to encourage the sufferers you relieve and bury the dead you cannot save."

"But—for *you*, in your feebleness——"

He held up his thin white hand that trembled as an aspen leaf.

"It is enough, my dear. Consider all is said. I heard a fresh groan just then. Somebody needs you—or me."

Wahneenah now had two to watch, and she did it jealously, at the cost of the slight rest she had heretofore allowed herself. The result of overstrain, in the midst of such infection, was inevitable. One evening she crept languidly toward the empty house which had been her darling's home and behind which still stood her own deserted lodge. She was a little wearier than usual, she thought, but that was all. To lie down on her bed of boughs and draw her own old blanket over her would make her sleep. She longed to sleep—just for a minute; to shut out from her eyes and her thoughts the scenes through which she had gone. How long ago was it since the wagon and the fair-haired babies went away? [Pg 294]

She was a little confused. She was falling asleep, though, despite the agony that tortured her. *Her?* She had always hated pain and despised it. It couldn't be Wahneenah, the Happy, crouching thus, in a cramped and becrippled attitude. It was some other woman,—some woman she had used to know.

Why, there was her warrior: her own! And the son she had lost! And now—what was this in the parting of the tent curtains? The moonlight made mortal?

No. Not a moon-born but a sun-born maiden she, who stooped till her white garments swept the earth and her beautiful, loving face was close, close. Even the glazing eyes could see how wondrously fair it was in the sight of men and spirits. Even the dulled ears could catch that agonized cry: [Pg 295]

"Wahneenah! Wahneenah! My Mother! Bravest and noblest! and yet—a savage!"

"Who called her so knew not of what he spake. From one God we all came and unto Him we must return. Blessed be His Name!" answered the clergyman who had followed.

Then the frail man, who had so little strength for himself, was given power to lift the broken-hearted Maid and carry her away into a place of safety.

CHAPTER XXII.

[Pg 296]

GROWING UP.

"Well, I'm beat! I don't know what to do with myself. Out there to the clearing I was just crazy wild to get back to town; and now I'm here I'm nigh dead with plumb lonesomeness. My, my, my! Indians licked out of their skins, about, and cleared out the whole endurin' State. Old Black Hawk marched off to the East to be shown what kind of a nation he'd bucked up against, the simpleton! And Osceolo takin' himself and his pranks, with his tribe, clear beyond the Mississippi; an' me an' ma lived through watchin' them little tackers of Kit's—oh, hum! I'd ought to take some rest; but somehow I 'low I can't seem to."

Mercy looked up from the unbleached sheet she was hemming and smiled grimly.

"Give it up, pa. Give it up. I've been a-studyin' this question, top and bottom crust and through the inside stuffin', and I sum it this way: *It's in the soil!*"

"What's in the soil? The shakes? or the homesickness when a feller's right to home? or what in the land do you mean?" [Pg 297]

"The restlessness. The something that gets inside your mind and keeps you movin'. I've noticed it in everybody ever come here. Must be doin'; can't keep still; up an' at it, till a body's clean wore an' beat out. Me, for one. Here I've no more need to hem sheets than I have to make myself a pink satin gown, which I never had nor hope to have even——"

"The idee! I should hope not, indeed. You in a pink satin gown, ma; 'twould be scandalous!"

"Didn't I say I wasn't thinkin' of gettin' one, even so be I could, in this hole in the mud? I was talkin' about Chicago. It ain't a town to brag of, seein' there ain't two hundred left in it after the ravagin' of the cholera; an' yet I don't know ary creature, man, woman, or child, ain't goin' to plannin' right away for something to be done. I've heard more talk of improvements and hospitals and schools an' colleges and land knows what more truck an' dicker—Pshaw! It takes my breath away."

"It does mine, ma."

"Well,—*that's* Chicago! You can always tell by a child when it's a baby what it's goin' to be when it's a man. Chicago's a baby now, an' a mighty puny one, too; but it's kickin' like a good feller, an' it's gettin' strong; an', first you know, folks will be pourin' in here faster 'n the Indians or cholera carried 'em off, ary one." [Pg 298]

"Them ain't your own idees; they're Gaspar's and Kit's. He's gone right to work, an' so has she; layin' out buildin' sites an' sendin' East for any poor man that's had hard luck and wants to begin all over again. Say—do you know—I—believe—that our Gaspar writes for the newspapers. *Our Gaspar, ma! Newspapers! Out East!*"

"Well, I don't know why he shouldn't. Didn't I raise him?"

"Where do I come in, Mercy?"

"Wherever you can catch on, Abel. The best place I can see for you to take hold is to start in an' build a new tavern,—a tavern big enough to swing a cat in. Then I'll have a place to keep my sheets an' it'll pay me to go and make 'em."

"How'd you know what was in my mind, Mercy?"

"Easy enough. Ain't I been makin' stirabout for you these forty years? Don't I know the size of your appetite? Can't I cal'late the size of your mind the same way? Why, Abel, I can tell by the way you brush your wisps——"

"Ma, I'll send East an' buy me a wig. I 'low when a man's few hairs can tattle his inside thoughts to the neighbors, it's time I took a stand."

"Well, I think you might 's well. I think you'd look real becomin' in a wig. I'd get it red and [Pg 299]

curly if I was you; and you'd ought to wear a bosomed shirt every day. You really had."

"Mercy Smith! Are you out your head?"

"No. But when a man's the first tavern-keeper in this risin' town he ought to dress to fit his station. I always did like you best in your dickeys."

"Shucks! I'll wear one every day."

"I'm goin' to give up homespun. Calico's a sight prettier an' we can afford it. We're real forehanded now, Abel."

"Hello! Here comes Kit. Let's ask her about the tavern. She's got more sense in her little finger than most folks have in their whole bodies. She's a different woman than she was before Wahneeny died. I shall always be glad you an' her was reconciled when you parted. Hum, hum. Poor Wahneeny! Poor old Doctor! Well, it can't be very hard to die when folks are as good as they was. Right in the line of duty, too."

"Yes, Abel; but all the same I'm satisfied to think *our* duty laid out in the woods, takin' care Kit's children, 'stead of here amongst the sickness. Wonderful, ain't it, how our girl came through?"

"She'll come through anything, Sunny Maid will; right straight through this open door into her old Father Abel's arms, eh? Well, my dear, what's the good word? How's Gaspar and the youngsters?"

[Pg 300]

"Well, of course. We are never ill; but, Mother Mercy, I heard you were feeling as if you hadn't enough to do. I came in to see about that. It's a state of things will never answer for our Chicago, where there is more to be done than people to do it. Didn't you say you had a brother out East who was a miller?"

"Yes, of course. Made money hand over fist. He's smarter 'n chain lightning, Ebenezer is, if I do say it as hadn't ought to, bein' I'm his sister."

"Well, I'd like his address. Gaspar wants him here. We must have mills. The idea of our using hand-mills and such expedients to get our flour and meal is absurd for these days."

"Pshaw, Kit! 'Tain't long since I had to ride as far as fifty miles to get my grist ground, and when I got there there'd be so many before me, I'd have to wait all night sometimes. 'First come first served' is a miller's saying, and they did feel proud of the row of wagons would be hitched alongside their places. I——"

"Come, Abel, don't reminisce. If there's one thing more tryin' to a body's patience than another, it's hearin' about these everlastin' has-beens."

Abel threw back his head and laughed till the room rang.

[Pg 301]

"Hear her, my girl! Just hear her! That's ma! That's Mercy! She's caught the fever, or whatever 'tis, that ails this town. She's got no more time to hark back. It's always get up and go ahead. What you think? She's advising me to build a new tavern. *Me!* Mercy advising it! What do you think of that?"

"That it's a capital idea. We shall need it. We shall need more than one tavern if all goes well. And it will. Now that the Indians are gone forever,"—here Kitty breathed a gentle sigh,—"the white people are no longer afraid. They have heard of our wonderful country and our wonderful location,—right in the heart of the continent, with room on every side to spread and grow eternally, indefinitely."

"Kitty, I sometimes think you an' Gaspar are a little *off* on the subject of your native town; for 'twasn't his'n; seein' what a collection of disreputable old houses an' mud holes an' sloughs of despond there's right in plain sight. But you seem to think something's bound to happen and you two'll be in the midst of it."

The Sun Maid laughed, as merrily as in the old days, and answered promptly:

"*I've* never found any sloughs of despond and something *is* bound to happen. Katasha's dreams, or prophecies, whichever they were, are to come true. There is something in the very air of our lake-bordered, wind-swept prairie that attracts and exhilarates, and binds. That's it,—*binds*. Once a dweller here by this great water, a man is bound to return to it if he lives. Those soldiers who have gone away from us, a mere handful, so to speak, will spread the story of our beautiful land and will come again—a legion. It is our dream that this little pestilence-visited hamlet will one day be one of the marvels of the world; that to it will assemble people from all the nations, to whom it will be an asylum, a home, and a treasure-house for every sort of wealth and wisdom. In my fancies I can see them coming,

[Pg 302]

crowding, hastening; as in reality I shall some day see them, and not far off. And in the name of all that is young and strong and glorious—I bid them welcome!”

She stood in the open doorway and the sunlight streamed through it, irradiating her wonderful beauty. The two old people, types of the past, regarded her transfigured countenance with feelings not unmixed with awe, and after a moment Abel spoke:

“Well, well, well! Kitty, my girl. Hum, hum! You yourself seem all them things you say. Trouble you’ve had, an’ sorrow; the sickness an’ Wahneeny; an’ growin’ up, an’ love affairs; an’ motherhood, an’ all; yet there you be, the youngest, the prettiest, the hopefulest, the courageousest creature the Lord ever made. What is it, child; what is it makes you so different from other folks?”

[Pg 303]

“Am I different, dear? Well, Mother Mercy, yonder, is looking mystified and troubled. She doesn’t half like my prophetic moods, I know. I merely came, for Gaspar, to inquire about the miller. But I like your own idea of the new tavern, and you should begin it right away. Gaspar will lend you the money if you need it; and if you have time for more sheets than these, Mercy dear, I’ll send you over some pieces of finer muslin and you might begin on a lot for our hospital.”

“Your hospital? ’Tain’t even begun nor planned.”

“Oh, yes, it is planned. From my own experience and from books I can guess what we will need. But there are doctors and nurses coming after a time—There, there, dear. I will stop. I won’t look ahead another step while I’m here. But—it’s coming—all of it!” she finished gayly, as she turned from the doorway and passed down the forlorn little street.

Was it “in the air,” as the Sun Maid protested, that indomitable courage and faith to do and dare, to plan, to begin, and to achieve? Certain it is that in five years from that morning when Kitty Keith had lingered in Mercy’s doorway foretelling the future some, at least, of her prophecies had materialized. Where then had been but two hundred citizens were now more than twenty times that number. The “crowding” had begun; and there followed years upon years of wonderful growth; wherein Gaspar’s cool head and shrewd business tact and ever-deepening purse were always to the fore, at the demand of all who needed either. In an unswerving singleness of purpose, he devoted his energy and his ambition toward making his beloved home, as far as in him lay, the leading home and mart of all the civilized world.

[Pg 304]

And the Sun Maid walked steadfastly by his side, adding to his efforts and ambitions the sympathy of her great heart and cultured, ever-broadening womanhood.

Thus passed almost a quarter-century of years so full and peaceful that nothing can be written of them save the one word—happy. Yet at the end of this long time, wherein Abel and Mercy had quietly fallen on sleep and “Kit’s little tackers” had grown up to be themselves fathers and mothers, the Sun Maid’s joy was rudely broken.

Not only hers, but many another’s; for a drumbeat echoed through the land, and the sound was as a death-knell.

Kitty looked into her husband’s face and shivered. For the first time in all his memory of her the Unafraid grew timid.

[Pg 305]

“Oh, Gaspar! War? Civil War! A family quarrel, of all quarrels the most bitter and deadly. God help us!”

CHAPTER XXIII.

[Pg 306]

HEROES.

The Sun Maid’s gaze into her husband’s face was a prolonged and questioning one. Before it was withdrawn she had found her answer.

There was still a silence between them, which she broke at last, and it touched him to see how pale she had become and yet how calm.

“You are going, Gaspar?”

“Yes, my love; I am going. Already I have pledged my word, as my arm and my purse.”

“But, my dear, do you consider? We are growing old, even we, who have never yet had time

to realize it—till now. There are younger men, plenty of them. Your counsels at home——”

“Would be empty words as compared to my example in the field. The young of heart are never old. Besides, do you remember that once, against my stubborn will, you resisted for duty’s sake? We have never regretted it, not for a day. More than that, when our first-born came to us, do you remember how we clasped his tiny hand and resolved always to lead it onward to the right? *Lead* it, sweetheart. We vowed never to say to him: ‘Go!’ to this or that high duty; but rather, still holding fast to him, say: ‘Come.’ There is such a wide, wide difference between the two.”

[Pg 307]

Then, indeed, again she trembled. The mother love shook her visibly and a secret rejoicing died a sudden death.

“‘Come,’ you say. But they are not here, in our own unhappy land. Gaspar in Europe, Winthrop in South America, and Hugh in Japan. They are better so.”

“Are they better there? You will be the first to say ‘no’ when this shock passes. A telegram will summon each as easily as we could call them from that other room—supposing that they, your sons, wait for the call. But they’ll not. I know them and trust them. They are already on the railways and steamships that will bring them fastest; and it will truly be the ‘Come with me!’ that we elected, for we shall all march together.”

So they did; and it was the Sun Maid herself, standing proudly among her daughters and daughters-in-law, yet more beautiful than any, who fastened the last glittering button over each manly breast and flicked away an imaginary mote from the spotless uniforms. Then she stood aside and let them go; two by two, “step,” “step”—as if in echo to the first sound which had greeted her own baby ear.

But as they passed out of sight, transgressing military discipline Gaspar turned; and once more the black eyes and the blue read in each other’s depths the unfathomable love that filled them. Then he was gone and the younger Gaspar’s wife lifted to her own aching bosom the form that had sunk unconscious at her feet. For the too prescient heart of the Sun Maid had pierced the future and she knew what would befall her.

[Pg 308]

Yet before the gray shadow had quite left her face she rallied and again smiled into the anxious countenances bending over her.

“Now, my dears, how foolish I was and how wasteful of precious time! There is so much to be done for them and for ourselves. Gaspar’s business must not suffer, nor Son’s (as she always called her eldest), nor his brothers’. There are new hospitals to equip and nurses to secure. Alas! there should be a Home made ready, even so soon, for the widows and orphans of our soldiers. Let us organize into a regular band of workers; just ourselves, as systematically as your father has trained us to believe is best. There are six of us, a little army of supplies and reinforcements. Though, Honoria, my daughter, shall I count upon you?”

“Surely, Mother darling, though not here. Thanks to the hospital course you let me enjoy, I can follow my father and brothers to the front. I am a trained nurse, you know, and some will need me there.”

[Pg 309]

The Sun Maid caught her breath with a little gasp. Then again she smiled.

“Of course, Honoria; if you wish it. It is only one more to give; yet you will be in little danger and your father in so much the less because of your presence. Now let us apportion the other duties and set about them.”

This was quickly done; and to the mother herself remained the assumption of all monetary affairs in her husband’s private office in their last new home; where, when they had removed to it, she had inquired:

“Why such a palace, Gaspar, for two plain, simple folk like you and me? It is big enough for a barrack, and those great empty ‘blocks’ on every side remind me of our old days in Mercy’s log cabin among the woods.”

“I like it, dear. There will be room in this big house to entertain guests of every rank and station as they should be entertained in our dear city. These empty squares about us shall keep their old trees intact, but the grounds shall be beautified by the highest landscape art, to which the full view of our grand lake will give a crowning charm. When we have done with it all we will give it to the little children for a perpetual playground. Even the proposed new enlargement of the city limits will hardly encroach upon us here.”

[Pg 310]

“But it will, Gaspar, it surely will! When I hark back, as Abel used to say, I find Katasha’s prophecies and my old dreams more than fulfilled. But the end is not yet, nor soon.”

Now that her daughters were scattered to their various points of usefulness and the Sun Maid was left alone with Hugh's one motherless child—another Kitty—the great house seemed more empty than ever; and its brave mistress resolved to people it with something more substantial and needy than memories. So she gathered about her a host to whom the cruel war had brought distress of one form or another; while out among the trees of the park she erected a great barrack, fitted with every aid to comfort and convalescence. This, like the mansion, was speedily filled, and the "Keith Rest" became a household word throughout the land.

The war which wise folk augured at its beginning, would be over in a few days dragged its weary length into the months, and though for a time there were many and cheerful letters, these ceased suddenly at the last, giving place to one brief telegram from Honoria: "Mother, my work here is ended. I am bringing home your heroes—four."

Upon the hearth-rug, Kitty the younger, lay stretched at her ease, toying with the sharp nose of her favorite collie. She had the Sun Maid's own fairness of tint and the same wonderful hair; but her eyes were dark as her grandsire Gaspar's and saw many things which they appeared not to see; for instance, that one of the numerous telegrams her busy grandmother was always receiving had been read and dropped upon the floor. Yet this was a common circumstance, and though she felt it her duty to rise and return the yellow paper to the hand which had held it, she delayed a moment, enjoying the warmth and ease. Then Bruce, the collie, sat up and whined,—dolefully, and so humanly, it seemed, that the girl also sprang up, demanding:

[Pg 311]

"Why, Bruce, old doggie, what do you hear? What makes you look so queer?"

Then her own gaze followed the collie's to her grandmother's face and her scream echoed through all the house.

"Grandmother! My darling Grandmother! Are you—are you dead—dying—what——"

She picked up the telegram and read it, and her own happy young heart faltered in its rhythm.

"Oh! awful! 'Bringing'—those precious ones who cannot come of themselves. This will kill her. I believe it will kill even me."

But it did neither. After a space the rigidity left the Sun Maid's figure and her staring eyes that had been gazing upon vacancy resumed intelligence. Rising stiffly from her seat, she put the younger Kit aside, yet very gently and tenderly, because of all her race this was the dearest. Had not the child Gaspar's eyes?

[Pg 312]

"My girl, you will know what to do. I am going to my chamber, and must be undisturbed."

Then she passed out of the cheerful library into that "mother's room," where her husband and her sons had gathered about her so often and so fondly and in which she had bestowed upon each her farewell and especial blessing. As the portiere fell behind her it seemed to her that already they came hurrying to greet her, and softly closing the door she shut herself in from all the world with them and her own grief.

For the first time in all her life the Sun Maid considered her own self before another; and for hours she remained deaf to young Kitty's pleading:

"Let me come in, Grandmother. Let me come in. I am as alone as you—it was my father, too, as well as your son!"

It was the dawn of another day before the door did open and the mourner came out. Mourner? One could hardly call her that; for, though the beautiful face was colorless and the eyes heavy with unshed tears, there was a rapt, exalted look upon it which awed the grandchild into silence. Yet for the first time she was startled by the thought:

[Pg 313]

"We have lived together as if we were only elder and younger sister, for she has had the heart of a child. But now I see—she is, indeed, my grandmother—and she is growing old."

"Let all things be done decently and in order when Gaspar and the boys come home," was all the direction the Sun Maid gave, and it was well fulfilled. Yet, because she could not bear to be far apart from them, she sat out the hours of watching in the little ante-room adjoining the great parlor where her heroes lay in state, while all Chicago gathered to do them reverence.

There was none could touch her grief, not one. It was too deep. It benumbed even herself. Perhaps in all the land, during all that dreadful time, there was no person so afflicted as she, who had lost four at a blow. But she rose from her sorrow with that buoyant faith and hopefulness which nothing could for long depress.

“There is unfinished work to do. Gaspar left it when he went away, knowing I would take it up for him if he could never do it for himself. There is no time in life for unavailing sorrow. Come, Kitty, child. Others have their dead to bury, let us go forth and comfort them.”

Obedient Kitty went, her thoughts full of wonder and admiration:

[Pg 314]

“By massacre, famine, pestilence, and the sword! How has my dear ‘Sun Maid’ been chastened, and how beautifully she has come through it all! She could not have been half so lovely as a girl, when Grandfather met and wooed her that morning on the prairie. I wonder have her trials ended? or are there more in store before she is made perfect? I cannot think of anything still which could befall her, unless I die or her beloved city come to ruin. Well, I’ll walk with her, hand in hand, and if I live, I’ll be as like her as I can.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

[Pg 315]

CONCLUSION.

“What shall we do to celebrate your birthday, my child?” asked Grandmother Kitty, early in that first week of October on whose Saturday the young girl would reach to the dignity of sixteen years. “All the conditions of your life are so different from mine at your age: seeming to make you both older and younger—if you understand what I mean—that I would like to hear your own wishes.”

“They shall be yours, Grandma dearest. You always have such happy ideas. I’d like yours best.”

“No, indeed! Not this time. I want everything to be exactly as you like this year; especially since you are now to assume the main charge of some of our charities.”

“I feel so unfitted for the responsibility you are giving me, Sun Maid. I’m afraid I shall make many blunders.”

“Doesn’t everybody? And isn’t it by seeing wherein we blunder and avoiding the pitfall a second time that we learn to walk surely and swiftly? You have been well trained to know the value of the money which God has given you so plentifully and of that loving sympathy which is better and richer than the wealth. I am not afraid for you, though it is an excellent sign that you are afraid for yourself. Now a truce to sermons. Let’s hear the birthday wish. I am getting an old lady and don’t like to be kept waiting.”

[Pg 316]

“Sunny Maid! you are not old, nor ever will be!”

“Not in my heart, darling. How can I feel so when there is so much in life to do and enjoy? I have to bring myself up short quite often and remind myself how many birthdays of my own have gone by; though it seems but yesterday that Gaspar and I were standing by the Snake-Who-Leaps and learning how to hold our bows that we might shoot skilfully, even though riding bareback and at full speed, yet——”

“I believe that you could do the very same still; and that there isn’t another old lady——”

“Let me interrupt this time. Aren’t you contradicting yourself? Were you speaking of ‘old ladies?’”

“You funny Grandma! Well, then, I don’t believe there’s another young-old person in this great city can sit a horse as you do. If you would only ride somewhere besides in our own park and just for once let people see you! How many Snowbirds have you owned in your lifetime, Grandmother?”

[Pg 317]

“One real Snowbird, with several imitations. Still, they have been pretty fair, for Gaspar selected them and he was a fine judge of horseflesh. You must remember that as long as he was with me we rode together anywhere and everywhere he wished. He was a splendid horseman.”

“He was ‘splendid’ in all things, wasn’t he, Sun Maid?” asked the girl, with a lingering tenderness upon the other’s Indian name and knowing that it still was very pleasant in the ears of her who owned it.

“He was a man. He had grown to the full stature of a man. That covers all. But let’s get back to birthday wishes. What are they?”

“They’re pretty big; all about the new ‘Girls’ Home’ where I am to work for you. I think if

the girls knew me, not as just somebody who is richer than they and wants to do them good, but as an equal, another giddy-head like themselves, it would make things ever so much easier for all of us. I would like to go through all the big stores and factories and places and find out every single girl who is sixteen and have them out to Keith House for a real delightful holiday. And because I like boys, and presume other girls do, too—Don't stiffen your neck, please, Grandmother; remember there were you and Gaspar——"

"But we were different."

[Pg 318]

"Maybe; yet these girls have brothers, and I wish I had. Never mind, though. I'd like to invite them all out here for Saturday and Sunday. On Saturday evening we'd have an old-fashioned young folks' party, with games and frolics such as were common years and years ago. Then, for Sunday, there'd be the ministers who are to stop here during that convention that's coming, and they'd be glad, I know, to speak to us young folks. It's perfect weather, and all day these young things who are shut up all the week could roam about the park, or read, or rest in the picture-gallery or library, and—eat."

The Sun Maid laughed.

"Do you really stop to think about the eating? How many do you imagine would have to be fed? And I assure you, my young dreamer, that, though it doesn't sound especially well, the feeding of her guests is one of the most important duties of every hostess. But I'll take that part off your hands. You attend to the spiritual and moral entertainment and I'll order the table part. Yet your plan calls for many sleeping accommodations. How about that?"

"I thought, Grandmother, maybe you'd let me open the 'Barrack' again. That would do for the boys, and there's surely room enough in this great house for all the girls who'd care to stay."

A shadow passed over the Sun Maid's face, but it—*passed*. In a moment she looked up brightly and answered as, a few hours later, she was to be most thankful she had done:

[Pg 319]

"Very well. After the war was over and I closed it I felt as if I could never reopen the place. Though Gaspar and my boys never saw it, somehow it seemed always theirs. I suppose because it had been built for the benefit of those who had fought and suffered with them. Now I see that this was morbid; and I am glad I have never torn the building down, as I have sometimes thought I would. You may have it for your friends and should set about airing and preparing it at once. Also, if you are to give so many invitations, you would better start upon them."

"Couldn't I just put an advertisement in the papers? That's so easy and short."

"And—rude!"

"Rude?"

"Yes. There would be no compliment in a newspaper invitation. Would you fancy one for yourself?"

"No, indeed, I should not. That rule of yours, to 'put yourself in his place,' is a pretty good one, after all, isn't it?"

"Yes. Now order the carriage and I'll go with you on your rounds and make a list as we do so of how many will need to be provided for. We shall have a busy week before us."

[Pg 320]

"But a happy one, Grandmother. Your face is shining already, even more than usual. I believe in your heart of hearts you love girls better than anything else in this world."

"Maybe. Except—boys."

"And flowers, and animals. How they will enjoy the conservatories! And it wouldn't be wrong, would it, to have out the horses between times on Sunday and let these young things, who'd never had a chance, see how glorious a feeling it is to ride a fine horse? Just around the park, you know."

"Which would be quite as far as most of them would care to ride, I fancy, for there are very few people who call their first experience on horseback a 'glorious' one."

It was a busy week indeed, but a joyful one, full of anticipation concerning the coming festivities. Never had the Sun Maid appeared younger or gayer or entered more heartily into the preparations for entertainment. A dozen times, maybe, during those mornings of shopping and ordering and superintending, did she exclaim with fervor:

"Thank God for Gaspar's money, that makes us able to give others pleasure!"

"Grandmother, even for a foreign nobleman you wouldn't do half so much!"

[Pg 321]

"Foreign? No, indeed. To all their due; and to our own young Americans, these toilers who are the glory of our nation, let every deference be paid. Did you write about the orchestra? That was to play during Saturday's supper?"

"Yes, indeed. I believe nothing is forgotten."

To the guests, who came at the appointed time, it certainly did not seem so; and almost every one was there who had been asked.

"I did not believe that there could be found so many working girls in Chicago who are just sixteen," cried the gay young hostess, standing upon the great stair and looking down across the wide parlor, crowded with bright, graceful figures.

"I did. My Chicago is a wonderful city, child. But I do not believe that in any other city in the world could be gathered another such assemblage. Typical American girls, every one. May God bless them! Their beauty, their bearing, even their attire, would compare most favorably with any company of young women who are far more richly dowered by dollars. And the boys; even with their greater shyness, how did they ever learn to be so courteous, so——"

"Oh, my Sun Maid! Answer yourself, in your own words. 'It's in the air. It's just—Chicago!'"

When the fun was at the highest, there came a belated guest who brought news that greatly disquieted the elder hostess, though none of the merrymakers about her seemed to think it a matter half as important as the next game on the list.

[Pg 322]

"A fire, broken out in the city? That is serious. The season is so dry and there are many buildings in Chicago that would burn like kindlings. However, let us hope it will soon be subdued; and there is somebody calling you, I think."

Although anything which menaced the prosperity of the town she loved so well always disturbed the Sun Maid, she put this present matter from her almost as easily as she dismissed the youth who had brought the bad tidings. The housing and entertaining of Kitty's guests was an engrossing affair; and all Sunday was occupied in these duties; but on Sunday night came a time of leisure.

It was then, while resting among her girls and discussing their early departure in the morning—which their lives of labor rendered necessary—that a second messenger arrived with a second message of disaster.

"There's another fire downtown, and it's burning like a whirlwind!"

"We have an excellent fire department," answered the hostess, with confident pride.

"It can't make much show against this blaze. I think those of us who can should get home at once."

[Pg 323]

The Sun Maid's heart sank. The coming event had cast its shadow upon her and, foreseeing evil, she replied instantly:

"Those who must go shall be conveyed at once; but I urge all who will to remain. Keith House is as safe as any place can be if this fire continues to spread. It is not probable, even at the best, that any of you will be wanted at your employers' in the morning. The excitement will not be over, even if the conflagration is."

The company divided. There were many who were anxious about home friends and hastened away in the vehicles so hastily summoned; but there were also many whose only home was a boarding-house and who were thankful for the shelter and hospitality offered. Among these last were some of the young men, and the Sun Maid summoned them to her own office and discussed with them some plans of usefulness to others.

"We shall none of us be able to sleep to-night. I have a feeling that we ought not. I wish, therefore, you would go out and engage all the teams you possibly can from this neighborhood; and go with them and their drivers to the threatened districts, as well as those already destroyed. Our great house and grounds are open to all. Bring any who wish, and assure them that they will be cared for."

[Pg 324]

"But there may be thieves among them," objected one lad, who had a keener judgment of what might occur.

"There is always evil amid the good; but not for that reason should any poor creature suffer. Remember I am able to help liberally in money, and never so thankful as now that this is so. Go and do your best."

They scattered, proud to serve her, and thrilled with the excitement of that awful hour; but many were amazed to find that after a brief time she had followed them herself.

The younger Kitty pleaded, though vainly, to prevent her grandmother's departure, for the Sun Maid answered firmly:

"You are to take my place as mistress here. I will have the old coachman drive me in the phaeton to the nearest point advisable. I must be on the spot, but I will not recklessly risk myself. Only, my dear, it is *our city*, Gaspar's and mine; almost a personal belonging, since we two watched its growth from a tiny village to the great town it has become. Gaspar would be there with his aid and counsel. I must take his place."

There were many who saw her, and will forever remember the noble woman, standing upright in the low vehicle at a point where two ways met; with the light of the burning city falling over her wonderful hair, that had long since turned snowy white, and bringing out the beauty of a face whose loveliness neither age nor sorrow could dim. [Pg 325]

The sadness in her tender eyes deepened as she could see the cruel blaze sweeping on and on, wiping out home after home and hurling to destruction the mighty structures of which she had been so personally proud.

"Oh, I have loved it, I have loved it! Its very paving-stones have been dear to me, and it is as if all these fleeing, homeless ones were my own children. Well, it is—Chicago,—a city with a mission. It cannot die. Let the fire do its worst; not all shall perish. There are things which cannot burn. Again and again and again I have thanked God for the wealth he led my Gaspar, the penniless and homeless, to gain—for His own glory. Let the flames destroy unto the limit He has set. Out of their ruins shall rise another city, fairer and lovelier than this has been; richer because of this purification and far more tender in its broad welcome to humanity."

Hour after hour she waited there, directing, comforting, assisting; giving shelter and sustenance, and, best of all, the influence of her high faith and indomitable courage. As it had done before, her clear sight gazed into the future and beheld the glory that should be; and, like every prophecy her tongue had ever uttered, this, spoken there in the very light of her desolation, as it were, has already been more than verified. [Pg 326]

This all who knew the Beautiful City as it was and now know it as it is will cheerfully attest; and some there are among these who deem it their highest privilege to go sometimes to a stately mansion, set among old trees, where in a sunshiny chamber sits an old, old lady, who yet seems perennially young. Her noble head still keeps its heavy crown of silver, her eye is yet bright, her intellect keen, and her interest in her fellow-men but deepens with the years.

Very like her is the younger Kitty, who is never far away; who has grown to be a person of influence in all her city's beneficence; and who believes that there was never another woman in all the world like her grandmother.

"Yes," she assures you earnestly, "she is the Sun Maid indeed,—a fountain of delight to all who know her. She has still the heart of a child and a child's perfect health. I confidently expect to see her round her century."

FOOTNOTE:

[1] Pacific Ocean.

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