

EDWARD BRABOURNE

UNCLE JOE'S
STORIES

Edward Brabourne

Uncle Joe's Stories

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First Baron Brabourne

Uncle Joe's Stories

PREFACE

I had almost made up my mind to write no more Fairy Tales, to let sprites and elves alone for ever, and to refrain from any further research into the dark and mysterious doings of warlocks and witches in the olden time. But fate is stronger than the will of man, and I am powerless to resist the influences brought to induce – nay, to compel – me to alter my determination. It is not only that verbal and written requests have come to me from many quarters which it is difficult to resist; it is not only that I am tired of being asked when my new book is coming out, and of being generally disbelieved when I answer "never." There is a stronger influence still. Fairies and elves have an extraordinary power which they exercise over those who have once sought to pry into their mysteries. If once you have dealings with such creatures, you can rarely, if ever, leave them. There is a fatality which urges you on – an irresistible fascination in the subject which brings you back to it again and again, and obliges you to recur to it in spite of yourself. When I walk out in the woods, or ramble through the fields alone, the objects which appear ordinary and commonplace to people who have, unhappily for themselves, neglected to study Fairy Lore, bear to me quite a different appearance. I see traces of the little beings which are not visible to the careless, still less to the unbelieving eye. I hear voices which are inaudible to the ear of the incredulous; and even without this, Fancy – free, glorious Fancy – clothes the grass, the flowers, the bushes, the trees, with a beauty of her own, and peoples every fairy haunt with a spirit company. Is it only Fancy? Ah! that is just what nobody knows. Only how could I tell so many different stories if nobody told them to me first?

That is a question I should like people to put to themselves calmly and quietly, and if they think, after full consideration, that some person or persons must have told me these curious stories, I hope they will come to the conclusion that I am only doing what is right and fair in passing them on to other people, so that the world may know as much as I do about the strange and wonderful beings to whom these stories relate.

UNCLE JOE

I do not think that I ever met so extraordinary a man as Uncle Joe in all my life. We children were all very fond of him, because he had an inexhaustible supply of stories, and those, too, of a kind which are especially popular with children. He had exciting stories of almost every sort: of thrilling adventures by land and sea, of captures by pirates, hair-breadth escapes from Red Indians; fearful conflicts with robbers; terrible struggles with wild animals; and strange encounters with sea-serpents or similarly wonderful creatures. Then he knew an immense deal about giants and dwarfs, witches and wizards, ogres and vampires, and he also possessed no little insight into all that concerned fairies and fairy-land. He could tell of the little sea fairy that rode on the crest of the wave, basking pleasantly when the sun shone down on a calm still ocean, and shrieking madly with frenzied delight when the winds lashed the waves into fury, and carried her forward on the great flakes of snow-like foam; of the fairy who looked after some particular house or family, and always appeared to warn them of danger just at the right moment, or to disclose a buried treasure, exactly in time to save them from ruin; and of the happy little woodland fairies, who are to be found in the deep glades and dark ravines of the wild forest, and about whom such innumerable legends have from time to time been written by some of those fortunate mortals who have visited and been aided by them in time of sickness or danger, and who have in gratitude chronicled their power.

Nothing delighted Uncle Joe so much as to tell one of his charming stories to us, eager listeners as we always were. He liked to get one child on each knee, and to have the others clustering round as near as possible, and then he would start off and go on just for all the world as if he was only reading from a book.

Looking back now, with the calmer judgment of riper years, I hardly know which was most wonderful, the unlimited power of invention of Uncle Joe, or the boundless credulity of us children. Because no man could by any possibility have gone through half the wonderful adventures of which he pretended to have been the hero, if he had lived to twice the ordinary age of man, and kept on searching for adventures all the time. Besides, it would have been five hundred to one against his escaping every time, as Uncle Joe always did, "by the skin o' his teeth."

Once he was tied to the stake, and just going to be scalped by the Indians, when some miraculous thing (I forget what at this moment) occurred to save him; once he was in the very coils of an enormous snake, and was yet preserved; and at another time, he was actually swallowed by a crocodile, (I am sure I don't know how he got down its throat without a disabling nip from some of those teeth which I have noticed in the mouths of stuffed crocodiles in museums,) and escaped by means of employing his penknife in a manner too disagreeable to describe. In short, there never was a man who, according to his own account, had gone through such a series of remarkable adventures as Uncle Joe, and I am therefore quite justified in pronouncing him to have been a most extraordinary man.

I have never discovered what really was Uncle Joe's profession or occupation. For anything I know, he may have been a soldier, a sailor, or a horse-marine; though, for the matter of that, I have so little conception of what may be the duties of persons engaged in the latter profession, that I should dispute the claims of nobody who averred that he had belonged to it. All I know is, that he wore a blue coat with brass buttons, had a hooked nose and a bright eye, and only possessed one arm; the other I solemnly declare I have heard him state, on different occasions, to have been shot off in battle, lost in saving life from a shipwreck, when it got jammed between two planks of the sinking ship, and bitten off by a tiger, under circumstances the details of which I do not happen to remember – it was gone, however, anyhow, was that left-arm of Uncle Joe's, and its loss must have had this great consolation, that it furnished a foundation upon which he built many a romance, pleasing to himself, and interesting to his listeners.

He had been a mighty traveller, had Uncle Joe. From Canada to the farthest extremity of South America, from Constantinople to Hong-Kong, from the Straits of Gibraltar to the Cape, all was familiar to him; whilst, as to continental Europe, there seemed to be no hole or corner which he had not explored. England was like his own house to him; that is to say, he knew every county and town in one as well as he knew every room in the other. In fact, to hear him talk on these subjects, you never would for a moment have guessed that which was the real truth, namely, that he had never been further from England than Paris, and had been so particularly ill in crossing the channel that nothing but the fear of the laughter of his friends, coupled with his total and entire ignorance of the French language, prevented his settling in France for the rest of his life, sooner than again undergo the ordeal of that terrible passage.

Happily for us children, (for this occurred before we were at the age of story-hearing, or indeed at any age at all,) he *did* face the channel once more, and never sought to tempt it again. But all this I only learned many years after, and during the whole of the early portion of my life, I (in common, I am sure, with the great majority of his acquaintance) set Uncle Joe down as a man who had seen more of the world than most living men, and knew more of the geography of foreign lands, as well as of the customs and manners of their inhabitants, than anyone whom I ordinarily met.

With all this sin, if sin it be, of exaggeration, (one wishes to use a mild word in speaking of a relative,) Uncle Joe's virtues greatly predominated over any defects which he may have possessed. He was good-natured to a fault – forgiving beyond most men – tender-hearted – a faithful friend – and full of sympathy for the woes and sorrows of others. I believe he lost a large sum of money in early life by becoming surety for some one whom he thought to be a friend, and who turned out to be an arrant scoundrel. Anyhow, he was far from rich, and was not one of those uncles who have always got a sovereign ready for a nephew going to school, or for spending at the confectioner's, if he comes to see a young relative during school-time. Still, Uncle Joe was the most popular of all our relations so far as the public opinion of the school-room was concerned, and every juvenile heart rejoiced when we were told that he was coming to spend Christmas at our home.

Upon one occasion he was expected to arrive upon the day before Christmas Eve, and we were all greatly delighted at the prospect. Fanny and Kitty, my two eldest sisters, were looking forward with much pleasure to the visits to the school-room which Uncle Joe always paid about tea-time, not only on account of the stories we were sure to hear, but because it was so very amusing to see the violent efforts which Miss Crinkles, the governess, used to make in order to avoid going into fits of laughter at some of our uncle's jokes, and the entire – though only temporary – loss of dignity which followed her inevitable failure to keep her countenance. Tom and Gerald and I (Harry is my name, and I was about twelve at the time of this story) were equally interested, and little Lucy and Mary were employed for several days beforehand in putting on their dolls' best dresses, that they might be in a fit state to receive this honoured relation.

Well, the day before Christmas Eve came – as it always comes every year, if you only look out for it – and our hearts beat high with expectation of Uncle Joe. But no Uncle Joe appeared at luncheon time (he often turned up about that time) and when tea-time had arrived, the hoped-for visit was not paid. Presently the dressing-bell rang, half-an-hour before dinner, and still no Uncle Joe. Even my father began to fidget now, and to wonder where the expected guest could be, and my mother became positively uneasy. If there was one thing rather than another about which our uncle was particular, it was the important point of being in time for dinner. The reason he always gave for this particularity was his sense of the unfairness to the cook which was occasioned by unpunctuality. No cook, he said, could contend against it, and you had no right to expect a good dinner unless you were ready to eat it at the hour for which it had been ordered.

The knowledge of this opinion on the part of Uncle Joe, and of the firmness – not to say obstinacy – with which he always maintained it – increased the uneasiness of my parents as the dinner hour grew nearer and nearer without his appearance, and when half-past seven arrived, and still no

Uncle Joe, matters were held to be so serious that messengers were despatched in several directions to make inquiries whether anything had been heard or seen of the expected visitor. It was fortunate that this step was taken, because otherwise there exists a violent probability that this story might never have been told, and we children should have had to mourn over the loss of our favourite relative.

Uncle Joe was found lying by the roadside, barely a mile from our gate, at a spot where a path ran parallel with the road, but some twelve feet above it. His head was bruised and his left-arm broken, and, when found, he was insensible. There was snow on the ground: it had frozen during the day, and, about seven o'clock, light flakes of snow had begun to fall again, so that if my poor uncle had lain where he was much longer, he would either have been covered with snow, or frozen, and could in no case have come well out of the business. His story was, that, finding that he was at the station, some five miles off, in good time, he thought he would walk over to our house and have his portmanteau sent for from thence.

Some two miles from home there stood (and still stands) a convenient public-house by the roadside, bearing the respectable sign of "The Duke's Head," a staring picture of the head and shoulders of a man, displaying the prominent nose and distinctive features of the great Duke of Wellington, swinging gaily in front of the said inn. I believe it is a very old inn, and was originally named after the great Duke of Marlborough, and if England ever has another "great" Duke, I do not doubt that *his* picture will replace the present one, and the sign will do equally well for *him*.

At this hostelry, said Uncle Joe, he had pulled up to have a glass of hot brandy-and-water to cheer him on his way, and remembered to have observed several rough-looking characters hanging about the place at the time. He journeyed on, and at the spot at which he was found had been attacked by three foot-pads, whom he declared that he had resisted stoutly, but a blow with a short stick delivered by one of them had felled him to the earth with a broken arm, while he had been rendered insensible by a similar blow upon the head. The robbers seemed to have had some object other than that of mere plunder, for although Uncle Joe declared that they had taken all his money but half-a-crown, which was found in his waistcoat-pocket, yet it was so seldom that he had much more cash about him, that no one imagined that the robbers' booty could have been great, whilst they had left his big silver watch and chain untouched, and also the large old-fashioned silver pencil-case, which he always carried about with him. This he attributed to the stubbornness of his resistance, which had made the thieves glad to get away from the neighbourhood of so desperate a fellow as quickly as possible.

They were never traced, and as the snow soon afterwards came on more heavily, their footsteps could have been scarcely seen after the space of a very short time, and no one could tell in which direction they had fled. There were some people, indeed, who winked their eyes wickedly, and laid their fore-finger waggishly against the side of their noses whenever allusion was made to the attack upon Uncle Joe. They were unkind enough to declare that our good relative's story was true enough up to the time of his stopping at the "Duke's Head," but that at that point he had quitted the limits of strict veracity. They pretended to have the authority of the landlord of that highly respectable inn for the fact, that Uncle Joe, soon after six o'clock, came in and had, not one glass, but three good "stiff" tumblers of brandy-and-water before resuming his journey. They further maintained that he had gone on merrily for a while after this, but that it had had sufficient effect upon him to have rendered it very desirable that he should have kept in the road instead of following the pathway above it. Choosing the latter, however, he had lost his equilibrium at the spot near which he was found, tumbled down the steep bank into the road, and in this manner received the injuries to head and arm which he had undoubtedly sustained. The landlord, moreover, said these unbelievers, indignantly denied that any "rough-looking characters" had been near his house upon that day, and declared that the only people there at or about the time of Uncle Joe's visit were some Christmas ringers and singers preparing for, or proceeding with, their visits to the neighbouring villages, with the view of exchanging carols and hymns for pence and half-pence wherever they found Christian people ready for such a transaction.

These reports and doubts, however, about Uncle Joe's misfortune never reached us children at the time, and, if they had, we should not for a moment have attached the smallest weight to them. In our eyes the matter was one which placed our esteemed relative still higher in the rank of heroes to which our childish thoughts had long since raised him. Nor were we frightened at the idea of foot-pads or highwaymen having suddenly made their unwonted appearance in our happy and tranquil neighbourhood. It seemed to us only natural that curious and unusual things should attend Uncle Joe wherever he went, and it was with him and his life, and not with our home and its surroundings, that we connected the circumstance of this new feature in the locality.

However, the truth or falsehood of the story mattered little to us, so long as we had got our uncle safe and sound after all. There he was, and there he continued for several weeks; for a broken head and arm required attention, and he was nowhere so likely to receive it as at our house. During this long visit we saw more of Uncle Joe than we had ever done before, and it soon became an established practice that, after our tea and before dressing-time, he should narrate to us some of those wonderful stories of which I have spoken.

One of these I will relate, as nearly as possible in the words of my revered uncle, in order that my readers may be able to imagine the kind of way in which all his stories were told. But the other tales which I propose to chronicle I will tell after a different fashion, relating the substance of Uncle Joe's narrative, but leaving out the personal allusions to his own prowess with which it was embellished. Those who read have only to imagine that in the chief personage in every story they discern Uncle Joe, and they will easily discover the little alterations which I have thought it well to make in order to vary the form of each tale. The one which I am now going to tell was a favourite one with us boys, but the girls did not like so much killing, and rather thought Uncle Joe must have been a more cruel man in the days when these adventures happened to him than at the time he recounted them. Since then I have read a great many books from the pen of Cooper, Captain Mayne Reid, and Gustave Aimard, all dealing with the doings of Red Indians, their subtlety, their treachery, their implacable revenge, and other pleasing characteristics, and I have often thought that Uncle Joe must have intended a parody upon some of their most stirring recitals of Indian adventure in the following story. But, most certainly, he told it as having happened to himself, and threw so much vehemence into his manner of telling it, that we children never for a moment doubted that such was the case.

I remember quite well the day he first told it to us; and how intensely interested in it we all were. He began it at tea-time: I think he liked to tell his most extraordinary and unlikely stories at tea-time for the benefit of Miss Crinkles, and I sometimes wonder that the questions she occasionally asked him did not create a suspicion in our minds that there was some doubt as to the truth of some of his facts. But no such suspicion, as far as I can recollect, ever dawned upon our childish imaginations, and the only result of Miss Crinkles' questions was to imbue us with increased awe and respect for our uncle, whom even our governess could not readily understand without asking for further information. It was, I say, at tea-time that this story was begun, and, I think, finished. One of us boys had expressed a great desire to hear of some Indian adventures, and Uncle Joe, ever ready to oblige, at once commenced the following narrative, perhaps one of the least likely of the many marvellous tales with which he ever favoured us.

"It was during the time which I passed in America that some of the strangest and wildest adventures of my life happened. Perhaps none of these was more remarkable than that which I am about to relate to you, and indeed I question whether many people exist who have ever encountered an adventure so extraordinary. I had roamed some way through the dense forest, far from any human habitation, accompanied only by my faithful dog "Jumbo," a magnificent Cuban bloodhound, who never left my side, and was the cleverest as well as the bravest animal I ever possessed. I had with me my trusty double-barrelled rifle, a revolver, and a hunting-knife, and had for many days depended for my supply of food upon my skill as a marksman. I remember that it was a lovely day, and as the dense foliage of the woods protected me from the heat of the sun, I rambled on and on in pleasant

and listless security for many a mile. At length it happened that I approached a large tree, standing rather apart from its forest companions, and conspicuous not only by the size of its trunk, but by the magnificent limbs which it threw out on every side. I was already within a few yards of this tree when I observed something which caused me to stand still and gaze upon it before I advanced further. One large branch hung across my line of march, and in a few seconds I should have passed immediately beneath it; but it was something in connection with this very branch which arrested my footsteps. The day was perfectly calm and still; not a breath of wind was to be perceived, and yet I fancied that I saw the leaves with which this branch was thickly covered, tremble and rustle just as if a breeze was blowing through them. As I stood wondering what could be the cause of this strange occurrence, and doubtful whether or not to proceed, my doubts were cleared away in a manner more alarming than agreeable. Suddenly I perceived, rearing itself among the leaves, the hideous head of a gigantic snake. In another instant, whether to re-arrange its position or for what other reason I know not, the reptile dropped down from the branch to the length of some three or four feet, and swing for a moment or two like the pendulum of a clock, from the branch around which its tail and part of its body remained curled. I could not tell how long or large it might be, but I saw quite sufficient to assure me that it was a snake of very great size, and I shuddered to think of my possible fate had I passed beneath the branch in ignorance of its terrible tenant.

"I hastily retraced my steps for a few yards, and passing the tree at some little distance, determined to quit the neighbourhood of so dangerous a creature. The tree upon which it had taken up its position was upon the side of a somewhat steep hill, and it so happened that I had walked some way along the said hill very much lower down, and was now working my way back in a line parallel to my previous passage.

"I had not gone many yards beyond the snake's tree, before the manner of my dog attracted my attention. He threw up his head, sniffed the air uneasily, and then gave vent to a low whine which, from previous experience, I knew full well to betoken the presence of danger. At the same moment, listening with eager attention, and with an acuteness of hearing which those only possess who live such a life of wild, dangerous activity as mine was at that time, I fancied that I heard the cracking of a stick under the foot of man. It seemed to be at some distance off, and apparently far below where I was standing. The trees were too thick to enable me to see far, but creeping forward a little, and standing on the trunk of a fallen tree, I endeavoured to look down the hill as much as the fall of the ground permitted. It so happened that there was a space of ground somewhat less thickly surrounded by trees than the rest of the forest, over which I had passed in my previous journey, and it was upon this space that I looked, being many feet above it. You may imagine my feelings when I caught sight of an Indian, fully armed and decked in his war-paint, just crossing this space, and evidently examining the ground before him with the greatest care. I should have thought but little of this, indeed, but for that which followed. He crossed the space, and immediately after him came nine of his companions, horrible-looking creatures, travelling in single file and closely following in their leader's footsteps. Horror of horrors! they were upon my track. I knew it but too well! there was I, alone in the wild forest, with no less than ten deadly foes after me, whose object undoubtedly was to take my life, and not improbably with some of those tortures with which Indians delight to amuse themselves at the expense of their captives.

"Now I happened to have a decided preference for living, if I could, and, if I *must* die, for dying in a respectable manner. The idea of having my scalp torn from my head, and hung up in the wigwam of a wild savage, was extremely repugnant to me, and I determined at once to avoid such an unpleasant catastrophe if I possibly could. The question was, however, as to the best way in which this could be accomplished. If I pushed on through the forest, it could not be long before these enemies, hardy and used to the woods, and animated with their savage desire for my life, would overtake me, when, perhaps, I might be too fatigued to offer any real resistance. If I stood firm where I was, what could I hope to do against ten men? If, on the other hand, I assumed a friendly air and advanced to meet

them, I knew their treacherous nature too well to harbour for an instant the thought that they would treat me otherwise than as a captive taken in war. Indeed, should it be otherwise, my best fate would probably be to be obliged to join their tribe, very likely to marry several very unpleasant squaws, and to drag out my weary existence far away from scenes into which christianity or civilisation had penetrated. My aim, then, must be to escape from the clutches of these savages by some method or another, and I was indeed puzzled what to do. I had not much time to deliberate, and after a moment's thought, I decided to lie down flat behind the trunk of the tree on which I had been standing, and calmly await the event. I looked carefully to my rifle and revolver, both of which I ascertained to be loaded and ready for action, I bid my brave Jumbo lie down at my feet, which the intelligent animal immediately did, crouching quite close to the fallen tree, and then, having so disposed my body that I could see under one of the branches of the tree, and watch the approach of my enemies, I remained still and hoped for the best. It seemed to me hours before they came near. In reality it could not have been much more than half an hour, for the spot at which I had seen them could have been barely three miles, even by the zig-zag line which I had followed, and as I, having had no suspicion of the presence of a foe, had taken no precaution to conceal my track, they were not delayed in their pursuit by any trouble in discovering my footsteps. On they came, steadily and silently, and I saw them from my hiding-place rapidly approaching me. The foremost Indian had already arrived at the spot from which I had gazed at the overhanging branch and its fearful occupant, and stopped for an instant at the place where my footsteps ended, evidently puzzled as to what I had done, and where I had gone from that point.

"Not long, however, did he hesitate, but, casting a glance right and left, moved rapidly forward towards the tree, to discover whether any traces were to be found in that direction. Three or four of his rapid, noiseless strides brought him beneath the fatal branch: enemy as he was, I longed to warn him, despite the danger to myself, but it was more than I dared venture to do, and in another instant it was too late. With sudden and awful rapidity the snake darted downwards from the branch and struck the unfortunate wretch – a piercing yell rang through the woods, but the victim cried in vain. Encircled by the coils of the mighty reptile, his doom was sealed beyond hope, and I turned my head from the horrible sight of the last struggles of my miserable foe. His companions rushed hastily back as they saw their leader's fate, and I earnestly hoped that this misfortune would have induced them to desist from their pursuit. It was not so, however, but after the lapse of a few moments only, I saw them making casts like hounds directed by a huntsman, and presently they discovered the place where I had turned aside, and came eagerly forward on my track. There was no time to be lost: they were little more than twenty yards from my tree, and I had a full view of them. Nine more savage-looking rascals you never saw. Their war-paint made them appear even more ugly than nature had made them, although that was somewhat difficult. Only three of them carried rifles, the rest being armed, as far as I could see, only with tomahawks and hunting-knives. They were evidently "braves," or warriors, all of them, and by their appearance and the expression upon their faces, I felt very sure that they were in that excited state that my chance of mercy would be but small if I should be so unfortunate as to fall into their hands. I determined, therefore, to act with vigour and decision, and, if the worst came to the worst, to sell my life dearly at all events. When, therefore, my enemies were barely fifteen yards from me, I suddenly sprang to my feet, uttering at the same time the loudest and most outlandish howl I could command, by way of a war-cry, which Jumbo echoed by a bark more like the roar of a lion than the sound made by an ordinary dog. As I had expected, this sudden movement on my part took the Indians entirely by surprise, and caused them to come to a halt on the instant. Whilst they were thus stationary I fired both barrels of my rifle as quickly as possible, selecting as their object two of those who had firearms in their hands. The foremost man threw up his arms and dropped like a log, whilst the bullet of the second barrel, fired somewhat hastily, only struck an Indian in the shoulder. Scarcely waiting, however, to see the result, I had no sooner fired than I bounded down the hill, reloading as fast as I could, and closely followed by the faithful Jumbo.

The Indians, disconcerted by the suddenness of my appearance and attack, stood still for a moment without any effort to pursue me. Not long, however, was this the case, for a wild yell of anger and revenge rang through the air, and I knew that my relentless foes were again upon my track. I did not run far, for being expert at loading, my rifle was soon ready, and I well knew that all depended upon my speedy and effective use of the trusty weapon. Not fifty yards from the spot whence I had fired my first shot, I reached an open space, across which I bounded like a deer, and placed myself behind a large tree upon the further side. A few seconds after, and the enemy rushed into the space, and at a glance I perceived that there were only seven. My shots, then, had both told! Inspired by this good fortune, I felt my nerves grow steadier on the instant, and as the foremost savage bounded towards me, I fired upon him with deadly effect. He fell; and his six comrades immediately sought shelter in the bushes, but not before the shot from my second barrel reduced their number to five. Without an instant's delay, I darted down the hill again, at the base of which flowed a stream which I desired to reach, hoping to find some place on the opposite bank where I might make a stand. But my pursuers, grown wise by experience, no longer followed me together, but, spreading out right and left ran silently yet swiftly towards me. Full well did I know that they would do so, and that I must use every stratagem within my power if I desired to escape with my life.

"Accordingly, after I had gone a short distance, I seized the branch of a tree, and swung myself up as quietly and quickly as I could, motioning to Jumbo with my hand to continue his course, which the clever animal did for some little way, and then stopped. It fell out as I had hoped. Presently a light footstep came nearer and nearer to the tree upon which I sat, and an Indian, creeping softly forward, stole actually within three yards of the spot. He passed me and went silently forward for a few steps, when again the report of my rifle rang through the woods, and I had but four foemen to contend with. But I knew only too well the risk I had run in order thus to diminish their number. *I was no longer certain that all my enemies were behind me.* All I *did* know was, that four active, unwounded, ferocious men were somewhere near at hand, thirsting for my blood, and that I had but my rifle and my trusty hound to depend on to save me from their clutches.

"I remained perfectly still, not venturing even to reload my rifle, and listened with an eagerness which became agony. Not a sound could I hear of any sort or description. The Indians had evidently become alive to their danger, and were employing all the cunning of their race in order to avoid their own destruction and compass mine. Jumbo also was certainly aware that he had a part to play, and was in all probability lying still until I should summon him to my side. The suspense was awful, and all the more so as I knew perfectly well that a false move – or perhaps any move at all – might be fatal to my hopes of escape.

"How long this state of things endured I can hardly tell you, for my nerves were strung to that tension that I could take no account of time. It might have been, for aught I knew, five minutes or five hours, but probably the former is more nearly correct. As soon as I had shot the last Indian, I had drawn myself back to the thickest part of the branch on which I sat, and believed that I was invisible to the eyes of anyone below. I soon discovered my mistake, however, and that in a manner which very nearly put an end to me and my adventure together. As I waited anxiously for the next scene in this exciting drama, I suddenly felt my hunting cap struck from my head, whilst the sound of a rifle-shot rang unpleasantly near to my ears: a bullet had passed through my cap within an inch of my head!

"One of the Indians had certainly caught sight of me, and, aiming from some hiding-place hard by, had fired the shot which had so nearly proved fatal.

"Of course it would have been sheer madness to remain where I was for one moment longer, for another shot might, and probably would, prove more successful. Quick as lightning the thought flashed through my brain, that my only chance was to deceive my enemy into the belief that he had accomplished his purpose. Accordingly, in an instant I dropped heavily to the ground. Fortunately I had no great distance to fall, and as I did so, I kept my rifle clasped closely to my breast. It happened as I had anticipated, and even better than I had ventured to hope, for the next moment all four of my

foes came rushing through the wood from different points, the man who had fired brandishing his rifle over his head as he approached. He was within three or four yards of me when I sprang suddenly to my feet, and fired directly into his breast, with the natural result of checking his career for ever. No sooner had I fired than I rushed again down the hill at full speed, calling to my hound as I ran.

"The three remaining Indians did not stop with their slain friend for an instant, but, incensed beyond measure at his death and the success of my stratagem, followed me at best speed, much too closely to be pleasant. I determined, however, to reach and cross the stream if possible, and made every effort to do so. There was a small space nearly clear of trees and bushes between the edge of the wood and the stream, beyond which the wood again stretched away far and wide. I reached this space, and was within a couple of yards of the stream when my foes were upon me. Fearing that they might take me at disadvantage, I turned and suddenly confronted them – three horrid looking ruffians they were – their eyes gleaming with fury, and their appearance altogether enough to frighten any civilised person out of his wits.

"When I turned they were four or five yards from me – most fortunately none of them had firearms, not having stayed their pursuit to pick up the rifles of their deceased companions – each of them, however, had his tomahawk, and each hurled it at my head as I turned to face them. Dropping suddenly on one knee, I was fortunate enough to escape these weapons, which all whizzed harmlessly over my head: the three men were, however, close at hand, and I had no time to escape them. At this moment, however, I recollected an old trick of which I had read somewhere or other, and which I instantly resolved to put in practice. Rising from my knee, I rushed to meet one of the Indians, and as he furiously came upon me, I suddenly stooped quite low, evaded the blow which he struck over me, and seizing him by both ankles, lifted him by sheer muscular strength over myself, so that he fell with great violence upon his head several yards behind me, carried forward by the force of his own weight and impetus. The other two were so confused at this occurrence, that they lost the single moment in which they might have struck me a deadly blow without the possibility of my warding it off. The next moment Jumbo sprang upon one of them, whilst I confronted the other.

"My first object was to seize the wrist of the hand which held his hunting knife. I had no time to draw my own, and my only hope was to deprive my enemy of his weapon. In an instant we closed and grappled furiously. I kept firm hold of his wrist, however, well knowing that this was my safety. After a short struggle we rolled on the ground together, and the Indian's hand coming in contact with something hard, he dropped the fatal knife. We were now upon more equal terms, but still there were many chances against me. My foe was a tall, brawny, muscular man, a hardy son of the woods, and, like myself, now fighting for his life. Never shall I forget that moment. In the midst of that terrible struggle, when I was putting forth all my strength and concentrating every effort in order to gain the mastery, the pleasant meadows of dear old England came up in a vision, as it were, before my eyes, and familiar home scenes flashed like lightning across my sight. I redoubled my efforts, but the savage had succeeded in grasping my throat with one of his hands, and it was with the greatest difficulty I could draw my breath. My eyes seemed to grow dull and heavy, there was the roar of ten thousand surges in my ears, my temples throbbed as if they would burst, and I felt creeping over me a terrible sensation of despair, which I shall never forget whilst I have power to remember anything.

"All at once there came upon my hearing the sound as of a short, sharp roar of fury – the Indian's grasp was loosened – my sight came back to me, again I heard, I recovered consciousness just sufficiently to see my faithful Jumbo with his mighty teeth fixed in the throat of my dying enemy, and then I sank back in a dead faint.

"How long I remained in this state it is impossible for me to say. I was awakened by a soft, cooling sensation on my forehead, and opening my eyes, regained sufficient consciousness to be aware that an Indian maiden was bathing my feverish brow with cold water from the neighbouring stream, whilst my dog, usually so ferocious, was couched near, regarding her with friendly eyes, and evidently

quite aware that she was performing a kindly office, and was not to be interrupted. I strove to speak; but my benefactress forbade me with an expressive gesture, placing her finger lightly upon my lips.

"'White broder no speak,' she said, in the low guttural accents of her race; 'no open him lips. Silence berry good. Talkee hurt.'

"I was too confused and, I hope, too grateful to disobey, and remained perfectly quiet whilst the maiden continued her interesting occupation for several minutes, during which time I had an opportunity of attentively observing her. She was certainly one of the loveliest – nay, *the* loveliest of Indian maidens. Although she had not quite as many clothes on as an European damsel would consider necessary, their absence only served to disclose the perfect symmetry of her form, the graceful rounding of her limbs, and the natural dignity of her every movement. Her eyes, large and soft as those of the gazelle, were fringed with the most magnificent eye-lashes you can imagine, and when she cast them down, she presented an ideal of female modesty and refinement, which could not be surpassed by the most fashionable young lady that ever graced a London drawing-room. When she smiled, her face lighted up like that of a lovely child when, just awakened, it sees the loving face of its mother bending over it, and, in a word, purity, innocence, and natural beauty seemed all concentrated in the form, features, and expression of this child of the woods. Such at least was the thought which occupied my breast as I lay still and gazed upon the gentle being who was ministering to my wants in so agreeable a manner, and I think I could have stayed in the same position some time longer without any great desire to move. But, after a little while, the maiden ceased to bathe my brow, and addressing me in the same tones as before, said, 'White broder sit up now. Him better. Him no die dis time.' I mechanically obeyed, sat up, and felt much better already. In fact, there was no reason why I should not be so, for, save and except the exertion and excitement which I had undergone, and the near approach to strangulation from which Jumbo had providentially saved me, I had really received no bodily injury. It really seems a strange thing to look back upon, but here had been ten men against one poor wayfarer, and yet the ten had perished, and he was left alive. I did not think, however, of looking back at that moment; my thoughts were fixed upon my new friend: who or what was she, – where did she come from, – could she possibly be one of the tribe who had been upon my trail? If so, why did she not kill and scalp me whilst I lay senseless on the ground? Horrible thought! my head seemed to feel the knife, and I could fancy the awful wrench with which one's scalp would go; but I had no need for such thoughts. My scalp was safe and sound, and the maiden evidently could not belong to my enemies. The only way to find out the truth about her was to ask, so, adopting my style to her own, I began without loss of time.

"'My sister very good; – kind to poor white broder. Where my sister come from? How she happen to be in woods? Is she far from her home? And what my sister's name?'

"The girl laughed, and looked down upon the ground as she replied at once:

"'White broder ask many questions. Pale-face always much talkee. Moon-eye not tell eberything. No good too much talkee.'

"I doubted what to say next. I had gained one piece of information certainly, since the damsel evidently referred to herself as 'Moon-eye,' which was undoubtedly an appropriate name for her, and had been given by someone who was no bad judge of eyes in general, and hers in particular. But I wanted to know a great deal more, whilst at the same time I was anxious not to appear rude or inquisitive. So I remained silent for a little while, when presently she rose to her feet and addressed me in the following words:

"'Pale-face broder come now. "Moon-eye" show way.'

"I obeyed without hesitation, and prepared to go wherever she led, for in fact I had no alternative. It was very unlikely that the girl was alone in the forest, and if not, the eyes and ears of her friends might even at this moment be within sight and hearing, in which case my policy, as well as my inclination, would be to appear to be upon the best possible terms with her, and to approach them in her company and under her guidance. I felt somewhat weak when I attempted to walk, but as it was

only weakness, I knew it would soon pass away, and so said nothing, but quietly followed my guide. She walked down to the little stream before mentioned, then turned along its bank and proceeded for several hundred yards until she came to a place where the water was so shallow as to enable us easily to wade over, which we did, and plunged into the woods on the other side. By this time, I thought I might as well try to get a little more conversation out of my friend, and therefore accosted her with some ordinary question, but she immediately turned round and, placing her finger on her lips, said, in a voice so low as to be little more than a whisper:

"No talkie – enemy in woods. Moon-eye prisoner once. No want catchee again.'

"For the first time the truth now dawned upon me, and I understood the reason of the exceeding kindness bestowed upon me by the Indian damsel, which I had previously attributed either to her own natural humanity, or to admiration for my noble and prepossessing appearance. But, as I afterwards discovered, 'Moon-eye' had been carried off from her tribe by a party of thieving Indians, who, in order to elude pursuit, had divided in their journey, ten of them being entrusted with the captive maiden. While passing through this part of the woods, they had struck my trail, and, seeing it to be recent, had left the prisoner bound, and hastily followed, intending to finish me off before they continued their journey. Fortunately for me it had turned out otherwise, but it might not have been fortunate for 'Moon-eye' had she not succeeded in freeing herself from the bonds in which she had been left. They must have been less carefully tied than most Indian fastenings that I have seen; but I fancy the girl had rather deceived her captors by pretending to go with them more willingly than was really the case, and perchance a desire to avoid injuring her in any way had induced the Indians to fasten her less tightly and securely than they might otherwise have done. Anyhow, she contrived to get loose, and also to find her way to the spot where I lay senseless, and where, as we have seen, she treated me with a care and tenderness which I little expected to encounter in the depth of the forest.

"Being admonished to silence I said no more, and we tramped on in silence, followed by the brave Jumbo. We had gone thus above a mile, when we heard a yell which proceeded from the direction of the place we had quitted. My companion stopped short, and turning to me, said, in a low voice:

"More bad Indian. Him hear shot. Him come back and find him broder shot. Him follow soon now. If catchee Moon-eye and pale-face broder, him killee for sartain.'

"This being very much my own opinion, I asked the girl how far off her friends were, and as she now saw that something more than mere curiosity dictated the question, she replied at once:

"Two – tree – twenty mile. Bad Indian catchee before get to camp.'

"On further inquiry I found that she thought there must have been full fifty of the robbers who had attacked the camp of her people when most of the warriors were absent – that they had captured several other prisoners besides herself – that they had divided into three parties, doubtless for the sake of greater safety in their flight, and that one of these parties had sundry horses laden with plunder, whilst the other party had the remaining captives. In all probability the shots fired during my combat with the ten Indians, who had been in charge of her, had been heard by one or both of these parties, and the cries we now heard proceeded from them. They would certainly follow upon our trail, and our chances of escape depended as much upon the numbers of our pursuers as upon any skill or strength of ours. For if thirty or forty warriors were behind us, not only would resistance be vain, but we should probably be surrounded before we had travelled far, whereas if only a few of the savages had returned, and made the discovery of the death of their friends, there was greater hope that we might elude them. Our only chance was to push on, and, having more than a mile start, we must make the best of it. Accordingly, 'Moon-eye' advanced rapidly and cautiously, and I followed her, through the forest, and we must have gone quite another mile before we exchanged a word. By this time we had arrived at a sort of hill, upon which the trees grew less thickly than at other parts of the forest. At the foot of this hill the ground broke away to the right, the trees became still more scanty, and a wide chasm yawned at the distance of some twenty yards from where we stood, the descent into

which was down a precipice many feet in height, whilst on the other side of the chasm the forest rose again, and grew on in unbroken continuity. To the left the trees were somewhat thicker, and some forty or fifty yards before us, as we bore to that side in ascending the hill, we perceived a building of some sort, towards which my companion directed her way. Making me a sign to remain where I was for a moment, she crept forward to reconnoitre, and presently returning, motioned me to follow her, whilst she made her way directly to the right, in the direction of the precipice, to the very edge of which she advanced. Thence we looked down into a frightful abyss, down which, if one had tumbled, one would have had no chance of escape. Bits of jagged rock projected here and there; vegetation seemed suspended for some distance down, and then the eye rested upon thick and tangled bushes jutting out from the sides of the rock, and completely concealing the bottom of the chasm, if, indeed, it had any bottom at all, for it might be endless as far as one could see from the top. Leaning carefully forward, my companion tore a branch or two from the bushes growing near the edge of the precipice, and gave the place the appearance of having been disturbed by the passage of some heavy body. She then took from my neck a handkerchief, which I had on by way of a neck-cloth, and which I did not in the least want to part with, but, of course, gave it up readily at her request; then she calmly dropped it over the side of the precipice, so that it hung upon one of the few bushes which grew a little way down the chasm. She then turned to me and said, in a low voice:

"'Bad Indian tink him fall down cliff – no follow any more;' and with these words noiselessly retraced her way, treading so carefully in her former footsteps as to make it appear as if there was only one trail, and that pointing *towards* the precipice.

"When we had arrived at the spot from which she had previously gone to reconnoitre, we slowly ascended by the same way she had travelled before, carefully covering up and hiding all trace of our footsteps until we had reached the building to which I have already alluded.

"It was apparently composed entirely of logs, and seemed as if it had been built for the lodge, or more likely a place of refuge, for some hunting party. The logs were roughly hewn, but skilfully laid together, forming a strong building, with only one entrance, and that by means of a door which had long since been broken down and destroyed. There were, however, two stories to the building, and as soon as we had entered the doorway, we found ourselves in a large room, some ten feet high at least, with a strong flooring of logs overhead. 'Moon-eye' rapidly made her way to one corner of this place, where stood some rude wooden steps, above which was an opening in the flooring above. These she ascended, motioning me to follow, and we presently crept through the opening into the upper room. This was lighted by two windows, one at each side, and had a stout roof overhead. There was no furniture whatever in it, but only a number of dried leaves, which seemed to have blown in at the windows from time to time, since the place had been deserted. 'Moon-eye' trod gently across the floor towards one of those windows, and on following her I found that it commanded a view in the direction from which we had come, but a view limited of course by the trees which grew within a short distance of the building. Turning to me, the girl now whispered in her own guttural accents:

"'Bad Indian no come here, 'fraid of wicked spirit – kill much hunter here one day – times ago.'

"I gathered from this remark that the place in which we were, had been the scene of some cruel massacre by the Indians in days past, and that the savages probably avoided it from superstitious fear. This gave me a double pleasure, for whilst it increased my hopes of safety for the maiden as well as for myself, it showed me, that she was one of those Indians whom superior intelligence, and perhaps a better education than is common among the females of her race, had raised above their common prejudices. Her plan was easily to be perceived. Could the pursuers be led to believe that we had fallen down the precipice, perhaps having turned aside from our path with a natural desire to avoid the haunted building, they would perhaps abandon further pursuit, and continue their journey. The place in which we now were, might have been easily defended by a few men against a much larger number of enemies; and, as I had my rifle with me, I might have made a stand even where I was, but it was absolutely necessary to leave the door and the aperture into the upper room open, inasmuch as

the sight of any defence, however slight, would at once disclose our hiding-place to those who sought us. Nor, indeed, was there much time for consideration as to the best plan to adopt. In going to and returning from the edge of the precipice, and subsequently in concealing our trail, we had occupied some little time; and scarcely had we reached the upper story, than a yell arose from the forest which betokened the immediate advance of the foe. There was but a moment for reflection; through the chinks of the logs near one of the windows, we could see without being seen, and here we took our station, watching and waiting in breathless suspense. We had not long to wait. For some little time all was silence, and the forest looked so peaceful and lovely, that it was difficult to believe it full of savage enemies thirsting for our blood.

"Meanwhile, I have forgotten to tell you of that which was at one moment our great difficulty, namely, my old friend Jumbo. Invaluable as he was in a fight, when the question became one of concealing a trail, he was very much the reverse. His trail was easy enough to discover, and we were rather puzzled what to do about it. The dog, however, was so intelligent that I felt sure he would understand the necessity of our separation for a time. So when we turned from our first track in order to approach the building, I pointed into the woods in the contrary direction, and bade him in the most impressive manner to go and wait for me there. The clever animal looked at me for a moment as if to fully take in what I had said, and then quietly turned round and entered the forest in obedience to my command. We were, therefore, unincumbered by his presence whilst we awaited the coming of our enemies in breathless anxiety in the upper story of the building.

"The savages were doubtless following up our trail all this time, silently, slowly, but surely. The yells we had heard at first, were of course caused by their discovery of the bodies of their friends: why there had been a second yell, I have never discovered to this day, unless it was that they had lost our trail for a moment, and that it had been found again by some young warrior who had not sufficient experience or self-restraint to prevent his announcing the welcome fact by a shout. However this may be, they yelled no more, and after we had waited for some ten minutes or less, the party arrived at the spot whence we had ascended the hill, that is to say, within some fifty yards of the place where we lay.

"As I have already said, the trees were thinner here than elsewhere, and we could from this cause see sufficiently well to discern objects moving about at that distance.

"It was late in the afternoon now, but the light was still good, and 'Moon-eye' looked with keen and anxious eyes through the chinks of the logs in the direction of the savages. Though we could not count them, we soon saw that there were certainly more than twenty of the rascals.

"The truth was, that *both* the other two parties had heard the firing which occurred during my fight with the ten who had attacked me, but neither party liked to retrace their steps with their captives, and each had therefore again divided, and sent back a portion of their number to follow up the matter. These two divisions had met, and their meeting and explanations had probably caused just that delay which had enabled us to take shelter in our present place of refuge.

"All was silence for a few moments longer, whilst we saw the dusky forms of the savages flitting, like evil spirits, through the trees at the foot of the hill, and moving in the direction in which we had gone. Then presently came a tremendous yell of mingled surprise and disappointment. They had evidently arrived at the spot where we wished them to believe we had fallen over the precipice. There was no more silence now, but on the contrary a Babel of tongues arose, and the savages chattered one to another like a number of old women over their washing-tubs, if I may make such an irreverent comparison.

"My companion turned her head to me and smiled pleasantly, whilst her eyes laughed with joy:

"'Sioux fool,' she whispered (from which remark I first learned the tribe to which our foes belonged). 'Pawnee girl cheat him well. No cheat Pawnee warrior so!'

"I said nothing, for I did not like the silence that suddenly ensued. Whether some wiser chief had spoken, or what was the reason, I knew not, but the clamour and confusion ceased all at once, and the Indians began to return from the edge of the precipice, and spread themselves around the

foot of the hill as if in search of some new trail, or to make sure that they had made no mistake. Still we lay quite quiet, convinced that this was our best chance of safety, and hoping that the superstitious fears of the savages would keep them from entering our hiding-place.

"As they took no particular pains to conceal their movements, we could plainly hear the leaves rustle, and the dried sticks crash as they tramped through the surrounding woods; but for some time no one approached the building. Then, all of a sudden, we heard a footstep close below us. How we wished that it was a couple of hours later, when we might have hidden more securely in one of the dark corners of the room. This, however, was impossible, and we could only lie still where we were, still trusting that even if an Indian were found bold enough to enter the place in which we were, he would be content with inspecting the lower apartment. Presently the step entered the building, stealthily as that of a wolf creeping after his prey. A moment of intense anxiety followed, to be succeeded by one of as intense disgust. The steps creaked beneath the weight of a man, and the head and shoulders of a powerful savage appeared above the opening. For one instant he gazed round, his eyes being as yet unaccustomed to the imperfect light.

"Had I been alone, I should probably have closed the aforesaid eyes with a bullet then and there, but my companion restrained me with a gesture, and in another second it was too late. The Indian naturally said 'Hugh,' in a deep guttural tone. I never knew or read of an Indian who did *not* say 'Hugh' in a similar emergency, and the next moment he disappeared. Then arose a shout which summoned his comrades, and within a couple of minutes, my companion and I were standing outside the unlucky building, with five-and-twenty of the most unpleasant looking savages howling around us, in a manner doubtless most delightful to themselves, but to us the very reverse.

"The gentleman who had discovered us was evidently the chief of the party. He had got my rifle, confound him, and stood regarding us with such a complacent, self-satisfied air that I would have paid down half-a-crown cheerfully to have had one drive at his nose with my clenched fist. This, however, was out of the question, partly because it would have been a very rash and foolish proceeding under existing circumstances, and partly because it would have been somewhat difficult, seeing that my arms were securely fastened behind my back with ropes of bark. Poor 'Moon-eye' was also bound, and did not seem much to approve of the arrangement.

"The chief now approached us, and looked me steadfastly in the face, whilst I, having nothing better to do, looked back at him. Presently he gave a deep kind of cough or clearing of the throat, and after uttering the usual 'Hugh,' remarked that he was 'Pig-face,' and a very great chief. To this I responded, in plain English, that I didn't think much of the name for beauty, but had no doubt but that he was a tremendous 'swell' in his own country, to which remark he gravely bowed assent, evidently not understanding a word of it. He then came close to me, and, lightly touching me on the shoulder, exclaimed in a somewhat excited tone, 'Pale-face tief – no good – kill Pig-face young man – carry off Pig-face squaw – must die.'

"Before I could by any possibility reply, 'Moon-eye' had interposed with a torrent of invective of which I had scarcely supposed her capable. She was terribly disgusted, I think (and no wonder at it) at being called Pig-face's squaw by that illustrious chief, and she certainly told him so in pretty plain terms, if her language (which I did not understand) at all corresponded to her voice and manner. This scene, however, could not last long. Although the Indian chief had kindly informed me of my doom, it was not his intention that it should be immediately fulfilled. He and his party had travelled many miles that day, and felt inclined for a rest before going further; added to which I imagine that they thought it would be more congenial to their feelings to kill me in their own village. Accordingly, they very kindly postponed that operation for the present, and leading us to a spot not more than half a mile distant from our late refuge, prepared to encamp for the night. Each of us captives, lady as well as gentleman, was bound to a tree, which is by no means the easiest position in which to pass the night, especially when vigilant eyes are upon you the whole time, which was the case in this instance, as the Indians relieved each other every two hours, so that we were closely watched through the whole

night, and had no opportunity of communicating with each other. Early in the morning the party again set out, and poor 'Moon-eye' and I, but little rested, were forced to accompany them, much against our inclination. I will do the savages the justice to observe that they loosened the girl's arms during the morning, but as they neglected to perform the same kindness in my case, I felt remarkably uncomfortable. We journeyed along for some distance, until we came to an open grassy space, upon which we halted, and our captors, producing some venison meat, sat down to make a meal, unbinding my arms for a while, and pressed both me and my companion to share their food. I had carefully counted their number during our march, and found that there were twenty-four men, besides the excellent chief Pig-face, so that even if I had been free and armed, I could neither have resisted nor escaped from so great a number. I therefore determined to forbear from any such attempt, which, besides being useless, might increase the severity of our treatment.

"As we sat, the chief again approached us and indulged in some more conversation. He spoke after the usual fashion of Indians, praising himself and his people a good deal, abusing me and all white people generally, and assuring me that my scalp should hang at his belt before many days were past. I bethought me of all the wise things which I had read of as having been said by 'Hawkeye,' in Fennimore Cooper's immortal books, and could have prated for half an hour about 'White man's gifts,' and 'Red man's gifts,' if I had been so disposed. As, however, the only 'gift' which I desired at that moment was one which would have enabled me to set my companion and myself free, I did not care to indulge in those sage moral reflections which always seemed to me as I read them singularly out of place and extremely unlikely to have formed part of the conversation of a backwoodsman. I therefore merely thanked the savage, and informed him at the same time that my scalp was exceedingly comfortable where it was, and that I had no desire for its removal, a remark which he received with much composure, and probably imagined to be a reply entirely to the purpose. Then he began to tell my beautiful Moon-eye that she was foolish to have run away, that no one could withstand Pig-face, and that she should undoubtedly share his wigwam before long.

"The maiden heard him this time in dignified silence, and after a while he left off talking, and directed his people to prepare to continue their journey.

"We walked for a considerable distance, and having re-crossed the stream near which my first encounter had taken place, travelled for several miles without the occurrence of any incident worthy of note until the second evening arrived. Whether the savages felt more secure on account of being nearer their village, or from any other cause, I cannot say, but certain it is that they now so far relaxed their vigilance as to suffer my arms to be unbound for a time, and neither I nor Moon-eye were apparently so closely watched during the supper hour. Still, we knew but too well that keen eyes were upon us, and that flight was out of the question.

"When the Indians had finished their meal, my companion and I were both tied again, but not so fast as before, or at least not in so objectionable a manner. We were suffered to lie down, our hands were fastened before us, and a rope round one ankle secured each of us to a tree. So darkness crept over the forest, and the savages were soon buried in sleep.

"Presently a low whine attracted my attention, and I perceived my faithful Jumbo, who had evidently followed us all the journey, too wary to expose himself to view before he saw an opportunity of being of use. Creeping gently up to me now, the affectionate brute first licked my hands and face, though the latter was an attention with which I confess I could have dispensed. Then he began gently to gnaw the bark ropes which bound my wrists, and in a very short time succeeded in freeing my hands. At that instant one of the Indians started up. Jumbo slunk away in the shadow of the trees, whilst I kept my position, and endeavoured to appear as if I was fast asleep. The savage was soon satisfied, and lay down again, but I did not move for some minutes. Then I put out my hand and reached a knife which one of the party had carelessly left within my reach; with this I severed the fastening which held me to the tree, and crawling a few yards, performed the same office for my companion.

"Still we were not much better off, for if we ventured to fly, we were certain to be speedily pursued and brought back. Therefore we looked at each other with a mutually disconsolate air, and hesitated what to do next. At this moment the hoot of an owl broke upon our ears. The eyes of the Indian maiden opened to their fullest extent: her nostrils seemed to tremble with excitement as she listened, and her features worked with a convulsive movement. The cry was repeated.

"Pawnee near – that him cry,' whispered the girl, and sat upright to listen again.

"At that moment Pig-face suddenly sprang to his feet, as if he too had heard and recognized the sound. But before he had time to utter a word or cry, a furious yell broke the stillness of the night, and the well-known war-cry of the Pawnees rang through the air. A band of these brave people had started in pursuit of their enemies as soon as they had discovered the theft of the latter, and the carrying off of Moon-eye, upon their return to the camp. The Sioux would probably have got clear off if, in the first place, the party of ten had not been so desirous of getting my scalp, and if, in the second place, their friends had not thought it necessary to attempt to revenge their death. The time which they had lost in following and capturing us had enabled the Pawnees to overtake them, and their surprise was complete. I must say for the fellows that they lost no time in flying, and that too with amazing dexterity, for they disappeared like magic on all sides, Pig-face included. Fortunately for them, the anxiety of the Pawnees to recover the lost maiden was much in favour of their escape, for it appeared that the warriors had reasoned, wisely enough, that if they surrounded the camp, the position of the captives might be dangerous, whereas if they attacked on one side only the enemy would, in all probability, be principally occupied in securing his own safety.

So, indeed, it turned out, and out of the twenty-five savages who had captured us, I believe that nearly one-half escaped unhurt. More might have done so if the gallant Jumbo had not thought it necessary to take an active part in the combat, which he did by pursuing and pulling down several of the Sioux, who thus became easy victims to their pursuers.

"Pig-face and four of his men were taken unhurt, and when our friends re-assembled, and congratulations had passed between them and Moon-eye, the latter, having introduced me to her tribe, told them of the fate which the Sioux chief had intended for each of us.

"The leader of the Pawnees, who rejoiced in the name of 'the Rattle-snake,' and was painted to represent that interesting animal, approached the unhappy Pig-face after this, and gave him a piece of his mind upon the subject. I did not understand what he said, of course, being, as I told you before, somewhat ignorant of their language; but I knew by the manner of the two that they were going on after the usual Indian fashion, the one telling the other that he should soon be tied to the stake, and what jolly fun it would be to torture him till he howled again, and the other replying that he was a great chief, that the other belonged to a nation of women, and that if he tortured him as he said, he would see that a chief knew how to die.

"When they had satisfied themselves with this little interchange of compliments, 'the Rattle-snake' came up to me and spoke in his own language, saying, I have no doubt, several things which I should have very much liked to understand. I suppose, however, that my countenance showed him that he might as well have been talking to one of the trees, for he presently turned to Moon-eye and beckoned her to approach, which she accordingly did. Then he spoke to her in the same tongue, and she interpreted what he said to me in her pretty broken English.

"Chief say he tank pale-face broder for kill bad Indian. Pawnee him friend, – white skin, Pawnee heart.'

"When I understood what the girl said, I replied at once that I was very much obliged for his good opinion, but that as a matter of fact my killing the bad Indians was not on account of any particular friendship for his tribe, but because if I had not done so, the beggars would certainly have killed *me*. 'The Rattle-snake' listened to this explanation with great attention, and answered through the interpreter that this was doubtless very true, inasmuch as these thieving Indians would kill any fellow they found in the woods if it suited their purpose; but that, nevertheless, a warrior who had

assisted in disposing of so many Sioux *must* be a friend to the Pawnees, even if he had never heard of them before.

"There was no arguing against such a reason as this, and I therefore at once professed myself as a decided friend to the Pawnees, then and for ever. To tell the truth, I was not disinclined to become so, since Moon-eye had made such a deep impression upon me, that I felt a natural liking towards her people. The thought had several times crossed my mind during the last few days, whether I should not be much happier if I gave up the roving life which I had followed so long, and settled down comfortably in some quiet nook of the world, exchanging continual restlessness for domestic tranquillity. Coupled with this thought came another, namely, that I had become so unused to the polished manners of civilized people, that an Indian home and an Indian bride might possibly bring me more happiness than a return to my native land. So I resolved to accept the offer of the Pawnees to return with them to their own village, and bethought me at the same time that if I could but win the heart of the lovely Moon-eye, I might settle down among her people and become a regular Pawnee.

"Perhaps, my dear children, this might have been the case, and your dear uncle might now have been walking about with his head shaved for the most part, with an eagle's feather behind his ear, moccasins on his feet, and in every respect a perfect Indian. One little circumstance alone prevented me, and this was the painful fact that Moon-eye herself took a different view of the case. I soon discovered that her young affections had long been fixed upon a young chief of her tribe, who enjoyed the appellation of 'the Rising Sun,' and as he seemed to return the young lady's feelings, I thought I should only get into hot water if I acted upon my first idea. So I forthwith made up my mind that it would be a shocking thing for a white man of my education and position to marry an ignorant Indian girl, and that it was evidently my duty to think no more of it.

"I went to the Pawnee's village with them and stayed for a few weeks very happily. You will perhaps be glad to hear that Pig-face and his young men were not tortured after all. They were exchanged for prisoners whom the Sioux had taken in their last raid, and I never heard any more about them. Moon-eye was very gracious to me whilst I was with her people, but it annoyed me to see that fellow 'Rising Sun' always following her about, and I therefore shortened my stay.

"Jumbo and I took our departure early one morning, and were accompanied by a number of the tribe for some distance on our way. We had many more curious adventures together in the woods, my trusty companion and I, and very lucky we were to have come so well out of them all. But on looking back to my forest and wilderness life, I never remember to have had a more stirring adventure than that of which I have just told you. It sometimes comes back to me now, as I lie awake at nights: I fancy I see those ten vagabonds tramping after me through the woods, – then comes the horrid scene with the snake – the battle – the slaughter – the waking – the flight with Moon-eye – the capture – the rescue, – all comes flitting like a vision before my eyes, and I drop to sleep at last, wondering how I have been preserved through so much trouble and so many dangers, and thinking how lucky it is for you young ones to have a respectable old uncle with so many experiences to relate, and such interesting and curious tales with which to instruct and amuse your young minds."

ZAC'S BRIDE

King Fridolin sat gloomily in the ancient halls of his race. A mighty race, forsooth, had they been for many a long year, and a mighty king was Fridolin. I shall not tell you the precise situation of his kingdom, for it is only by avoiding particular descriptions that we historians escape a variety of impertinent and troublesome questions. Suffice it to say that the monarch ruled over a territory of goodly size, containing mountains, forests, houses, vineyards, cornfields, and everything else which the neighbourhood of a mighty river could supply. For a river, mighty, indeed, in size and reputation, flowed through his kingdom, and was the principal glory of his land. The monarch had succeeded to the throne at an early age, and had reigned for long years over his people. They, poor creatures, had apparently only been created in order to minister to his comfort. Ground down by oppressive taxation, their spirits broken, their bodies subject to the will of their despotic master, their homes held only at his pleasure, and scarcely daring to call their very thoughts their own, they dragged on such a miserable existence as was permitted to them, without a hope or an idea that their condition could ever be improved by any effort of their own. But with him, their imperious lord, the case was surely different. He, one would have imagined, had everything to make him happy. Lands, vassals, money – what would he more? And yet King Fridolin sat gloomily in his ancient halls. His crown was upon his head – surmounted by his favourite crest, representing the figure of an eagle clapping its wings; his left hand rested upon the hilt of the mighty sword which he and his fathers before him had so often wielded in battle, whilst in his right hand he held a watering-pot, by means of which he tormented his Lord Chamberlain, who, having offended him, and being troubled with a bad cold, had been ordered to stand below the balcony upon which his majesty sat, whilst the royal hand let iced water fall upon his bald head. But even as he watered, King Fridolin pondered, and melancholy were his thoughts the while. Broad, indeed, were his lands, full were his coffers, obedient his vassals, but he lacked that sunshine of the heart, without which life is dull and heavy at the best. Moreover, he had no one who dared to contradict him, no one who ventured to suggest to him any alteration in his way of living, no new occupation which could relieve him from the oppressive dullness under which he suffered. So there he sat, watering and thinking and wishing for he knew not what —*anything* to relieve the dreary monotony of his existence. Suddenly he started up.

"I've hit it!" he cried – which, if he referred to the Lord Chamberlain's head, he certainly had, for, as he spoke, the watering-pot fell directly upon the bald pate of that unlucky functionary.

"I've hit it!" again cried the king – and the Chamberlain was not prepared to dispute the statement. In fact, the king gave him no time to do so, for the next moment, apparently forgetting his cause of displeasure against the high official in question, he eagerly called him up to the balcony, and bade him listen to the development of a new idea which had suddenly entered his royal brain.

"Pompous," he cried (for such was the name of the Lord Chamberlain), "Pompous, I've thought of something!"

"Happy the thing which has had the honour of occupying your majesty's mind," returned the ancient courtier, deeming it right to preserve honey upon his tongue, although bitter gall was in his heart, in consequence of the treatment to which he had just been exposed.

"Don't be an ass, Pompous!" replied the king hastily. "I tell you I've thought of something. Guess what it is."

The Lord Chamberlain drew himself up to his full height, bowed low, coughed, hemmed, and, after repeating this process several times, meekly answered that he could not tell what his gracious majesty might have been pleased to think of.

"Tell? Why, of course not, you old noodle," said the King, whose manner of addressing his attendants was occasionally barely polite. "Who expected you to tell? I told you to *guess*, but since you are too stupid to do so, I may as well tell you what it is. We'll have a pig-race!"

"A *what*, your majesty?" faltered out the Lord Chamberlain.

"A pig-race, you old idiot!" roared the king into his ear. "P I G, pig, R A C E, race —*pig-race*. Do you hear now?"

And the old man was obliged to own that he did; but although he heard, he hardly understood what the king could really mean. Old Pompous, however, was a thorough courtier, and having had the misfortune to offend his royal master *once* that morning, was far too good a judge to do so again, if he could by any possibility avoid it. He therefore put on a smiling face, declared that the idea was excellent, and pretended to enjoy it vastly, all the time wondering what could have caused the king to think of such a ridiculous project, and by what means it could ever be carried out. Whether any difficulty had suggested itself to the mind of the king, or what had put the project into his head at all, are questions which it is both useless and unnecessary to ask. It is sufficient to know that there it was, and when the despotic king of a country has a practical idea, something generally happens in consequence, and it is a fortunate thing for his people if it is nothing worse than a pig-race. Now it happened that the kingdom of Fridolin was famous for its breed of pigs. They grew to a very large size, and were much thought of by the people of that and neighbouring countries, who bred, bought, sold, and ate them to a great extent. A pig-race, however, was not a common event, nor, indeed, had one ever been heard of in the memory of the oldest inhabitant. A pig had certainly been more than once turned out, on festive occasions, with his tail soaped, and a prize given to the rustic who should succeed in securing the animal by holding on to that appendage; but this was not what the king meant. He announced his intention of giving a prize, to be run for by pigs, each pig to be ridden by a boy under fourteen years of age, and fixed that day month for the event. Pompous received the order with obsequious readiness, and was too wise to raise any objection to the project, or express any doubt as to the possibility of carrying it out. Next morning, accordingly, it was made known to the world, and the whole kingdom was agitated from one end to the other. It was not a great racing country; but, if it had been, a race between pigs, and pigs, too, ridden by boys, would have been a novelty, and the publication of the king's intentions caused a great deal of surprise and excitement. The race was to take place upon a common in the immediate neighbourhood of the capital city of the kingdom, and the course, which was to be half a mile long, was settled and marked out long before the day arrived on which the event was to come off. A great number of competitors had entered for the race, and it was calculated that at least twenty would start. Some complaints there had been of the shortness of time allowed for training either boys or pigs; but that was not a country in which many complaints were made against anything the king did, as those who made them generally had their heads cut off with a promptitude which had a signal effect in preventing others from following their example. So there was very little said against the arrangements which had been made, and people only talked of the curious scene they expected to witness, and speculated upon the chance of success possessed by the pigs which came from their several neighbourhoods. As the day approached, the excitement increased, and every available lodging was occupied in anticipation of the great event. It is right to state, perhaps, that the intensity of the interest caused by the coming race, was not only due to the love of sport which existed in that country. King Fridolin had perhaps no other intention than that of providing amusement for himself, when he first set on foot the race which now attracted so much of public attention, although he had, as a truly gracious monarch, no objection to his subjects sharing that amusement, so long as his own would not be lessened thereby. But when he came to consider the nature of the prize which he should offer, another thought struck him, upon which he had immediately acted.

He had read and heard of many kings who, upon suitable occasions, when they wanted their country to be delivered from some misfortune, or if they desired to obtain the performance of some mighty deed of valour, or some great feat of agility, had endeavoured to get what they wanted by offering the hand of their daughter as the prize for which all efforts should be made.

This kind of proceeding had, of course, its disadvantages, as, in a country where only one wife was permitted, the prize would be one which shut out at once from competition all married men, and thus greatly limited the possible number of competitors. But Fridolin was in a peculiar position in this respect.

In the first place, as only boys of tender age were to ride, there was very little probability that any of them would be married, and, in the next place, he had a daughter whom he thought very unlikely to be married, unless by some clever contrivance such as that which he had now planned. Belinda was the youngest of three princesses who owned Fridolin for their father, and she was at this time just ten years of age. But, unhappily, whilst her two sisters, the Princesses Amabilia and Concaterina were lovely and well shaped, Belinda had no such recommendations. Her mother, having had the misfortune to offend a powerful and wicked witch, had expired, through her machinations, shortly after the birth of her third daughter. One would have supposed that the vengeance of a witch would have been satisfied by the death of its object; but the witch Nuisancenika was not so easily appeased. She visited the dying queen, made use of language which, always objectionable in itself, was doubly improper, when used at such a moment, and solemnly doomed the baby child to ugliness and deformity. This pretty well finished the poor mother of itself, and she actually died outright, when, within ten minutes of the cruel doom having been pronounced, a palpable hump appeared upon the infant's back, and her features assumed an expression of ugliness seldom seen in the females of that country. So the child had grown up, deformed and ugly, though with a sweetness of disposition which atoned for both defects in the eyes of those who knew her well. This scarcely applied to Fridolin, who cared little for his children, although he occasionally had the pretty ones down to dessert to show off to his friends, whilst poor Belinda was left alone and neglected in the nursery.

Under these painful circumstances it was singular that Belinda should not have grown up as deformed in mind as body, and this might very possibly have been the case but for the unwearied love and devotion of her foster-mother. This estimable person was the wife of one of the king's shepherds, and no mother could have watched over her own child more constantly or more tenderly than she tended Belinda. Being moreover of a remarkably even temper, and blessed with a kindly disposition withal, the good woman doubtless did much towards the development of that remarkable sweetness of character, which the princess had inherited from her mother. Be this how it may, she certainly grew up in such a manner as to cause the remark to be frequently made that her mind evinced a marked and singular contrast to her body, and she was generally beloved in the royal household. This, then, was the daughter whose destiny King Fridolin had resolved to determine by the chances of a pig-race, and the fact was duly notified to those concerned, and advertised in the newspapers throughout the whole length and breadth of the country.

Although, as I have said, the circumstances of that country prevented people from commenting too freely upon any proceeding of the king's, yet nothing could prevent this matter being talked about in private circles, and wherever the conversation could be safely carried on great surprise was expressed at the course which Fridolin had thought fit to take. It was argued with some reason that the king, had he so chosen, might have ordered any of his subjects to marry Belinda, should no suitable admirer have appeared from among any of the neighbouring princes, and that, if he deemed it necessary that the princess should be married at all, he might in this manner have at least secured for her a husband more eligible than might now fall to her lot. Besides, the class of people who would be likely to contend for the prize in a pig-race would be of a varied character. It was undoubtedly true that many of the highest nobility of the land were breeders of pigs, but it was equally certain that there were a far greater number of small farmers and even labourers who could also claim to be included in the same category.

Moreover, it was more than probable that the more aristocratic and refined was a pig-breeder, the less likely would it be that one of his own sons would ride in the race, and it was to the rider and not to the owner of the animal that the prize was to be given. So far, indeed, the king seemed

to have been kind and considerate, for this plan would secure to his little daughter a husband better suited to her tender age than if she had been bestowed upon some pig-owner of advanced years, to whom she would have made a most unsuitable wife. But the king's intention was plainly declared; whoever won the pig-race would win Belinda too, and although a few years might be permitted to pass, so that her education might be completed and the age of the bridegroom be allowed to ripen, yet at the end of that time, which the king would fix according to circumstances, the nuptials would certainly be celebrated.

As I have already said, everyone in the kingdom knew the conditions before the day arrived, and many and various were the speculations as to the result.

At last the sun shone upon the eventful morning of the day which was to decide the issue of the race and the fate of Belinda. From every quarter people came hurrying into the town; carts, carriages and vehicles of every description and size thronged the roads, which were also crowded with foot-passengers, all dressed in holiday garments, and pushing forward in one direction, namely, to the race-course. There the crowd was enormous, and the grand-stand was filled with a distinguished company, as well as by many of those individuals who are only distinguished by their extraordinary capacity for getting money out of other people's pockets.

In a private stand which was appropriated to royalty, sat Fridolin and his daughters, surrounded by the nobles of the court. The king was in the highest spirits, chaffing old Pompous, flirting with the maids of honour, and teasing his two eldest daughters by telling them that if the affair went off to his satisfaction, he should probably have another on *their* account before long. The two princesses tossed their heads haughtily at this, although they stood too much in awe of their royal parent to make any open protest. They were both dressed in the extreme of the fashion, and displayed in their features the beauty for which their race had always been celebrated. At a little distance sat poor Belinda, who had been ordered by her father to be present, but who did not seem much to enjoy it, although she endeavoured to preserve a cheerful demeanour. The child was simply dressed in white muslin, and her dress was in no way calculated to remove the disagreeable impression produced by her ugliness and bodily defect. As her sisters were known to be the king's favourites, it was naturally around them that the courtiers clustered, and Belinda sat neglected, and almost alone, though some of the more kindly disposed and tender-hearted of the court ladies paid her a little attention.

There was the usual shouting and betting, card-playing and band-playing, pick-pocketing and cheating, wrangling and chaffing, which accompany a race-course, I am told, even down to the present day; and there was a dog, which issued no one knew where from, and ran down the very centre of the course, howled at by the crowd and vainly chased by the policemen, just before the race began. Carriages of all sorts were drawn up by the side of the course, several rows deep, and the occupants of many of them appeared to have come there principally for the purpose of eating and drinking, for there was a vast and continuous popping of corks, carving of chickens and mixing of salads, apparently much enjoyed by those who were no more immediately concerned in the consumption of the same, and as greatly envied by many hungry lookers-on, who passed and repassed the carriages with eager and longing eyes.

At last the bell for saddling rung, and after a while the course was cleared, and the animals which had been entered for the race came out of the adjoining paddock for their preliminary gallop. There were eighteen who actually started, of whom nine were black pigs and nine sandy coloured. The symmetry of their forms was generally admired, and as they cocked their little ears, twitched their tails, and grunted loudly in anticipation of the struggle, great was the interest and intense the excitement of the spectators. The little jockeys, clad in their jackets of different colours, sat gallantly on their steeds, and although the galloping was of a somewhat curious and uncertain character, no accident occurred, and the eighteen competitors were duly marshalled at the starting post. Then began the difficulty. It seemed as if no power on earth could induce the animals to range themselves as required or to keep any order at all. They grunted, squealed, turned round the wrong way, and

exhibited altogether such restlessness and queer temper, that a fair start really seemed to be an impossibility. This went on for nearly half-an-hour, when suddenly the starter effected his purpose – the flag fell – and a hushed whisper of "They're off!" ran through the crowd from one end to another. The excitement was tremendous. Luncheons were abandoned – champagne glasses put down when in the very act of being lifted to thirsty lips – opera-glasses and telescopes were everywhere in requisition, and no one in all that vast assembly had for the moment eyes or ears for anything but the pig-race. Those who were in the secret knew that seven of the animals which were running belonged to members of the aristocracy, whilst no less than eleven were owned by breeders and jobbers of an inferior class. Among these knowing ones there was great speculation as to the class from which the winner would come, also as to the colour, black or sandy, which would be successful. There was no limit as to the sex of the animals, and the only stipulation was that each competitor should be two years old, it being considered in that country injurious to the constitution of pigs that they should be allowed to run in races before that age.

It would take too long to describe the dresses of all the jockeys or to give the names of the animals which they respectively bestrode. If any of my readers desire to know more than I tell, the matter can be easily arranged, for the daily journals of that country inserted the fullest particulars, and were doubtless filed by many racing-men of the time, so that reference can be made to them by the curious inquirer. It is sufficient for me to chronicle the fact that cards were everywhere sold upon the day of the race, which contained the names, weights and colours of the riders, and from these every information could be gleaned. The names of the favourite pigs were Lubin, Toby, Trough-lover, Wallower and Hogwash, and it was thought by those who had, or who assumed to have, most knowledge of such matters, that none of the other competitors had much chance. How far the event realised these expectations will be presently seen. For the first few seconds after the start there was a breathless silence, whilst all eyes were eagerly fixed upon the advancing animals. Two or three could hardly be said to have earned that epithet, for they only advanced a few yards before they stopped, set their fore feet firmly in the ground and stood there squealing loudly and defying every effort of their riders to urge them forward. Another presently turned sharply aside and charged into the crowd of bystanders, grunting fiercely, and as he was a large hog of savage aspect and mighty bristles, the people scattered right and left and he disappeared from the course. But the other pigs pushed on for a while, until some six or seven appeared to have decidedly outstripped the others and to be those from whom the winner would undoubtedly be taken. The "knowing ones" seemed to be pretty right, for all the five animals whose names I have given were among those who led.

Trough-lover, a rough built, sandy-coloured pig, with a rider in a violet jacket with white sleeves, came on with a long steady gallop which augured well for his chance; the scarlet jacket of the boy who rode Toby, also a sandy pig, showed well to the front, and Wallower's dark and bony frame, bestridden by a jockey in pink and white was also well up. But the principal interest of the race was concentrated upon Hogwash and Lubin, who were running neck and neck together in the foremost place, whilst the three already named, with a couple of "outsiders" were several yards behind. The two favourites were both black pigs; Lubin, a remarkably well-shaped animal, whose jockey showed dark blue colours, whilst Hogwash was a beast of huge dimensions, ridden by a boy of complexion almost as dark as his own, whose jacket of lilac had been conspicuous in the front rank from the first moment of the start. They ran on in the order which I have mentioned, after they had shaken off the "ruck" of pigs, until within about a couple of hundred yards from home, when Lubin gradually came back to his pigs, and Hogwash forged slowly but surely ahead. The shouting on all sides was tremendous, and the excitement of the spectators was at its height, when at about a hundred yards from the winning post the position of the leading pigs appeared unaltered, save that Toby seemed to have somewhat gained on the others in the second rank, and Trough-lover was coming along by the rails with a stealthy, steady gallop, which made the backers of Hogwash tremble in their shoes. So it was until within fifty yards from the finish, when a totally unexpected incident suddenly changed the

aspect of affairs. Out from the second rank darted a pig of a sandy colour, and with a squeal hardly to be expected from an animal which had gone nearly half a mile at best pace, shot forward from the others and rapidly gained upon the leading pig. The shouts from the crowd now rent the skies, and as the sandy pig closed up with Hogwash, the rider of the latter was observed to be using his whip freely, whilst his rival, a boy of light hair and complexion, displaying a cherry-coloured jacket and black cap, sat firmly but quietly in his saddle, to all appearance neither using nor requiring whip or spur. At twenty yards from home he collared Hogwash, at ten yards they were neck and neck, racing for dear life, and when, amid the most maddening scene of excitement the sandy-coloured pig galloped past the winning post nearly a length ahead, the shout that went up from the crowd was something appalling in its vehemence. There was no doubt about it. Hogwash was beaten and so were all the favourites, and an outsider had won. Who was it? The faces of the book-makers fell, and people looked eagerly to see what number went up, for no one had an idea of what was the name of the winner, except those who were sufficiently calm to consult their cards, and ascertain what pig it was that the "cherry and black" jockey had ridden. It was soon known, Number 17 had won, and Number 17 was "Sandy Sue," the property of Giles Dickson, a small farmer very little known among the great pig-breeders of the kingdom.

Before I go further, I may as well explain the clever manner in which this great race was actually won, which was thought to reflect considerable credit upon those who had contrived it. Farmer Dickson, though not in a large way of business, had plenty of brains, and it has been remarked by men of undoubted sagacity that there are two classes of men into which the world may be divided, namely those who have brains and no money, and those who have money and no brains, the latter being created principally for the benefit of the former. Now Farmer Dickson belonged emphatically to the former class, and as soon as ever the race was announced and the course fixed, he conceived a project which he immediately carried into execution.

At the end of the course, and not above a hundred yards or so therefrom, was a fence, beyond which was situated a small farm, the homestead of which was thus very near the winning post, or at least not above three or four hundred yards distant. Being well acquainted with the tenant of this farm, the sagacious farmer made known his plan to him and they agreed to carry it out together. "Sandy Sue," as the large sow was called upon whom Farmer Dickson had resolved to set his hopes and stake his money, had not long since presented her owner with a fine litter of pigs. These were all removed forthwith to the farm near the racecourse, and their mother was also comfortably housed in the farmyard. Day by day she took her gentle exercise, and day by day was she well fed at a spot as near to the racecourse as could be managed. More than this, her favourite food was always given to her about the time at which the race had been fixed to come off, and to this precaution the strictest attention was given. The consequence was exactly that which the confederates had expected.

Although her condition was probably not quite so good as that of some of the pigs with whom she had to contend, it was sufficiently so to enable her to run her best for a course so short as half a mile. Then, when she came near to the finish, recollections of feeding time not only crowded upon her, but she had directly before her the very spot where her daily food was served out to her, and where she was accustomed to receive the visits of her beloved children. Stimulated to renewed exertions by these facts, she did exactly that which was expected from her, and forgetting every other consideration, made such a splendid "spirt" as to carry her triumphantly to the victory in the manner which I have described. These things all came out afterwards, but they did not affect the decision of those who had to judge upon the race, and "Sandy Sue" was without objection or protest hailed as the winner.

As soon as her jockey had dismounted and been duly weighed, he was summoned to the presence of the king, who was not unnaturally desirous to behold his future son-in-law. The boy accordingly mounted the stairs which led to the royal stand, and was forthwith ushered into the presence of his sovereign. As soon as he appeared, Fridolin advanced a few steps to meet him, and then stood still and regarded him with a curious eye.

He was, as I have said, a boy of light complexion, with light brown hair and light blue eyes, and by no means of an unprepossessing appearance, especially in his jockey dress. He stood bashfully before the king, with blushing cheeks and eyes cast down, until, after a few moments of silence, Fridolin addressed him.

"Well, boy," he said, "thou hast won the race and hast gained the prize. Of what house and lineage dost thou come?"

"Please, sir, my lord, your kingship's majesty," said the boy in trembling accents, entirely mistaking the question, "our house bean't but a small one, and as for linen, mother does the washing and I don't know nothing about it."

At this reply the king burst into a fit of laughter, in which his courtiers joined, although some of them felt a sensation of regret within their hearts when they considered the illiterate ignorance of the youth to whom the Princess Belinda was to be sacrificed. This reflection apparently did not trouble the king greatly, for he presently remarked, "the bridegroom must be introduced to his bride without delay. Come hither, boy," and with these words advanced towards the spot where Belinda was sitting. The poor child, understanding but too well what had happened and what was about to follow, trembled with visible emotion as they came near, and would gladly have made her escape. But Fridolin did not intend that this should be the case by any means. He called to her as she rose from her seat and bade her be ready to receive the winner of the race and her future husband. Meekly and humbly she obeyed, taking her seat again, and fixing her eyes modestly upon the floor.

"There," cried the king as he pushed the boy forward towards the princess, "there is the youth who will one day be your husband, child. Kiss her, boy, and make friends at once."

A deep blush suffused the face of the shrinking Belinda, who had not as yet even looked upon the other's countenance, and she trembled more than ever. But with a grace which no one had expected from the quarter from which it came, the boy, immediately on receiving the king's commands, stepped forward towards Belinda's chair, and, kneeling on one knee, raised her hand gently to his lips.

"Bravo, boy!" cried the king with another laugh. "I vow you're half a courtier already. Two or three years' training and you'll be perfect."

He then proceeded to inquire more particularly about the youth's age and condition, and found that he was called Zachariah Dickson, or usually "Zac" for shortness, that Farmer Dickson had several other sons and daughters, but that this boy, being just under the limit of age, had been selected as the rider of "Sandy Sue." He learned, moreover, that the education of the Dickson family had been somewhat neglected, and that though Master Zac could certainly read and write, he was no great proficient at either accomplishment. Altogether it appeared that the pig-race had secured for Belinda a husband so very much beneath her in rank, position, breeding and education that her future happiness could hardly be said to be very certain.

As, however, Fridolin had made the arrangement without any reference to its probable effect upon his daughter's happiness, but entirely to gratify his own whim, he was not greatly concerned with this reflection. He told the youth, indeed, that he had something to learn, before he could be really fit to be a king's son-in-law, but as in that country a king's word was always sacred, and as good as his bond, he never for one moment entertained the idea of trying to be off the bargain.

No: "Zac" Dickson should be Belinda's husband, come what might. "He had won her and he alone should wear her." So said the king again and again, at the same time avowing his determination that the boy should be forthwith sent at the royal expense to one of the best colleges in the country, in order that he might pursue his studies, and prepare himself to discharge the duties of that lofty position to which he had been called by the voice of Fate. This announcement was received with respectful submission by the boy, and with unfeigned satisfaction by old Dickson, who, besides having won a considerable sum of money on the race, now saw the prospect of having one of his boys entirely taken off his hands and better educated than he could possibly have been without such aid.

The king further declared that three years should elapse before the wedding, but that then, when the bridegroom was seventeen and the bride thirteen, the marriage should certainly be celebrated, youthful marriages being always the fashion in that country. After the interview on the royal Stand, the winner of the race was allowed to return home for the night, but with orders that he was to take up his abode at the palace upon the following day. Then the king ordered his carriages and the royal party left the course. The crowd was already broken up, and people were streaming in every direction over the common upon which the sport had taken place.

The common was ere long left desolate and alone, only tenanted by a grazing donkey or two, and a few wretched human creatures who wandered over every spot upon which carriages had stood and luncheons had been eaten, in the hope of finding something which they might convert into money in order to aid the necessities of their miserable lives. Soon, too, these took their departure: the crowd of people returning home grew smaller and smaller, gradually the road was less and less thronged, the people were only seen going along it by twos and threes, then at last these, too, had found their way home, silence reigned where all had so lately been talk and mirth, noise and revelry, and night came down upon the earth with her sable cloak, extinguishing the last flickering rays of the sun which had so gaily and brightly shone upon the day of the great pig-race.

The Princess Belinda woke next morning with a load upon her young heart, and a novel sense of responsibility which made her feel quite a different being from the child of the day before. She was, indeed, no ordinary child. Even in her appearance *that* could hardly be said of her, poor girl! for she was not so much ordinary as decidedly ugly, but the epithet was even less applicable to her intellectual powers, which were undeniably of a superior order. Having moreover been debarred by her deformity from the more active pastimes of childhood, she had from a very early period sought her pleasure in books, and was, even at the early age of ten, far better acquainted with the literature of the day than many young ladies of twice her age. Well informed, however, as she was, and fortified as she might be against the storms of the outside world, as much as the fortifications of a prudent heart and well-regulated temper can avail against such adversities, she nevertheless awoke, as I have already said, to a new feeling upon the morning after the pig-race. Her childhood seemed to be over, and the real cares of life to have commenced. She had no longer only her own life to regard, the life of another was thenceforth inseparably bound up with her own. The actual marriage, indeed, was to be deferred for three years, but the boy who had been presented to her as her future husband was practically, for the future, a part and parcel of her life, and his doings must be always of great and paramount interest and importance to her. To tell the truth, he had made a very favourable impression upon the heart of the youthful princess.

Unaccustomed to go much into that society of which her more fortunate sisters were at once the ornaments and the delights, Belinda was less struck than might otherwise have been the case by the somewhat rough and countrified bearing of the boy, and indeed, as has been already said, his action in kneeling before her on his first introduction had been far from ungraceful. She had remarked with pleasure the honest gaze of his blue eyes, and the healthy clearness of his fair complexion, whilst no one could deny that his form was well-shaped, and his figure lithe and active. Still, the age of ten is one at which it is somewhat early to be engaged to be married, and it is scarcely to be considered a matter of wonder that the little princess regarded her prospects with some apprehension.

The youthful Zac was brought to the palace next day, according to the king's orders, and forthwith took up his residence in the royal abode. It was a curious arrangement, and one that was made the subject of much comment by the court, although it was allowed on every hand that, since the king had determined upon bestowing the hand of his youngest daughter upon the winner of the pig-race, there was much good sense, as well as kindness, in his resolution to have that winner properly educated. It must be owned, too, that the lad did no discredit to his teachers. He was diligent, attentive, and showed no small capacity for learning. Whatever there had been of vulgarity in his accent rapidly disappeared, uncouth and ignorant language was banished from his hearing, and consequently very

soon from his speech, while his errors of grammar speedily became things of the past. In short, it was confessed even by those who had at first shaken their heads with a gravity befitting the occasion, and had declared that the old proverb "you cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear" would be verified in this case, and that a person of humble birth could by no means be converted into a gentleman; even these persons, I say, began to take a different tone, to talk about another proverb, namely that "exceptions prove the rule," and to express their feelings towards Belinda's future husband in no unfavourable terms.

He made such progress in his books that his tutors were quite astonished, and Belinda was herself delighted. Once a week he was allowed to visit her for an hour, and from time to time she found a perceptible difference in his manners and conversation, and a decided improvement in both. In this manner a whole year passed over the heads of the people of whom we are speaking, and during that time no event occurred of a character so specially interesting as to require a separate allusion. People were born, married and died as usual. Whilst they lived they ate, drank, and paid their taxes – three things common to all mankind who happen to be resident in civilized countries – and after they were dead they were comfortably buried by their relations, who then went home and remembered them as long as people usually do, and no longer. The world, in short, went steadily on, and the inmates of the palace did much the same as the rest of the world. Lord Pompous, it is true, fell occasionally into disgrace, being rather a stupid man and apt to offend the king when he most wanted to please him. But as he always got out again very soon, this did not signify. Fridolin was rather fond of the old man, if the truth must be told, and though he enjoyed teasing him now and then, never really meant to get rid of him. So they jogged on together happily enough, and nothing occurred to seriously disturb either of them.

The king, however, felt time hang as heavy upon his hands as is the case with most people who either have nothing to do, or are too idle to do what they really *have* to do in the shape of work. He often looked back to that idea of a pig-race which had afforded him such a good day's amusement, and once or twice hinted to his two elder daughters that it had turned out remarkably well. The princesses, however, viewed the matter in a different light, for they guessed at once at their father's intentions, and had no notion of allowing them to come to any practical issue. It was all very well for Belinda, indeed: a third sister, with neither beauty nor wealth, might fairly be disposed of in any way that happened to be most convenient. It was entirely different, however, with girls who had beauty to recommend them, and no lack of admirers to tell them so. Wherefore the fair Amabilia and the sweet Concaterina promptly checked their father's most distant allusion to the subject, and as they were the only people of whom he stood at all in awe, he soon abandoned the idea, and gave up all thoughts of having another pig-race.

After young Zac's first entrance into the palace, Fridolin had concerned himself very little about the boy, being content, as many people are, to let matters drift on as long as they gave no trouble to himself. But it happened one day that he overheard some of the courtiers speaking in praise of the lad, and this excited his curiosity to a degree sufficient to induce him to desire that Zac should be summoned to his presence. This occurred about the end of the first year of Zac's residence in the palace, and was really the beginning to him of another existence. For King Fridolin was so pleased with the alteration in the youth, that he thought he should like to see more of him. Having no son of his own, why should not the future husband of one of his daughters be as a son to him? Thus the result of his great idea might turn out altogether fortunate, and he should have conferred a benefit upon himself as well as Belinda after all. He forthwith gave directions that Zac should be present on all occasions when the king appeared in public, or gave a reception to any of his subjects, and he also desired that he should be frequently admitted to the royal presence upon other occasions. The boy always conducted himself so well that he gradually became a great favourite with the king, and not only with the king but with the other princesses.

This occurrence was the reverse of fortunate, but perhaps it was not unnatural. Amabilia was little more than a year older than Zac, and Concaterina about his age. His good looks, his pleasant manner, the unfailing sweetness of his temper, and the general intelligence which he evinced, were all calculated to make an impression upon the tender hearts of the two princesses. Surrounded by flatterers and sycophants, the simple character and honest bearing of the youth had the additional charm of novelty, and this was increased by the natural manner in which, considering these as his future sisters, he accepted his position and treated them frankly as such. Accordingly they both fell deeply in love with him. It was very sad, and I am sorry to be obliged to tell it, but it is no use concealing the truth, and there was and is no mistake about the matter. The two sisters were not long in discovering each other's secret, and as soon as they had made the mutual discovery, a coldness sprang up between them which was most distressing. I am bound to say that no thought of or for Belinda ever crossed the mind of either of them. It was not that they disliked their younger sister, or that they were habitually unkind to her, but they had got into the way of considering her as a kind of inferior being, whose thoughts, hopes, and wishes must never for a moment interfere with their own, and who could on any occasion, and in any matter, be pushed aside as best suited their convenience, so that it scarcely at all, if ever, occurred to either of them that it was either wrong, dishonourable, or unkind to rob Belinda of her promised husband, and if it *had* occurred to them, I am afraid that they had both been too much accustomed to have their own way to have hesitated even under the influence of such a thought. Nurtured as they had been in their father's court, surrounded by people who had taught them to believe in the divine right of kings to reign over their people, and the enormous privilege which it was to be of royal blood, and the incomparable superiority of beings such as they were over the common herd of mortals, one would have thought it probable that their pride would have prevented them from yielding to the soft influence of love in such a case as that of the boy of humble birth with whom they had thus accidentally been associated. But poets and writers of olden time have always told us that Love is invincible, and I can only suppose that he chose to give another instance of his prowess by conquering the hearts of the two princesses, and forcing them to bow before his resistless sway. At all events, to cut the matter short, they both fell in love with Zac Dickson, so that his very name (though to me there seems nothing at all savouring of melody about it) was music to their ears, their eyes delighted to behold him, and their blushes would soon have told the tale, if indeed their tender looks and affectionate manner had not been such as to reveal to the youth the ill-concealed secret of their young hearts.

Extraordinary though it be to relate, and difficult to believe, Zac was considerably more annoyed than pleased by the discovery. Most boys of fifteen would have been far from insensible to the attentions of beautiful damsels even of their own rank and station, and few there are who would not have been flattered – and perchance fluttered too – by the palpable affection entertained towards them by lovely princesses. Nevertheless, this was not at all the case with Zac. By some curious freak of Nature, he had been constituted with an acute sense and appreciation of the difference between right and wrong, and a steady desire and determination to avoid the latter whenever he possibly could. He remembered full well the manner in which he had obtained access to the palace, and the terms upon which his admission had been arranged, and the means provided for his education. Strange to say, moreover, he had conceived a real regard and affection for Belinda. He remembered her first reception of him as her future husband; he did not forget the uniformly meek and modest nature which she displayed in her weekly interviews with him; nor was he oblivious of the kindly interest she had ever taken in his mental progress and development of those qualities which go to make a man's life both useful and advantageous to himself and others. He had perceived, too, in the youngest princess, that sweetness of disposition for which she had ever been remarkable, and had learned gradually to understand, and, as he understood, to love her better.

If, at his first entrance upon the scene of our history as the winner of the pig-race, he had been offered the choice of any one of the three princesses, it is highly probable that he would never

have looked upon Belinda a second time. The beauty of the elder sisters was undeniably great; their manners pleasant, though occasionally haughty; and they were girls who would at once have captivated the susceptible heart of any young man suddenly placed in Zac's position. But a year's residence in the palace, and that under his peculiar circumstances and engagements, had made all the difference. Bound in honour to Belinda, he would as soon have thought of stealing the king's crown as of making love to either of her sisters, nor could he believe for a long time that they had any such intentions towards himself. This, however, only served to make matters worse, because he took no pains to keep out of their way, and was rather glad when any opportunity for meeting either of them chanced to occur. Nay, when Amabilia pressed his hand tenderly, he saw in it nothing more than the regard which Belinda's sister had a right to entertain towards him, and when Concaterina, as they were bending together over a photograph, put her arms softly round his neck, and when their faces were almost touching, pressed her lips softly upon his cheek, he even then deemed it but a proof of sisterly affection, and at once returned the compliment, without a suspicion that anything more was meant. His eyes, however, were opened at last, when the attentions, looks, and words of the two elder princesses became unmistakable, and their design of winning him from Belinda but too apparent.

The boy was grieved beyond measure, for not only was he sharp enough to know that his own position at court might be seriously imperilled by what was before him, but he also felt that, through him, Belinda herself might be made to suffer. Yet what was to be done? Deceit was repugnant to his honest nature, and had it been otherwise, it could scarcely have been long maintained, since not only one, but both sisters were aiming at the same thing, and to deceive the two would have been beyond human skill and subtlety. If he appeared to favour either one, the other would probably be bitterly offended; if he seemed to care for both, but to hesitate between the two, their mutual jealousy would be stimulated, and, besides, if Belinda should hear of it, as would be but too likely, her tender heart would be filled with sorrow. On the other hand, if he spoke his mind out to the two princesses, openly and boldly, they had only to agree together to denounce him to the king, and his position would be most precarious, whilst Belinda would be quite unable to assist him.

The matter caused the poor boy much anxious thought. At first, when he became quite certain that he was not mistaken, he tried, by every means in his power, to avoid Amabilia and Concaterina, and was never alone with either of them if he could possibly help it. But very often he couldn't help it, do what he would. He made his studies a constant excuse for absence from luncheon, to which meal he had latterly been invited, and at which the two elder princesses were always present, although Belinda had her solitary meal in the school-room.

Sometimes the king was there, and then Zac dared not be away, since Fridolin liked him to be present, and sent for him if he was not. But his time of trial was "Five o'clock Tea."

The two sisters had a joint sitting-room, a very comfortable place, with inviting arm-chairs, delightful sofas, all the new novels, and every knick-knack you can imagine, arranged as only a lady's taste *can* arrange things, but so managed as to make the room wonderfully attractive to the male who has the good fortune to be admitted to a sight of its treasures. Their tea was always brought in on a silver tray soon after five, and to this most enjoyable meal they frequently invited such of the courtiers as they specially favoured. Zac had constant invitations of a general character, but whenever one of the sisters chanced to be absent from any cause whatever, the other was sure to send specially to request his attendance. This was his time of trial. The "request" of a princess in that royalty-loving country was equivalent to a command, and it was entirely contrary to etiquette for any one to refuse compliance, save on the score of ill-health, domestic affliction, or some other equally valid excuse. Therefore it was very difficult for Zac to refuse, though he knew only too well what awaited him. Amabilia or Concaterina, whichever it happened to be – no matter which – was certain to be alone, and always received him with such overpowering affection as quite bewildered him. His only safety lay in the fact that the two girls had become so jealous of each other, that one never left the other alone at five o'clock tea if she could possibly help it. Still, sometimes such an occurrence was unavoidable,

and if Amabilia was ever kept up-stairs by a bad cold, or Concaterina had been detained elsewhere by some accidental circumstance, as sure as fate, one of these special invitations came to Zac, and the poor boy had to go and face the lovely princess as best he could.

So things went on for several months, well into the second year of the youth's residence in the palace, until at last matters seemed coming to a crisis. For the second time, Concaterina had indulged him with a kiss, which he could hardly with politeness refrain from returning, and the lovely Amabilia actually began the same game.

She secured him for a five o'clock tea, and whilst sitting by his side on the sofa, and talking in her usually affectionate manner, she suddenly laid her fair head upon his shoulder for an instant, and the next moment as suddenly raising it, exclaimed in an energetic and emphatic tone: "*Dear Zac!*" and imprinted at the same instant a warm and loving kiss upon his young lips.

Poor Zac was terribly perplexed, but more in thought than in action, for of course he could do no less than promptly return the compliment just paid him by the princess. But when she took his hand in hers, pressed it warmly, and regarded him with loving eyes, with her face still closer to his than any face but Belinda's should have been, he felt that this was really carrying things too far, and that he must somehow or other put an end to it. How he would have done so it is impossible to say, inasmuch as the princess, evidently of a different opinion, appeared desirous of prolonging the situation, and his difficulty in preventing her from doing so would probably have been considerable.

Fortunately – or unfortunately, as the taste of my readers may lead them to determine – the door suddenly flew open, and the princess had barely time to spring to the other end of the sofa when the portly figure of Lord Pompous entered the apartment. As Lord Chamberlain, Old Pompous had the general right of entry everywhere, although he rarely ventured to approach the sitting-room of the princesses without special invitation, and probably would not have done so upon the present occasion had he not been sent directly by the king. I do not think that Amabilia ever quite forgave the old man for his unwelcome intrusion; but he really was not to blame in the matter. King Fridolin had got into a difficulty about some curtains which he had recently ordered for his study, and which, when they came home, he fancied were of colours which did not match; those destined for one window being of a different hue to those which belonged to another. Having referred the matter to Lord Pompous, that worthy ventured to be of an opinion contrary to that of his sovereign, and held that the curtains matched perfectly. Upon this Fridolin first threw a footstool at the head of his lord chamberlain – on dodging which he tumbled over the waste-paper basket into the coal-scuttle, and spoiled a new white waistcoat – and then directed him, since he was such a blind old fool as to be unable to tell one colour from another, to go immediately to Amabilia's room and ask her to come there and decide the knotty point. Accordingly, the submissive Pompous hurried off to obey the orders of the king, and arrived at the particularly opportune or inopportune moment which I have described.

As far as Zac was concerned, the intrusion appeared to him to be little less than providential. The princess could do nothing else than obey, and as it would not have been etiquette for her either to have invited him to accompany her, or told him to await her return, she had no alternative but to dismiss him from the apartment. This she did with a loving look, which certainly could not be misunderstood by its object, and could hardly have escaped the observation of any bystander less blind and stupid than Lord Pompous.

The princess then sought the presence of her father, and Zac, having deeply cogitated upon the whole matter, after his return to his own room, made up his mind that, unless he was to run away – a proceeding which would be difficult, uncomfortable, ruinous to his future interests, and very disagreeable to others beside himself – the only alternative he had was to open his whole heart to Belinda upon the very first opportunity.

Having quite resolved upon this he felt somewhat more happy, for that which had really troubled him most was the apprehension that the young princess might discover something of the truth, and not knowing from himself how matters really stood, might imbibe some false impression concerning the

matter, and blame him for having employed unnecessary and unjustifiable concealment in a business so intimately concerning her interests and future happiness. He had not long to wait for the opportunity he desired. At their very next interview he was able to open his heart to Belinda upon the subject, and to tell her all the awkwardness of his position as regarded the king, herself, and her two sisters.

At first the poor child wept bitterly, and was quite unable either to control or to conceal her feelings. She had never expected, for she had never received, great kindness from her elder sisters, but she had thought herself quite safe from molestation with regard to her future husband. Amabilia and Concaterina had so scoffed at the idea of the pig-race when the project was first started, they had laughed so heartily at the ridiculous notion of the hand of a king's daughter being given as the reward of a successful jockey, and they had tossed their heads so high at the idea of a common farmer's son being received and accepted as the future husband of *their* sister, that it had never entered the poor child's head that there was the slightest chance of either of them ever desiring to obtain his affection. Yet such was the case. She was attacked upon the very side upon which she had felt herself most secure, and her surprise was only equalled by her distress. One consolation, however, she certainly had, than which none could well be greater. The fidelity of Zac was a comfort which was beyond all price, as it was also beyond all praise. When she was fully assured of this – and indeed she was too young and too honest to have ever doubted it – she felt almost glad that the occasion to prove it had arisen. In warm but simple language she expressed at once her gratitude and her affection for the youth, who, on his part, declared his firm adherence to the troth he had plighted, and in homely words vowed that he would never be false to his Belinda.

But this mutual interchange of confidence and regard rendered the present position of affairs by no means less dangerous and uncomfortable. Zac offered to go to the king if Belinda desired it, but to this there was a double objection. In the first place, Fridolin would probably be slow to believe anything to the disadvantage of his favourite daughters, and an appeal to him, certain to lead to an entire denial on the part of the princesses, would not improbably recoil upon the heads of both Belinda and her promised husband. Then, in the second place, Zac had a strong and conscientious objection to betraying a lady's secret, and had only done so in the present case because Belinda was his affianced wife, and he felt himself bound in honour to tell her how matters stood between her sisters and himself.

They decided, therefore, that they certainly would not say anything to the king upon the subject. There was no one else to whom they could appeal, for Amabilia and Concaterina were omnipotent in the palace, and it would have been hopeless to speak to old Pompous or any of the courtiers. All that Belinda could think of was to tell her old foster-mother, who was allowed to see her twice a month, and who was so utterly devoted to her, that if the worst came to the worst, and the poor child had to leave the palace, she knew she could find a refuge in that humble cottage as long as the old woman was allowed to live there. So, after much difficulty, she obtained Zac's permission to confide to her the whole matter, and to ask her counsel regarding it.

The youth left his betrothed with a heavy heart, but rejoiced withal at the thought that, at all events, she knew the truth, and would place in him the trust which he so well deserved.

The cottage of Belinda's foster-mother was not far from the palace, and close to a forest of considerable size, between which and the river which flowed through the fertile plain upon one side of it, were the king's pastures upon which grazed his numerous flocks and herds. As has been already stated, the good old foster-mother was the wife of one of the shepherds whose duty it was to tend the king's flocks. He was now somewhat advanced in years, and so was his wife; but they were a hale and hearty couple, and still performed their duties with diligence and fidelity. According to her resolution, Belinda confided to her foster-mother at the very next interview the whole circumstances of her painful position. The worthy woman was much disturbed at hearing this news. No one was better informed than she was of the state of affairs at the palace. She knew that the word of either Amabilia or Concaterina was law, whilst her nursling had no influence whatever. If, then, the two

sisters could agree between themselves as to which of them should appropriate Zac, there seemed but small hope that Belinda would be permitted to retain her lover. True, he might have a word to say upon the subject himself, and would possibly – nay, probably, according to Belinda – be firm and true, but how far that would avail against the will of those with whom he would have to deal, was a very doubtful matter. So when she had heard her child's story, the old woman comforted and petted her at first by condoling with her on the badness of the prospect before her, and the impossibility of its ever being any better. Having thus made both her nursling and herself as miserable as she could, and having cried together a good deal more than the urgency of the case required, they began to think whether anything else could be done, and for some time no thought entered either head of which any use could be made. This interview took place in the palace, and the good old woman said that she never *could* think in such a grand place as that, but that if Belinda could manage to come and see her one of those days at her own cottage, they would be able to talk the matter over quietly together, and perhaps something might turn up. To this Belinda consented, and the old woman took her departure.

For the next few days things went on much the same, the two elder princesses doing all in their power to attract the affection of Zac, and the honest lad striving to avoid them as much as he possibly could do without actual incivility. One day, however, things really came to a crisis. Zac had finished his work earlier than usual, and went into the palace garden to enjoy the fresh air. He took a book with him, and finding a pleasant seat in a little summer-house, which had been built near a natural waterfall which formed one of the beauties of the place, he sat himself thereupon, and began to read.

It was a lovely spot, and the moment was one which occasionally comes to everybody in the warm summer-time, when the sound of falling water, the rays of the sun just piercing through a thick leafy screen, the low singing of the birds and the humming of the insects, all induce a kind of dreamy happiness which gradually steals over the spirit, and not seldom ends in the forgetfulness of sleep. So it was with Zac. He read a page or two with avidity – for his book was interesting – then another page or two rather less eagerly, then more slowly and lazily still; then he ceased to turn over the pages at all, and finally the book slipped from his hands to his knees, and from his knees to the ground, his eyes closed, and he fell into a sweet, dreamless sleep.

Now, as luck would have it, the lovely Concaterina had observed the youth saunter into the garden, as she was watering the mignonette which grew in a box placed upon her window-sill. The opportunity for a *tête-à-tête* seemed too good to be lost, and she therefore shortly afterwards descended in pursuit of him, having previously made sure that her beloved elder sister was practising music in their joint sitting-room. The princess did not find the boy directly, as she fancied he had gone further into the shrubberies than was really the case, so that by the time she came upon him in the summer-house he was stretched at full length upon the seat and sleeping as I have described.

She gazed upon him for some few seconds in a transport of maidenly affection – so young and so handsome did he seem in her eyes, with his head leaning upon one of his arms which he had carelessly thrown behind it as he sank to sleep. Should she awaken him? and how? She did not take long to decide. In that country there was a proverbial saying – and I believe it is not confined to that country – that if a gentleman finds a lady asleep he has a right to take a kiss by way of legitimate booty. Concaterina had no idea that such a privilege could be properly or fairly confined to one sex, and she therefore leaned gently over the slumbering Zac, and without more ado kissed him tenderly on the cheek.

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