

FINLEY MARTHA

ELSIE IN THE
SOUTH

Martha Finley

Elsie in the South

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CHAPTER I

"What a storm! there will be no going out to-day even for the early stroll about the grounds with papa," sighed Lucilla Raymond one December morning, as she lay for a moment listening to the dash of rain and sleet against her bedroom windows. "Ah, well! I must not fret, knowing who appoints the changes of the seasons, and that all He does is for the best," her thoughts ran on. "Besides, what pleasures we can all have within doors in this sweetest of homes and with the dearest and kindest of fathers!"

With that she left her bed and began the duties of the toilet, first softly closing the communicating door between her own and her sister's sleeping apartments lest she should disturb Grace's slumbers, then turning on the electric light in both bedroom and bathroom, for, though after six, it was still dark.

The clock on the mantel struck seven before she was quite through with these early morning duties, but the storm had in no wise abated in violence, and as she heard it she felt sure that outdoor exercise was entirely out of the question.

"And I'll not see Chester to-day," she sighed half-aloud. "It was evident when he was here last night that he had taken a cold, and I hope he won't think of venturing out in such weather as this."

Just then the door into Grace's room opened and her sweet voice said, "Good-morning, Lu. As usual, you are up and dressed before your lazy younger sister has begun the duties of the toilet."

"Take care what you say, young woman," laughed Lucilla, facing round upon her. "I am not going to have my delicate younger sister slandered in that fashion. She is much too feeble to leave her bed at the early hour which suits her older and stronger sister."

"Very kind in you to see it in that light," laughed Grace. "But I must make haste now with my dressing. Papa may be coming in directly, for it is certainly much too stormy for him and you to take your usual stroll in the grounds."

"It certainly is," assented Lu. "Just listen to the hail and rain dashing against the windows. And there comes papa now," she added, as a tap was heard at their sitting-room door.

She ran to open it and receive the fatherly caress that always accompanied his morning greeting to each one of his children.

"Grace is not up yet?" he said inquiringly, as he took possession of an easy-chair.

"Yes, papa, but not dressed yet; so that I shall have you to myself for a while," returned Lu in a cheery tone and seating herself on an ottoman at his knee.

"A great privilege that," he said with a smile, passing a hand caressingly over her hair as he spoke. "It is storming hard, so that you and I must do without our usual early exercise about the grounds."

"Yes, sir; and I am sorry to miss it, though a chat with my father here and now is not so bad an exchange."

"I think we usually have that along with the walk," he said, smiling down into the eyes that were gazing so lovingly up into his.

"Yes, sir, so we do; and you always manage to make the shut-in days very enjoyable."

"It is what I wish to do. Lessons can go on as usual with you and Grace as well as with the younger ones, and after that we can have reading, music, and quiet games."

"And Grace and I have some pretty fancy work to do for Christmas time."

"Ah, yes! and I presume you will both be glad to have a little – or a good deal – of extra money with which to purchase gifts or materials for making them."

"If you feel quite able to spare it, father," she returned with a pleased smile; "but not if it will make you feel in the least cramped for what you want to spend yourself."

"I can easily spare you each a hundred dollars," he said in a cheery tone. "Will that be enough, do you think?"

"Oh, I shall feel rich!" she exclaimed. "How very good, kind, and liberal you are to us and all your children, papa."

"And fortunate in being able to be liberal to my dear ones. There is no greater pleasure than that of gratifying them in all right and reasonable desires. I think that as soon as the weather is suitable for a visit to the city we will take a trip there for a day's shopping. Have you and Grace decided upon any particular articles that you would like to give?"

"We have been doing some bits of fancy work, father, and making up some warm clothing for the old folks and children among our poor neighbors – both white and colored; also a few things for our house servants. And to let you into a secret," she added with a smile and a blush, "I am embroidering some handkerchiefs for Chester."

"Ah, that is right!" he said. "Chester will value a bit of your handiwork more than anything else that you could bestow upon him."

"Except perhaps the hand itself," she returned with a low, gleeful laugh.

"But that he knows he cannot have for some time," her father said, taking in his the one resting on the arm of his chair. "This belongs to me at present and it is my fixed purpose to hold it in possession for at least some months to come."

"Yes, sir; I know that and highly approve of your intention. Please never give up your claim to your eldest daughter so long as we both live."

"No, daughter, nothing is further from my thoughts," he said with a smile that was full of affection.

"What do you want from Santa Claus, papa?" she asked.

"Really, I have not considered that question," he laughed; "but anything my daughters choose to give me will be highly appreciated."

"It is pleasant to know that, father dear; and now please tell me what you think would be advisable to get for Mamma Vi, Elsie, and Ned."

That question was under discussion for some time, and the conclusion was arrived at that it could not be decided until their visit to the city stores to see what might be offered there. Then Grace joined them, exchanged greetings and caresses with her father, and as the call to breakfast came at that moment, the three went down together, meeting Violet and the younger children on the way.

They were a cheerful party, all at the table seeming to enjoy their meal and chatting pleasantly as they ate. Much of their talk was of the approaching Christmas and what gifts would be appropriate for different ones and likely to prove acceptable.

"Can't we send presents to brother Max, papa?" asked Ned.

"Hardly, I think," was the reply, "but we can give him some when he comes home next month."

"And he'll miss all the good times the rest of us have. It's just too bad!" replied Ned.

"We will try to have some more good times when he is with us," said the captain cheerily.

"Oh, so we can!" was Neddie's glad response.

The captain and the young people spent the morning in the schoolroom as usual. In the afternoon Dr. Conly called. "I came in principally on your account, Lu," he said, when greetings had been exchanged. "Chester has taken a rather severe cold so that I, as his physician, have ordered him to keep within doors for the present; which he deeply regrets because it cuts him off from his daily visits here."

"Oh, is he very ill?" she asked, vainly trying to make her tones quite calm and indifferent.

"Oh, no! only in danger of becoming so unless he takes good care of himself."

"And you will see to it that he does so, Cousin Arthur?" Violet said in a sprightly, half-inquiring tone.

"Yes; so far as I can," returned the doctor, with a slight smile. "My patients, unfortunately, are not always careful to obey orders."

"When they don't the doctor cannot be justly blamed for any failure to recover," remarked the captain. "But I trust Chester will show himself docile and obedient."

"Which I dare say he will if Lu sides strongly with the doctor," Grace remarked, giving Lucilla an arch look and smile.

"My influence, if I have any, shall all be on that side," was Lucilla's quiet rejoinder. "He and I might have a bit of chat over the telephone, if he is able to go to it."

"Able enough for that," said the doctor, "but too hoarse, I think, to make himself intelligible. However, you can talk to him, bidding him to be careful, and for your sake to follow the doctor's directions."

"Of course I shall do that," she returned laughingly, "and surely he will not venture to disregard my orders."

"Not while he is a lover and liable to be sent adrift by his lady-love," said Violet, in sportive tone. Just then the telephone bell rang and the captain and Lulu hastened to it.

It proved to be Mrs. Dinsmore of the Oaks, who called to them with a message from Chester to his affianced – a kindly greeting, a hope that she and all the family were well, and an expression of keen regret that he was, and probably would be for some days, unable to pay his accustomed visit to Woodburn.

"There, daughter, take your place and reply as you deem fit," said Captain Raymond, stepping aside from the instrument.

Lucilla at once availed herself of the permission.

"Aunt Sue," she called, "please tell Chester we are all very sorry for his illness, but hope he may soon be well. We think he will if he is careful to follow the doctor's directions. And when this storm is over probably some of us will call at the Oaks to inquire concerning his welfare."

A moment's silence; then came the reply. "Chester says, thank you; he will be glad to see any or all of the Woodburn people; but you must not venture out till the storm is over."

"We won't," returned Lucilla. "Good-by." And she and her father returned to the parlor where they had left the others, with their report of the interview.

Two stormy days followed; then came one that was bright and clear and they gladly availed themselves of the opportunity to go to the city, do their Christmas shopping, and call at the Oaks on their return. They reached home tired, but in excellent spirits, having been very successful in making their purchases, and found Chester recovering from his cold.

From that day until Christmas time the ladies and little girls of the connection were very busy in preparing gifts for their dear ones; Grandma Elsie as well as the rest. She did not come so often to Woodburn as was her custom, and the visits she did make were short and hurried.

Chester was a more frequent caller after partially recovering from his cold, but even while he was there Lucilla worked busily with her needle, though never upon the gift intended for him. She now wore and highly prized a beautiful diamond ring which he had given her in token of their betrothal, though she had told him at the time of its bestowal that she feared it had cost more than he could well afford. At which he laughed, telling her that nothing could be too good or expensive for one so lovely and charming as herself.

"In your partial eyes," she returned with a smile. "Ah, it is very true that love is blind. Oh, Chester! I often wonder what you ever found to fancy in me!"

In reply to that he went over quite a list of the attractive qualities he had discovered in her.

"Ah," she laughed, "you are not blind to my perhaps imaginary good qualities, but see them through multiplying glasses; which is certainly very kind in you. But, oh, dear! I'm afraid you'll find out your mistake one of these days!"

"Don't be disturbed. I'll risk it," he laughed. Then added more seriously, "Oh, Lu, darling, I think I'm a wonderfully fortunate fellow in regard to the matter of my suit for your heart and hand."

"I wish you may never see cause to change your mind, you dear boy!" she said, glad tears springing to her eyes, "but ah, me! I fear you will when you know me better."

"Ah," he said teasingly, "considering our long and rather intimate acquaintance, I think you are not giving me credit for any great amount of discernment."

"Well," she laughed, "as regards my faults and failings probably the less you have of that the better for me."

They were alone in the library and the house was very quiet, most of the family having already retired to their sleeping rooms.

Presently Captain Raymond came in, saying with his pleasant smile, "I should be sorry to seem inhospitable, Chester, but it is growing late and I am loath to have my daughter lose her beauty sleep. Don't for a moment think I want to hurry you away from Woodburn, though; the room you occupied during your illness is at your service and you are a most welcome guest."

"Many thanks, captain; but I think I should go back to the Oaks at once lest someone should be waiting up for me. I should have brought my night key, but neglected to do so," Chester replied, and in a few minutes took leave.

The captain secured the door after him, then turned to Lucilla, saying:

"Now, daughter, you may bid me good-night, then make prompt preparations for bed."

"Oh, papa, let me stay five minutes with you," she entreated. "See, I have something to show you," holding out her hand in a way to display Chester's gift to advantage.

Her father took the hand in his. "Ah, an engagement ring!" he said with a smile; "and a very handsome one it is. Well, dear child, I hope it may always have most pleasant associations to you."

"I should enjoy it more if I were quite sure Chester could well afford it," she said with a half sigh.

"Don't let that trouble you," said her father. "Chester is doing very well, and probably your father will be able to give some assistance to you and him at the beginning of your career as a married couple. Should Providence spare me my present income, my dear eldest daughter shall not be a portionless bride."

"Papa, you are very, very good to me!" she exclaimed with emotion, "the very dearest and best of fathers! I can hardly bear to think of living away from you, even though it may not be miles distant."

"Dear child," he said, drawing her into his arms, "I do not intend it shall be even one mile. My plan is to build a house for you and Chester right here on the estate, over yonder in the grove. Some day in the near future we three will go together and select the exact spot."

"Oh, papa, what a delightful idea!" she exclaimed, looking up into his face with eyes dancing with pleasure; "for I may hope to see almost as much of you as I do now, living in the same house."

"Yes, daughter mine; that is why I want to have your home so near. Now bid me good-night and get to bed with all speed," he concluded with a tender caress.

CHAPTER II

"They are going to have a Christmas tree at Ion, one at Fairview, one at Roselands, and I suppose one at the Oaks," remarked Ned Raymond one morning at the breakfast table. "But I guess folks think Elsie and I have grown too old for such things," he added in a tone of melancholy resignation and with a slight sigh.

"A very sensible conclusion, my son," said the captain cheerfully, with a twinkle of amusement in his eye. "But now that you have grown so manly you can enjoy more than ever giving to others. The presents you have bought for your little cousins can be sent to be put on their trees, those for the poor to the schoolhouses; and if you choose you can be there to see the pleasure with which they are received. Remember what the Bible says: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

"Oh, yes, so it is!" cried the little fellow, his face brightening very much. "I do like to give presents and see how pleased folks look that get them."

"And as papa is so liberal to all of us in the matter of pocket money, we can every one of us have that pleasure," said Grace.

"Yes; and I know we're going to," laughed Ned. "We didn't go so many times to the city and stay so long there for nothing. And I don't believe grandma and papa and mamma did either."

"No," said his mother; "and I don't believe anybody – children, friend, relative, servant, or poor neighbor – will find himself neglected. And I am inclined to think the gifts will be enjoyed even if we have no tree."

"Oh, yes, mamma! and I'm glad to be the big fellow that I am, even if it does make me have to give up some of the fun I had when I was small," Ned remarked with an air of satisfaction.

"And to-night will be Christmas Eve, won't it, papa?" asked Elsie.

"Yes, daughter; and some of us will be going this afternoon to trim the tree in the schoolhouse. Do you, Elsie and Ned, want to be of the party?"

"Oh, yes, sir! yes, indeed!" was the joyous answering exclamation of both. Then Elsie asked: "Are you going too, mamma? Sisters Lu and Gracie too?" glancing inquiringly at them.

All three replied that they would like to go, but had some work to finish at home.

A part of that work was the trimming of the tree, which was brought in and set up after the departure of the captain, Elsie, and Ned for the schoolhouse.

Violet's brothers, Harold and Herbert, came in and gave their assistance as they had done some years before when Max, Lucilla, and Grace had been the helpers of their father at the schoolhouse. The young girls had enjoyed that, but this was even better, as those for whom its fruits were intended were nearer and dearer. They had a merry, happy time embellishing the tree with many ornaments, and hanging here and there mysterious packages, each carefully wrapped and labelled with the name of its intended recipient.

"There!" said Violet at length, stepping back a little and taking a satisfied survey, "I think we have finished."

"Not quite," said Harold. "But you and the girls may please retire while Herbert and I attend to some small commissions of our good brother – the captain."

"Ah! I was not aware that he had given you any," laughed Violet. "But come, girls, we will slip away and leave them to their own devices."

"I am entirely willing to do so," returned Lucilla gayly, following in her wake as she left the room.

"I, too," said Grace, hastening after them, "for one never loses by falling in with papa's plans."

"What is it, Harold?" asked Herbert. "The captain has not let me into his secret."

"Only that his gifts to them – his wife and daughters – are in this closet and to be taken out now and added to the fruits of this wondrous tree," replied Harold, taking a key from his pocket and unlocking a closet door.

"Ah! something sizable, I should say," laughed Herbert, as four large pasteboard boxes came into view.

"Yes; what do you suppose they contain?" returned his brother, as they drew them out. "Ah, this top one – somewhat smaller than the others – bears little Elsie's name, I see, and the other three must be for Vi, Lu, and Grace. Probably they are new cloaks or some sort of wraps."

"Altogether likely," assented Herbert. "Well, when they are opened in the course of the evening, we shall see how good a guess we have made."

And here," taking a little package from his pocket, "is something Chester committed to my care as his Christmas gift to his betrothed."

"Ah! do you know what it is?"

"Not I," laughed Herbert, "but though a great deal smaller than her father's present, it may be worth more as regards moneyed value."

"Yes; and possibly more as regards the giver; though Lu is evidently exceedingly fond of her father."

"Yes, indeed! as all his children are and have abundant reason to be."

Herbert hung the small package on a high branch, then said: "These large boxes we will pile at the foot of the tree; Vi's at the bottom, Elsie's at the top, the other two in between."

"A very good arrangement," assented Herbert, assisting him.

"There, we have quite finished and I feel pretty well satisfied with the result of our labors," said Harold, stepping a little away from the tree and scanning it critically from top to bottom.

"Yes," assented Herbert, "it is about as attractive a Christmas tree as I ever saw. It is nearing tea time now and the captain and the children will doubtless soon return. I think I shall accept his and Vi's invitation to stay to that meal; as you will, will you not?"

"Yes; if no call comes for my services elsewhere." And with that they went out, Harold locking the door and putting the key into his pocket.

They found the ladies in one of the parlors and chatted there with them until the Woodburn carriage was seen coming up the drive. It drew up before the door and presently Elsie and Ned came bounding in, merry and full of talk about all they had done and seen at the schoolhouse.

"We had just got all the things on the tree when the folks began to come," Elsie said: "and oh, Mamma, it was nice to see how glad they were to get their presents! I heard one little girl say to another, 'this is the purtiest bag, with the purtiest candy and the biggest orange ever I seed.' And the one she was talking to said, 'Yes, and so's mine. And aint these just the goodest cakes!' After that they each – each of the girls in the school I mean – had two pair of warm stockings and a woollen dress given them, and they went wild with delight."

"Yes; and the boys were just as pleased with their coats and shoes," said Ned. "And the old folks too with what they got, I guess. I heard some of them thank papa and say he was a very good, kind gentleman."

"As we all think," said Violet, with a pleased smile. "But come upstairs with me now; for it is almost tea time and you need to be made neat for your appearance at the table."

They were a merry party at the tea table and enjoyed their fare, but did not linger long over it. On leaving the table, Violet led the way to the room where she, her brothers, and Lucilla and Grace had been so busy; Harold produced the key and threw the door open, giving all a view of the Christmas tree with its tempting fruits and glittering ornaments.

Ned, giving a shout of delight, rushed in to take a nearer view, Elsie following close in his wake, the older ones not far behind her. Christine, having another key to the door, had been there before them and lighted up the room and the tree so that it could be seen to the very best advantage.

"Oh, what a pile of big, big boxes!" exclaimed Elsie. "And there's my name on the top one! Oh, papa, may I open it?"

His only reply was a smile as he threw off the lid and lifted out a very handsome baby astrakhan fur coat.

"Oh! oh!" she cried, "is it for me, papa?"

"If it fits you," he replied. "Let me help you to try it on." He suited the action to the word, while Harold lifted the box and pointing to the next one, said, "This seems to be yours, Gracie. Shall I lift the lid for you?"

"Oh, yes, if you please," she cried. "Oh! oh! one for me too! Oh, how lovely!" as another baby astrakhan fur coat came to light.

He put it about her shoulders while Harold lifted away that box and, pointing to the address on the next, asked Lucilla if he should open that for her.

"Yes, indeed! if you please," she answered, her eyes shining with pleasure.

He did so at once, bringing to light a very handsome sealskin coat.

"Oh, how lovely! how lovely!" she exclaimed, examining it critically.

"Papa, thank you ever so much!"

"You are heartily welcome, daughters, both of you," he said; for Grace too was pouring out her thanks, her lovely blue eyes sparkling with delight.

And now Violet's box yielded up its treasure – a mate to Lu's – and she joined the young girls in their thanks to the giver and expressions of appreciation of the gift.

"Here, Lu, I see this bears your name," said Harold, taking a small package from the tree and handing it to her. She took it, opened it, and held up to view a beautiful gold chain and locket. As she opened the latter, "From Chester," she said with a blush and a smile, "and oh, what a good likeness!"

"His own?" asked Violet. "Ah, yes! and a most excellent one," she added, as Lucilla held it out for her inspection.

All, as they crowded around to look, expressed the same opinion.

"Oh, here's another big bundle!" exclaimed Ned; "and with your name, mamma, on it! And it's from grandma. See!" pointing to the label.

"Let me open it for you, my dear," said the captain, and doing so brought to light a tablecloth and dozen napkins of finest damask, with Violet's initials beautifully embroidered in the corner of each.

"Oh, they are lovely!" she said with a look of delight, "and worth twice as much for having such specimens of mamma's work upon them. I know of nothing she could have given me which I would have prized more highly."

There was still more – a great deal more fruit upon that wonderful tree; various games, books, and toys for the children of the family and the servants; suitable gifts for the parents of the latter, useful and handsome articles for Christine and Alma, and small remembrances for different members of the family from relatives and friends.

Chester joined them before the distribution was quite over and was highly pleased with his share, especially the handkerchiefs embroidered by the deft fingers of his betrothed.

The captain too seemed greatly pleased with his as well as with various other gifts from his wife, children, and friends.

The distribution over, Violet's brothers hastened to Ion to go through a similar scene there. And much the same thing was in progress at the home of each of the other families of the connection.

Grandma Elsie's gift to each daughter, including Zoe, was similar to that given to Violet, tablecloth and napkins of the finest damask, embroidered by her own hands with the initials of the recipient – a most acceptable present to each.

Ned had received a number of very gratifying presents and considered himself as having fared well; but Christmas morning brought him a glad surprise. When breakfast and family worship were over his father called him to the outer door and pointing to a handsome pony grazing near at hand,

said in his pleasant tones, "There is a Christmas gift from Captain Raymond to his youngest son. What do you think of it, my boy?"

"Oh, papa," cried the little fellow, clapping his hands joyously, "thank you, thank you! It's just the very best present you could have thought of for me! He's a little beauty and I'll be just as good to him as I know how to be."

"I hope so indeed," said his father; "and if you wish you may ride him over to Ion this morning."

"Oh, yes, papa! but mayn't I ride him about here a while just now, so as to be sure I'll know how to manage him on the road?"

"Why, yes; I think that's a good idea; but first put on your overcoat and cap. The air is too cool for a ride without them."

"Oh, mamma and sisters!" cried Ned, turning about to find them standing near as most interested spectators, "haven't I got just the finest of all the Christmas gifts from papa?"

"The very best for you, I think, sonny boy," returned his mother, giving him a hug and a kiss.

"And we are all very glad for you," said Grace.

"I as well as the rest, dear Ned," added Elsie, her eyes shining with pleasure.

"And we expect you to prove yourself a brave and gallant horseman, very kind and affectionate to your small steed," added Lucilla, looking with loving appreciation into the glad young face.

"Yes, indeed, I do mean to be ever so good to him," rejoined the little lad, rushing to the hat-stand and, with his mother's help, hastily assuming his overcoat and cap. "I'm all ready, papa," he shouted the next moment, racing out to the veranda where the captain was giving directions to a servant.

"Yes, my son, and so shall I be when I have slipped on my coat and cap," returned his father, taking them, with a smile of approval, from Lucilla, who had just brought them.

The next half hour passed very delightfully to little Ned, learning under his father's instruction to manage skilfully his small steed. Having had some lessons before in the riding and management of a pony, he succeeded so well that, to his extreme satisfaction, he was allowed to ride it to Ion and exhibit it there, where its beauty and his horsemanship were commented upon and admired to his heart's content.

The entire connection was invited to take Christmas dinner at Ion, and when they gathered about the table not one was missing. Everybody seemed in excellent spirits and all were well excepting Chester, who had a troublesome cough.

"I don't quite like that cough, Chester," said Dr. Conly at length, "and if you ask me for a prescription it will be a trip to Florida."

"Thank you, Cousin Art," returned Chester with a smile. "That would be a most agreeable medicine if I could spare the time and take with me the present company, or even a part of it."

"Meaning Lu, I presume, Ches," laughed Zoe.

"Among the rest; she is one of the present company," he returned pleasantly.

"What do you say, captain, to taking your family down there for a few weeks?" asked Dr. Conly, adding, "I don't think it would be a bad thing for Grace."

"I should have no objection if any of my family need it, or if they all wish to go," said the captain, looking at his wife and older daughters as he spoke.

"A visit to Florida would be something new and very pleasant, I think," said Violet.

"As I do, papa," said Grace. "Thank you for recommending it for me, Cousin Arthur," she added, giving him a pleased smile.

"Being very healthy I do not believe I need it, but I should greatly enjoy going with those who do," said Lucilla, adding in an aside to Chester, who sat next her, "I do hope you can go and get rid of that trying cough."

"Perhaps after a while; not just yet," was his low-toned reply. "I hardly know what I should like better."

"Well, don't let business hinder; your life and health are of far more importance than that, or anything else."

His only answer to that was a smile which spoke appreciation of her solicitude for him.

No more was said on the subject just then, but it was talked over later in the evening and quite a number of those present seemed taken with a desire to spend a part of the winter in Florida. Chester admitted that by the last of January he could probably go without sacrificing the interests of his clients, and the captain remarked that by that time Max would be at home and could go with them.

Grandma Elsie, her father and his wife, also Cousin Ronald and his Annis, pledged themselves to be of the party, and so many of the younger people hoped they might be able to join that it bade fair to be a large one.

"Are we going in our yacht, papa?" asked Ned Raymond.

"Some of us, perhaps, but it is unfortunately not large enough to hold us all comfortably," was the amused reply.

"Not by any means," said Dr. Conly, "but the journey can be taken more quickly by rail, and probably more safely at this time of the year."

Their plans were not matured before separating for the night, but it seemed altogether probable that quite a large company from that connection would visit Florida before the winter was over; and at the Woodburn breakfast the next morning the captain, in reply to some questions in regard to the history of that State, suggested that they, the family, should take up that study as a preparation for their expected visit there.

"I will procure the needed books," he said, "and distribute them among you older ones to be read at convenient times during the day and reported upon when we are all together in the evenings."

"An excellent idea, my dear," said Violet. "I think we will all enjoy it, for I know that Florida's history is an interesting one."

"Were you ever there, papa?" asked Elsie.

"Yes; and I found it a lovely place to visit at the right time of the year."

"That means the winter time, I suppose?"

"Yes; we should find it unpleasantly warm in the summer."

"How soon are we going, papa?" asked Ned.

"Probably about the 1st of February."

"To stay long?"

"That will depend largely upon how we enjoy ourselves."

"The study of the history of Florida will be very interesting, I am sure, father," said Lucilla; "but we will hardly find time for it until next week."

"No," he replied, "I suppose not until after New Year's – as we are to go through quite a round of family reunions. But in the meantime I will, as I said, procure the needed books."

"And shall we learn lessons in them in school time, papa?" asked Ned.

"No, son; when we are alone together in the evenings – or have with us only those who care to have a share in learning all they can about Florida. Our readers may then take turns in telling the interesting facts they have learned from the books. Do you all like the plan?"

All thought they should like it; so it was decided to carry it out.

That week except Sunday was filled with a round of most enjoyable family festivities, now at the home of one part of the connection, now at another, and wound up with a New Year's dinner at Woodburn. There was a good deal of talk among them about Florida and the pleasure probably to be found in visiting it that winter, to say nothing of the benefit to the health of several of their company – Chester especially, as he still had a troublesome cough.

"You should go by all means, Chester," said Dr. Conly, "and the sooner the better."

"I think I can arrange to go by the 1st of February," replied Chester, "and shall be glad to do so if I can secure the good company of the rest of you, or even some of you."

"Of one in particular, I presume," laughed his brother.

"Will you take us in the yacht, my dear?" asked Violet, addressing her husband.

"If the weather proves suitable we can go in that way – as many as the *Dolphin* can accommodate comfortably. Though probably some of the company would prefer travelling by rail, as the speedier and, at this season, the safer mode," replied Captain Raymond.

"If we take the yacht you, mamma, will go with us in it, of course," observed Violet. "Grandpa and Grandma, too."

"Thank you, daughter, the yacht always seems very pleasant and homelike to me, and I have great confidence in my honored son-in-law as her commander," returned Mrs. Travilla, with a smiling look at the captain.

He bowed his acknowledgments, saying, "Thank you, mother, I fully appreciate the kindness of that remark." Then turning to his wife's grandfather, "And you, sir, and your good wife, I hope may feel willing to be of our company should we decide to take the yacht?"

"Thank you, captain; I think it probable we will," Mr. Dinsmore said in reply.

"I wish my three brothers may be able to accompany us also," said Violet.

Neither one of them felt certain of his ability to do so, but all thought it would be a pleasure indeed to visit Florida in such company. No one seemed ready yet for definite arrangements, but as the trip was not to be taken for a month prompt decision was not esteemed necessary, and shortly after tea most of them bade good-night and left for their homes.

Chester was one of the last to go, but it was not yet very late when Lucilla and Grace sought their own little sitting-room and lingered there for a bit of chat together.

Their father had said they need not hasten with their preparations for bed, as he was coming in presently for a few moments. They had hardly finished their talk when he came in.

"Well, daughters," he said, taking a seat between them on the sofa and putting an arm about the waist of each, "I hope you have enjoyed this first day of a new year?"

"Yes, indeed, papa," both replied. "And we hope you have also," added Grace.

"I have," he said. "I think we may well be called a happy and favored family. But I wonder," he added with a smiling glance from one to the other, "if my older daughters have not been a trifle disappointed that their father has made them no New Year's gift of any account."

"Why, papa!" they both exclaimed, "you gave us such elegant and costly Christmas gifts and each several valuable books to-day. We should be very ungrateful if we did not think that quite enough."

"I am well satisfied that you should think it enough," he returned laughingly, "but I do not. Here is something more." As he spoke he took from his pocket two sealed envelopes and put one into the hand of each.

They took them with a pleased, "Oh, thank you, papa!" and hastened to open them and examine the contents.

"What is it, papa?" asked Grace with a slightly puzzled look at a folded paper found in hers.

"A certificate of stock which will increase your allowance of pocket money to about ten dollars a week."

"Oh, how nice! how kind and generous you are, papa!" she exclaimed, putting an arm about his neck and showering kisses on his lips and cheek.

"And mine is just the same, is it not, papa?" asked Lucilla, taking her turn in bestowing upon him the same sort of thanks. "But oh, I am afraid you are giving us more than you can well spare!"

"No, daughter dear," he said, "you need trouble yourselves with no fears on that score. Our kind heavenly Father has so prospered me that I can well afford it; and I have confidence in my dear girls that they will not waste it, but will use it wisely and well."

"I hope so, papa," said Grace. "You have taught us that our money is a talent for which we will have to give an account."

"Yes, daughter, I hope you will always keep that in mind, and be neither selfish nor wasteful in the use you put it to."

"I do not mean to be either, papa," she returned; "and I may always consult you about it, may I not?"

"Whenever it pleases you to do so I shall be happy to listen and advise you to the best of my ability," he answered with an affectionate look and smile.

CHAPTER III

A few days later a package of books was received at Woodburn which, upon being opened, proved to be histories of Florida ordered by the captain from the neighboring city. They were hailed with delight by Violet and the older girls, who were cordially invited to help themselves, study up the subject in private, and report progress in the evenings. Each one of them selected a book, as did the captain also.

"Aren't Elsie and I to help read them, papa?" asked Ned, in a slightly disappointed tone.

"You may both do so if you choose," their father replied, "but I hardly think the books will prove juvenile enough to interest you as much as it will to hear from us older ones some account of their contents."

"Oh, yes, papa! and your way is always best," exclaimed Elsie, her eyes beaming with pleasure. "Neddie," turning to her brother, "you know we always like listening to stories somebody tells us; even better than reading them for ourselves."

"Yes, indeed!" he cried, "I like it a great deal better. I guess papa's way is best after all."

Just then Chester came in and, when the usual greetings had been exchanged, glancing at the books, he exclaimed, "Ah, so they have come – your ordered works on Florida, captain?"

"Yes; will you help yourself to one or more and join us in the gathering up of information in regard to the history, climate, productions, et cetera, of that part of our country?"

"Thank you, captain, I will be very glad to do so," was the prompt and pleased reply. "Glad to join in your studies now and your visits to the localities afterward."

"That last, I am thinking, will be the pleasantest part," said Grace; "but all the more enjoyable for doing this part well first."

"Father," said Lucilla, "as you have visited Florida and know a great deal about its history, can't you begin our work of preparation for the trip by telling us something of the facts as we sit together in the library just after tea to-night?"

"I can if it is desired by all of you," was the pleasant-toned reply.

"Before Neddie and I have to go to bed, papa, please," exclaimed little Elsie coaxingly.

"Yes, daughter, you and Neddie shall be of the audience," replied her father, patting affectionately the little hand she had laid upon his knee. "My lecture will not be a very lengthy one, and if not quite over by your usual bedtime, you and Ned, if not too sleepy to be interested listeners, may stay up until its conclusion."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" exclaimed the little girl joyfully.

"Thank you, papa," said her brother. "I'll not grow sleepy while you are telling the story, unless you make it very dull and stupid."

"Why, son, have I ever done that?" asked his father, looking much amused, and Elsie exclaimed, "Why, Ned! papa's stories are always ever so nice and interesting."

"Most always," returned the little fellow, hanging his head and blushing with mortification; "but I have got sleepy sometimes because I couldn't help it."

"For which papa doesn't blame his little boy in the least," said the captain soothingly, drawing the little fellow to him and stroking his hair with caressing hand.

At that moment wheels were heard on the drive and Grace, glancing from the window, exclaimed joyfully, "Oh, here comes the Ion carriage with Grandma Elsie and Evelyn in it. Now, papa, you will have quite an audience."

"If they happen to want the same thing that the rest of you do," returned her father, as he left the room to welcome the visitors and help them to alight.

They had come only for a call, but it was not very difficult to persuade them to stay and spend the night, sending back word to their homes by the coachman. In prospect of their intended visit to

Florida they were as greatly interested as the others in learning all they could of its history and what would be the best points to visit in search of pleasure and profit.

On leaving the tea table all gathered in the library, the ladies with their fancy needlework, Chester seated near his betrothed, the captain in an easy-chair with the little ones close beside him – one at each knee and both looking eagerly expectant; for they knew their father to be a good storyteller and thought the subject in hand one sure to prove very interesting.

After a moment's silence in which the captain seemed to be absorbed in quiet thought, he began:

"In the year 1512 – that is nearly four hundred years ago – a Spaniard named Juan Ponce De Leon, who had amassed a fortune by subjugating the natives of the island of Puerto Rico, but had grown old and wanted to be young again, having heard of an Indian tradition that there was a land to the north where was a fountain, bathing in which, and drinking of the water freely, would restore youth and make one live forever – set sail in search of it. On the 21st day of April he landed upon the eastern shore of Florida, near the mouth of the St. Johns River.

"The day was what the Romanists called Paschal Sunday, or the Sunday of the Feast of Flowers, and the land was very beautiful – with magnificent trees of various kinds, stalwart live-oaks, tall palm trees, the mournful cypress, and the brilliant dogwood. Waving moss drooped from the hanging boughs of the forest trees; golden fruit and lovely blossoms adorned those of the orange trees; while singing birds filled the air of the woods with music, and white-winged waterfowls skimmed quietly on the surface of the water. The ground was carpeted with green grass and beautiful flowers of various hues; also in the forest was an abundance of wild game, deer, turkeys, and so forth.

"De Leon thought he had found the paradise of which he was in search. He went up the river, but by mistake took a chain of lakes, supposing them to be a part of the main river, and finally reached a great sulphur and mineral spring which is now called by his name. He did not stay long, but soon sailed southward to the end of the peninsula, then back to Puerto Rico. Nine years afterward he tried to plant a colony in Florida, but the Indians resisted and mortally wounded him. He retreated to Cuba and soon afterward died there."

The captain paused in his narrative and Elsie asked, "Then did the Spaniards let the Indians have their own country in peace, papa?"

"No," replied her father. "Cortez had meanwhile conquered Mexico, finding quantities of gold there, of which he basely robbed its people. He landed there in 1519 and captured the City of Mexico in 1521.

"In the meantime Narvaez had tried to get possession of Florida, and its supposed treasures. He had asked and obtained of the king of Spain authority to conquer and govern it, with the title of Adelantado, his dominion to extend from Cape Florida to the River of Palms.

"On the 14th of April he landed near Tampa Bay with four hundred armed men and eighty horses.

"He and his men were entirely unsuccessful: they found no gold, the Indians were hostile, provisions scarce; and finally they built boats in which to escape from Florida. The boats were of a very rude sort and the men knew nothing about managing them. So, though they set sail, it was to make a most unsuccessful voyage. They nearly perished with cold and hunger and many were drowned in the sea. The boat that carried Narvaez was driven out to sea and nothing more was ever heard of him. Not more than four of his followers escaped."

The captain paused for a moment, then turning to his wife, said pleasantly, "Well, my dear, suppose you take your turn now as narrator and give us a brief sketch of the doings of Fernando de Soto, the Spaniard who next undertook to conquer Florida."

"Yes," said Violet, "I have been reading his story to-day with great interest, and though I cannot hope to nearly equal my husband as narrator, I shall just do the best I can.

"History tells us that Cabeza de Vaca – one of the four survivors of the ill-fated expedition of Narvaez – went back to Spain and for purposes of his own spread abroad the story that Florida was the

richest country yet discovered. That raised a great furor for going there. De Soto began preparations for an expedition and nobles and gentlemen contended for the privilege of joining it.

"It was on the 18th of May, 1539, that De Soto left Cuba with one thousand men-at-arms and three hundred and fifty horses. He landed at Tampa Bay – on the west coast – on Whitsunday, 25th of May. His force was larger and of more respectable quality than any that had preceded it. And he was not so bad and cruel a man as his predecessor – Narvaez."

"Did Narvaez do very bad things to the poor Indians, mamma?" asked Elsie.

"Yes, indeed!" replied her mother; "in his treatment of them he showed himself a most cruel, heartless wretch. Wilmer, in his 'Ferdinand De Soto,' tells of a chief whom he calls Cacique Ucita, who, after forming a treaty of peace and amity with Pamphilo de Narvaez, had been most outrageously abused by him – his aged mother torn to pieces by dogs, in his absence from home, and when he returned and showed his grief and anger, himself seized and his nose cut off."

"Oh, mamma, how very, very cruel!" cried Elsie. "Had Ucita's mother done anything to Narvaez to make him treat her so?"

"Nothing except that she complained to her son of a Spaniard who had treated a young Indian girl very badly indeed.

"Narvaez had shown himself an atrociously cruel man. So that it was no wonder the poor Indians hated him. How could anything else be expected of poor Ucita when he learned of the dreadful, undeserved death his poor mother had died, than that he would be, as he was, frantic with grief and anger, and make, as he did, threats of terrible vengeance against the Spaniards? But instead of acknowledging his cruelty and trying to make some amends, as I have said, Narvaez ordered him to be seized, scourged, and sadly mutilated.

"Then, as soon as Ucita's subjects heard of all this, they hastened from every part of his dominions to avenge him upon the Spaniards. Perceiving their danger the Spaniards then fled with all expedition, and so barely escaped the vengeance they so richly deserved.

"But to go back to my story of De Soto – he had landed a few miles from an Indian town which stood on the site of the present town of Tampa. He had with him two Indians whom he had been training for guides and interpreters; but to his great disappointment they escaped.

"The Spaniards had captured some Indian women, and from them De Soto learned that a neighboring chief had in his keeping a captured Spaniard, one of the men of Narvaez.

"After Narvaez landed he had sent back to Cuba one of his smaller vessels – on board of which was this Juan Ortiz – to carry the news of his safe arrival to his wife. She at once sent additional supplies by the same vessel and it reached the bay the day after Narvaez and his men had fled, as I have already told you, from the vengeance of the outraged Ucita and his indignant subjects.

"Ortiz and those with him, seeing a letter fixed in a cleft of a stick on shore, asked some Indians whom they saw to bring it to them. They refused and made signs for the Spaniards to come for it. Juan Ortiz, then a boy of eighteen, with some comrades, took a boat and went on shore, when they were at once seized by the Indians, one of them, who resisted, instantly killed, and the rest taken to the cruelly wronged and enraged chief Ucita, who had made a vow to punish with death any Spaniard who should fall into his hands.

"Ortiz' mind, as they hurried him onward, was filled with the most horrible forebodings. When they reached the village the chief was waiting in the public square to receive them. One of the Spaniards was at once seized, stripped of his clothes and bade to run for his life.

"The square was enclosed by palisades and the only gateway was guarded by well-armed Indians. As soon as the naked Spaniard began to run one of the Indians shot an arrow, the barbed edge of which sank deeply into his shoulder. Another and another arrow followed, the man in a frenzy of pain hurrying round and round in a desperate effort to find some opening by which he might escape; the Indians looking on with evident delight.

"This scene lasted for more than an hour, and when the wretched victim fell to the ground there were no less than thirty arrows fixed in his flesh, and the whole surface of his body was covered with blood.

"The Indians let him lie there in a dying condition and chose another victim to go through the same tortures; then another and another till all were slain except Ortiz. By that time the Indians seemed to be tired of the cruel sport and he saw them consulting together, the chief apparently giving the others some directions.

"It seems that from some real or fancied resemblance Ucita saw in the lad to the cruel wretch, Pamphilo de Narvaez, he supposed him to be a relative; and therefore intended him to suffer some even more agonizing death than than just meted out to his fellows. For that purpose some of them now busied themselves in making a wooden frame. They laid parallel to each other two stout pieces of wood – six or seven feet long and three feet apart, then laid a number of others across them so as to form a sort of grate or hurdle to which they then bound Ortiz with leathern thongs. They then placed it on four stakes driven into the ground, and kindled a fire underneath, using for it such things as would burn slowly, scarcely making a blaze!

"Oh, mamma! were they going to burn him to death?" exclaimed Elsie, aghast with horror.

"Yes," replied her mother; "and he was soon suffering terribly. But one of the Indian women who was present felt sorry for him and hastened away to the house of Ucita and told his daughter Ulelah what was going on. She was a girl of eighteen and not so hard as the men. She was sorry for the poor young man and made haste to run to the scene of his sufferings, where he was shrieking with pain and begging for mercy.

"Hearing those sounds before she reached the spot she ran faster and got there panting for breath. At once she threw herself at her father's feet and begged him to stop the execution for a few minutes. He did so, ordering some of his men to lift the frame to which Ortiz was fastened, and lay it on the ground. Ulelah then begged her father to remember that Ortiz had never offended him, and that it would be more humane – more to his honor – to keep him as a prisoner, than to put him to death without any reason or justification.

"The chief sternly replied that he had sentenced the Spaniard to death and no consideration should prevent him from executing him. Then Ulelah begged him to put it off for a day that was annually celebrated as a religious festival, at which time he might be offered as a sacrifice to their gods.

"To that at length Ucita consented. Ortiz was unbound and the princess placed him under the care of the best physician of their tribe.

"As soon as Ortiz began to recover every care was taken that he should not escape. He was made to busy himself in the most laborious and slavish occupations. Sometimes he was compelled to run incessantly, from the rising of the sun to its setting, in the public square where his comrades had been put to death, Indians armed with bows and arrows standing ready to shoot him if he should halt for a moment. That over, he would lie exhausted, and almost insensible, on the hard earthen floor of a hut, the best lodging the chief would allow him.

"At such times Ulelah and her maids would come to him with food, restoratives, medicines, and words of consolation and encouragement, all of which helped him to live and endure.

"When Ortiz had been there about nine months the Princess Ulelah came to him one evening and told him that their religious festival would be celebrated on the first day of the new moon. Ortiz had heard that the chief intended to sacrifice him on that occasion and of course he was sorely distressed at the dreadful prospect before him, and as the time drew near he tried to prepare his mind for his doom, for he could see no way of escape. Ulelah told him she had done all she could to induce her father to spare his life, but could gain nothing more than a promise to delay the execution of the sentence for a year – on one condition, that he should keep guard over the cemetery of the tribe, where, according to the custom of their people, the bodies of the dead were exposed above ground until the flesh wasted away, leaving only the naked skeletons.

"The cemetery was about three miles from the village, in an open space of ground surrounded by forests. The bodies lay on biers on stages raised several feet above the ground, and it was necessary to keep a watch over them every night to protect them from the wild beasts of prey in the surrounding woods. Generally those who were compelled to keep this watch were criminals under sentence of death, who were permitted to live, if they could, so long as they performed that duty faithfully. But they ran great risks from the wild beasts of prey in the surrounding forests and from effluvia arising from the decaying bodies.

"It seemed a terrible alternative, but Ortiz took it rather than suffer immediate death. Ulelah wept over him, and her sympathy abated something of the horror of his hard fate and helped him to meet it manfully.

"Next day he was taken to the place by the chief's officers, who gave him a bow and arrows and other weapons, told him to be vigilant, and warned him against any attempt to escape.

"His little hut of reeds was in the midst of the cemetery. The stench was horrible and for several hours overpowered him with sickness and stupor such as he had never known before. But from that he partially recovered before night, and toward morning the howling of wolves helped to arouse him; yet presently he nearly lost consciousness again.

"In the early part of the night he had contrived to scare away the wolves by waring a lighted torch which was kept ready for the purpose. But at length he became conscious that some living thing was near him, as he could hear the sound of breathing; then by the light of his torch he saw a large animal dragging away the body of a child.

"Before he could arouse himself sufficiently to attack the animal it had reached the woods and was out of sight. He was very ill, but roused all his energies, fitted an arrow to his bow and staggered toward that part of the forest where the beast had disappeared. As he reached the edge of the wood he heard a sound like the gnawing of a bone. He could not see the creature that made it, but sent an arrow in the direction of the sound, and at the same moment he fell to the ground in a faint; for the exertion had entirely exhausted his small portion of strength.

"There he lay till daybreak, then recovering consciousness, he by great and determined effort managed to crawl back to his hut.

"Sometime later came the officers whose duty it was to make a daily examination. They at once missed the child's body and were about to dash out the brains of Ortiz, but he made haste to tell of his night adventure; they went to the part of the forest which he pointed out as the spot where he had fired at the wild animal; found the body of the child, and lying near it, that of a large dead animal of the tiger kind. The arrow of Ortiz had struck it between the shoulders, penetrated to the heart, and doubtless killed it instantly.

"The Indians greatly admired the skill Ortiz had shown by that shot, and as they recovered the body of the child they held him blameless.

"Gradually he grew accustomed to that tainted air and strong enough to drive away the wolves, killing several of them. The Indian officers brought him provisions, and so he lived for about two weeks. Then one night he was alarmed by the sound of footsteps which seemed those of human beings. He thought some new trouble was coming upon him, but as they drew near he saw by the light of his torch that they were three women – the Princess Ulelah and two female attendants. He recognized the princess by her graceful form and the richness of her dress. She told him the priests of her tribe would not consent to any change of his sentence or delay in carrying it out. That Ucita had promised them he should be sacrificed at the approaching festival, and they were determined not to allow their deity to be defrauded of his victim. She said she had exposed herself to great risk by coming to warn him of his danger, for if the priests should learn that she had helped him to escape they would take her life – not even her father's authority could save her from them, – and to save his life she advised him to fly at once.

"He thought all this proved that she loved him, and told her he loved her; that in his own country he belonged to an ancient and honorable family and was heir to a large estate. He begged her to go with him and become his wife.

"When he had finished speaking she was silent for a few moments; then answered in a tone that seemed to show some displeasure. 'I regret,' she said, 'that any part of my conduct should have led you into so great an error. In all my efforts to serve you I have had no motives but those of humanity; and I would have done no less for any other human being in the same circumstances. To fully convince you of your mistake I will tell you that I am betrothed to a neighboring cacique, to whose protection I am about to recommend you. Before daybreak I will send a faithful guide to conduct you to the village. Lose no time on the way, and when you are presented to Mocoso, give him this girdle as a token that you come from me. He will then consider himself bound to defend you from all danger, at the hazard of his own life.'

"Ulelah and her maidens then left him and before morning came the promised guide, who conducted Ortiz through the trackless forest in a northerly direction, urging him to walk very fast, as he would certainly be pursued as soon as his absence was discovered.

"In telling his story afterward Ortiz said they travelled about eight leagues and reached Mocoso's village, at whose entrance the guide, fearing to be recognized by some one of Mocoso's subjects, left him to enter it alone.

"Some Indians were fishing in a stream near by. They saw Ortiz come out of the woods, and frightened by his outlandish appearance, snatched up their arms with the intention of attacking him. But when he showed the girdle which Ulelah had given him they understood that he was the bearer of a message to their chief, and one of them came forward to give the usual welcome, and then led him to the village, where his Spanish dress, which he still wore, attracted much attention, and he was ushered into the presence of Mocoso. He found that chief a youthful Indian of noble bearing, tall and graceful in person, and possessed of a handsome and intelligent face. Ortiz presented the girdle. Mocoso examined it attentively, and greatly to the surprise of Ortiz seemed to gain from it as much information as if its ornamental work had been in written words.

"Presently raising his eyes from the girdle Mocoso said, 'Christian, I am requested to protect you and it shall be done. You are safe in my village; but do not venture beyond it, or you may have the misfortune to be recaptured by your enemies.'

"From that time Mocoso treated Ortiz with the affection of a brother."

"Oh, how nice!" exclaimed little Elsie. "But when Ucita heard that Ortiz was gone, what did he do about it?"

"When he heard where he was he sent ambassadors to demand that he be given up. Mocoso refused. That caused a misunderstanding between the two chiefs and delayed the marriage of Ulelah and Mocoso for several years. At the end of three years the priests interposed and the wedding was allowed to take place, but the two chiefs did not become reconciled and held no communication with each other.

"For twelve years Ortiz was kept in safety by Mocoso, then De Soto and his men came and Ortiz, hearing of their arrival, wanted to join them and set out to do so in company with some of his Indian friends.

"At the same time a Spaniard named Porcalla had started out to hunt some Indians for slaves. On his way he saw Ortiz with his party of ten or twelve Indians, and with uplifted weapons he and his men spurred their horses toward them. All but one fled, but he drew near and, speaking in Spanish, said, 'Cavaliers, do not kill me. I am one of your own countrymen; and I beg you not to molest these Indians who are with me; for I am indebted to them for the preservation of my life.'

"He then made signs for his Indian friends to come back, which some few did, and he and they were taken on horseback behind some of the cavaliers, and so conveyed to De Soto's camp where Ortiz told his story; the same that I have been telling you.

"'As soon as Mocoso heard of your arrival,' he went on, 'he asked me to come to you with the offer of his friendship, and I was on my way to your camp with several of his officers when I met your cavaliers.'

"While listening to this story De Soto's sympathies had been much excited for Ortiz. He at once presented him with a fine horse, a suit of handsome clothes, and all the arms and equipments of a captain of cavalry.

"Then he sent two Indians to Mocoso with a message, accepting his offers of friendship and inviting him to visit the camp; which he shortly afterward did, bringing with him some of his principal warriors. His appearance and manners were such as at once to prepossess the Spaniards in his favor. De Soto received him with cordiality and thanked him for his kindness to the Spaniard who had sought his protection.

"Mocoso's reply was one that could not fail to be pleasing to the Spaniards. It was that he had done nothing deserving of thanks; that Ortiz had come to him well recommended and his honor was pledged for his safety. 'His own valor and other good qualities,' he added, 'entitled him to all the respect which I and my people could show him. My acquaintance with him disposes me to be friendly to all his countrymen.'

"The historian goes on to tell us that when Mocoso's mother heard where he had gone she was terrified at the thought of what injury might be done to him – no doubt remembering the sad misfortune of Ucita and his mother, so cruelly dealt with by the treacherous Spaniards. In the greatest distress she hurried to the camp of De Soto and implored him to set her son at liberty and not treat him as Ucita had been treated by Pamphilo. 'If he has offended you,' she said, 'consider that he is but young and look upon his fault as one of the common indiscretions of youth. Let him go back to his people and I will remain here and undergo whatever sufferings you may choose to inflict.'"

"What a good kind mother!" exclaimed Elsie Raymond. "I hope they didn't hurt her or her son either."

"No," said her mother; "De Soto tried to convince her that he considered himself under obligations to Mocoso, and that he had only intended to treat him in a most friendly manner. But all he could say did not remove the anxiety of the poor frightened woman, for she had come to believe the whole Spanish nation treacherous and cruel. Mocoso himself at last persuaded her that he was entirely free to go or stay as he pleased. Still she could not altogether banish her fears, and before leaving she took Juan Ortiz aside and entreated him to watch over the safety of his friend, and especially to take heed that the other Spaniards did not poison him."

"Did Mocoso stay long? and did they harm him, mamma?" asked Elsie.

"He stayed eight days in the Spanish camp," replied Violet; "being inspired with perfect confidence in the Christians."

"Christians, mamma? What Christians?" asked Ned.

"That was what the Spaniards called themselves," she answered; "but it was a sad misnomer; for theirs was anything else than the spirit of Christ."

CHAPTER IV

The next evening the same company, with some additions, gathered in the library at Woodburn, all full of interest in the history of Florida and anxious to learn what they could of its climate, productions, and anything that might be known of the tribes of Indians inhabiting it before the invasion of the Spaniards.

At the earnest request of the others Grandma Elsie was the first narrator of the evening.

"I have been reading Wilmer's 'Travels and Adventures of De Soto,'" she said. "He tells much that is interesting in regard to the Indians inhabiting Florida when the Spaniards invaded it. One tribe was the Natchez, and he says that they and other tribes also had made some progress in civilization; but the effect of that invasion was a relapse into barbarism from which they have never recovered. At the time of De Soto's coming they had none of the nomadic habits for which the North American Indians have since been remarkable. They then lived in permanent habitations and cultivated the land, deriving their subsistence chiefly from it, though practising hunting and fishing, partly for subsistence and partly for sport. They were not entirely ignorant of arts and manufactures and some which they practised were extremely ingenious. They had domestic utensils and household furniture which were both artistic and elegant. Their dresses, especially those of the females, were very tasteful and ornate. Some specimens of their earthenware are still preserved and are highly creditable to their skill in that branch of industry. Among their household goods they had boxes made of split cane and other material, ingeniously wrought and ornamented; also mats for their floors. Their wearing apparel was composed partly of skins handsomely dressed and colored, and partly of a sort of woven cloth made of the fibrous bark of the mulberry tree and a certain species of wild hemp. Their finest fabrics, used by the wives and daughters of the caciques, were obtained from the bark of the young mulberry shoots beaten into small fibres, then bleached and twisted or spun into threads of a convenient size for weaving, which was done in a very simple manner by driving small stakes into the ground, stretching a warp across from one to another, then inserting the weft by using the fingers instead of a shuttle. By this tedious process they made very beautiful shawls and mantillas, with figured borders of most exquisite patterns."

"They must have been very industrious, I think," said Elsie.

"Yes," assented her grandmother. "The weavers I presume were women; but the men also seem to have been industrious, for they manufactured articles of gold, silver, and copper. None of iron, however. Some of their axes, hatchets, and weapons of war were made of copper, and they, like the Peruvians, possessed the art of imparting a temper to that metal which made it nearly equal to iron for the manufacture of edge tools. The Peruvians, it is said, used an alloy of copper and tin for such purposes; and that might perhaps be harder than brass, which is composed chiefly of copper and zinc."

"Had they good houses to live in, grandma?" asked Ned.

"Yes," she replied; "even those of the common people were much better than the log huts of our Western settlers, or the turf-built shanties of the Irish peasantry. Some were thirty feet square and contained several rooms each, and some had cellars in which the people stored their grain. The houses of the caciques were built on mounds or terraces, and sometimes had porticos, and the walls of some were hung with prepared buckskin which resembled tapestry, while others had carpets of the same material. Some of their temples had sculptured ornaments. A Portuguese gentleman tells of one on the roof or cupola of a temple which was a carved bird with gilded eyes."

"The religion of the Natchez resembled that of the Peruvians; they worshipped the sun as the source of light and heat, or a symbol of the divine goodness and wisdom. They believed in the immortality of the human soul and in future rewards and punishments; in the existence of a supreme and omnipotent Deity called the Great Spirit and also in an evil spirit of inferior power, who was supposed to govern the seasons and control the elements. They seem not to have been image-

worshippers until the Spaniards made them such. Their government was despotic, but not tyrannical. They were ruled by their chiefs, whose authority was patriarchal, who were like popes or bishops, rather than princes, but who never abused their power."

Grandma Elsie paused as if she had finished her narration and Ned exclaimed, "Oh, that isn't all, grandma, is it?"

"All of my part of the account, for the present at least," she said with her sweet smile. Then turning to Lucilla:

"You will tell us the story of the Princess Xualla, will you not?"

"You could surely do it much better than I, Grandma Elsie," was the modest rejoinder; "but if you wish it I will do my best."

"We do," replied several voices, and Lucilla, encouraged by a look and smile from her father which seemed to speak confidence in her ability, at once began.

"It seems that De Soto, not finding there the gold for which he had come, and encouraged by the Indians, who wanted to be rid of him, to think that it might be discovered in regions still remote, started again upon his quest, taking a northerly or northwesterly direction.

"As they journeyed on they came to a part of Florida governed by a female cacique – a beautiful young girl called the Princess Xualla. Her country was a fine open one, well cultivated. They reached the neighborhood of her capital – a town on the farther side of a river – about an hour before nightfall. Here they encamped and were about to seize some Indians to get from them information of the country and people. But some others on the farther side of the stream hastened over in a canoe to ask what was wanted.

"De Soto had had a chair of state placed on the margin of the stream and placed himself in it. The Indians saluted him and asked whether he was for peace or for war. He replied that he wished to be at peace and hoped they would supply him with provisions for his army.

"They answered that they wished to be at peace, but the season had been one of scarcity and they had barely enough food for themselves. Their land, they said, was governed by a maiden lady and they would report to her of the arrival of the strangers and what they demanded.

"They then returned to their canoe and paddled back to the town to carry the news to the princess and chieftains. The Spaniards, watching the canoe, saw those in it received by a crowd of their countrymen at the landing place, and that their news seemed to cause some commotion. But soon several canoes left the wharf and came toward the Spaniards. The first was fitted up with a tasteful canopy and various decorations. It was filled with women all gayly dressed, among them the princess, the splendor of whose appearance almost dazzled the eyes of the beholders. There were five or six other canoes, which held her principal officers and attendants.

"When the boats reached the shore the Indians disembarked and placed a seat for their lady opposite to De Soto's chair of state. She saluted the strangers with grace and dignity, then, taking her seat, waited in silence as if expecting her visitors to begin the conference.

"For several minutes De Soto gazed upon her with feelings of admiration and reverence. He had seldom seen a more beautiful female, or one in whom the conscious pride of elevated rank was so nicely balanced with womanly reserve and youthful modesty. She seemed about nineteen years of age, had perfectly regular features and an intellectual countenance, a beautiful form, and she was richly dressed. Her robe and mantilla were of the finest woven cloth of native manufacture and as white and delicate of texture as the finest linen of Europe. Her garments were bordered with a rich brocade composed of feathers and beads of various colors interwoven with the material of the cloth. She wore also a profusion of pearls and some glittering ornaments which the Spaniards supposed to be of gold. Her name was Xualla and she ruled over several provinces.

"Juan Ortiz, being acquainted with several Indian dialects, acted as interpreter and told of the needs of the Spaniards. Xualla was sorry the harvest had been so poor that she had little ability to relieve their wants. She invited them to fix their quarters in her principal village while it was

convenient for them to stay in the neighborhood. Then she took from her neck a necklace of pearls of great value and requested Juan Ortiz to present it to the governor, as it would not be modest for her to give it herself.

"De Soto arose, took it respectfully, and presented a ruby ring in return, taking it from his own finger. That seems to have been considered a ratification of peace between them. The Spanish troops were taken over the river and quartered in the public square in the centre of the town and the princess sent them a supply of good provisions, and poultry and other delicacies for De Soto's table.

"Xualla's mother was living in retirement about twelve leagues from her daughter's capital. Xualla invited her to come and see these strange people – the Spaniards – but she declined and reproved her daughter for entertaining travellers of whom she knew nothing. And events soon showed that she was right; for the Spaniards, acting with their usual perfidy, made Xualla a prisoner, robbed the people, the temples and burial places, and tried to get possession of her mother. Xualla was urged and probably finally compelled by threats to direct them to the mother's abode.

"A young Indian warrior, evidently occupying some prominent position under her government, was given directions which were not heard or understood by the Spaniards. He made a sign of obedience, then turned to the Spaniards and gave them to understand that he was ready to be their conductor. One of them, named Juan Anasco, had been selected to go in search of the widow, and now thirty Spaniards, under his command, started on that errand.

"As they proceeded on their way the young chief seemed to grow more melancholy. After travelling about five miles they stopped for a rest, and while the soldiers were taking some refreshments the guide sat in pensive silence by the side of the road, refusing to partake of the repast. He laid aside his mantle, or cloak, which was made of the finest of sable furs, took off his quiver, and began to draw out the arrows one by one.

"The curiosity of the Spaniards was excited; they drew near and admired the arrows, which were made of reeds, feathered with the dark plumage of the crow or raven, and variously pointed, some with bones properly shaped, others with barbs of very hard wood, while the last one in the quiver was armed with a piece of flint cut in a triangular form and exceedingly sharp. This he held in his hand while the Spaniards were examining the others, and suddenly he plunged the barb of flint into his throat and fell dead.

"The other Indians stood aghast and began to fill the air with their lamentations. From them I presume it was that the Spaniards then learned that the young chief was affianced to the princess and was very much beloved and respected by the whole nation. He had committed suicide to escape betraying the mother of his betrothed into the hands of the Spaniards. In obedience to the order of the princess he had undertaken to guide those cruel enemies to the widow's hiding place, but he well knew that she was forced to give the order and that the carrying out of it would be the cause of increased trouble to her and her parent, and he had told one of the Indians who were of the party that it would be better for him to die than to be the means of increasing the afflictions of those whom he so dearly loved.

"The grief and despair of Xualla, when she heard of the death of her betrothed, were so great that even the Spaniards were moved to pity. For several days she shut herself up in her own dwelling and was not seen by either the Spaniards or her own people.

"In the meantime the Spaniards were robbing the tombs and temples of the country, finding great spoil there.

"About a week after the death of the young chief, De Soto told Xualla she must send another guide with a party of Spaniards to her mother's habitation. She promptly and decidedly refused to do so, saying she had been justly punished once for consenting to place her poor mother in his power, and no fears for herself would ever make her do so again. She said he had made her as miserable as she could be, and now she set him at defiance. She wished she had listened to the advice of her wise counsellors and driven him away from her shores when he first came with his false and deceitful

promises of peace and friendship; for she would have saved herself from that sorrow and remorse which now made her life insupportable. 'Why do you still remain in my country?' she asked. 'Are there no other lands to be robbed, no other people to be made miserable? Here there is nothing for you to do; you have taken all we had, and you can add nothing to our wretchedness. Go, coward as you are! Cease to make war on helpless women; and if you must be a villain, let your conduct prove that you are a man!'"

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