FINLEY MARTHA

THE THORN IN THE NEST

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Finley M.

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Содержание

CHAPTER I 5
CHAPTER II 8
CHAPTER III 12
CHAPTER IV 16
CHAPTER V 21
CHAPTER VI 26
CHAPTER VII 30
CHAPTER VIII 35
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. 37

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CHAPTER I

"A malady
Preys on my heart, that medicine cannot reach."

Our story opens in spring of 1797, in a sequestered valley in Western Pennsylvania. On a green hillside dotted here and there with stately oaks and elms, and sloping toward the road, beyond which flowed the clear waters of a mountain stream, stood a brick farm-house – large, roomy, substantial; beautiful with climbing vines and flowering shrubs. Orchard, meadow, wheat and corn fields stretched away on either hand, shut in by dense forests and wooded hills; beyond and above which, toward the right, towered the giant Alleghenies; their summits, still white from the storms of the past winter, lying like a bank of snowy clouds against the eastern horizon.

But night drew on apace, the light was fast fading even from the mountain tops, and down in the valley it was already so dark that only the outlines of objects close at hand were discernible as our hero, Kenneth Clendenin, mounted upon Romeo, his gallant steed, entered it from the west and slowly wended his way toward its one solitary dwelling. The road was familiar to both man and horse, and ere long they had reached the gate.

A negro boy perched on the top of the fence, with his hands in his pockets, whistling softly to himself in the dark, broke off suddenly in the middle of his tune, sprang nimbly to the ground and took the bridle, exclaiming, "Ki, Massa Doctah! t'o't dat you and ole Romeo comin' up de road. Ole Aunt Vashti she tole me watch out hyar an' ax you ef you's had yo' suppah, sah?"

"Yes, Zeb, tell her I have and shall want nothing more to-night," answered the traveller, alighting. "Rub Romeo down and give him a good feed."

"Dat I will, Massa Doctah; I neber 'glects ole Romeo," returned the lad, vaulting into the saddle and cantering off to the stable, while the gentleman walked quickly up the path leading to the house.

Within a wood fire burned brightly in the wide chimney of the living room. An arm-chair stood on each side of the hearth, the master of the house occupying one, his wife the other, she with her knitting, he half crouching over the fire, watching the flickering flames in moody silence.

At a table on the farther side of the room, a little girl was poring over a book by the light of a tallow candle. She had seemed very intent upon its pages, but at the first sound of the approaching footsteps sprang up and ran to open the door.

"At last, Kenneth!" she cried, in a joyous but subdued tone.

"Yes, little sister," he said, laying his hand caressingly for an instant on her pretty brown hair, and smiling into the bright, dark eyes. "I'm glad to find you up, I thought you went to bed with the chickens."

"Not to-night – the last – O Kenneth! Kenneth!" and she burst into passionate weeping.

"Marian, my little pet sister," he whispered, sitting down and drawing her to his breast with a tender caress, "try to be cheerful for mother's sake."

"I will," she answered, hastily wiping away her tears. "I have a parting present for you, Kenneth," she went on with a determined effort to seem bright and gay; "a pair of stockings made of my own lamb's wool, and every stitch knit by my own fingers – I took the last to-night, and you're to travel in them."

"Many thanks," he said, "my feet will surely keep warm in such hose, though the nights are still very cool."

"Yes, come nearer to the fire, Kenneth," said the mother, who had been watching the two, silently, but with glistening eyes.

She was a woman of middle age, gentle mannered, with a low and peculiarly sweet-toned voice, a tall and stately figure, and a face that told a story of trial and sorrow borne with patience and resignation.

Kenneth resembled her strongly in person and manner, he had the same noble contour of features – the broad high forehead, the large dark gray eye, keen yet tender in expression.

"Thank you," he said, coming forward and taking his stand upon the hearth, where the firelight fell full upon his tall, manly form, "its warmth is by no means unpleasant."

"Sit down, Kenneth; sit down, and take me on your knee," said Marian, bringing him a chair.

"Are you not growing rather large and heavy for that?" the mother asked with a slight smile, as Kenneth good-humoredly complied with the request.

"I'll be bigger and heavier before he has another chance," remarked the child, putting an arm about Kenneth's neck and gazing wistfully into his eyes.

"But not too big, never too big, to take your seat here," he responded, drawing her closer. "Ah, there will be many a lonely hour when I shall long for my little sister, long to feel her weight upon my knee, her arm about my neck, just as I feel them now."

"Why do you all talk so much?" queried the older man sharply, speaking for the first time since Kenneth's entrance, and turning somewhat angrily toward the little group. "You leave me no peace of my life with your incessant gabble, gabble."

With the last word he rose and withdrew to an inner room.

No one answered or tried to detain him: the shade of sadness deepened slightly on the mother's calm face, and Marian's arm tightened its hold on Kenneth's neck, but no one spoke and the room was very still for a moment.

Then the mother, glancing at the dial-plate of a tall old-fashioned clock, ticking in a corner, said, "Marian, my child, it is growing late, and you will want to be up betimes in the morning."

The little girl, heaving a sigh, reluctantly bade them good-night and retired.

Kenneth looked after her.

"What a sweet creature she is! what a lovely woman a few years will make of her," he said; but catching the expression of the mother's countenance, he ended abruptly, with almost a groan.

She had dropped her knitting in her lap, her face had grown very pale, her lips quivered, and there was a look of anguish in her eyes.

Kenneth longed to comfort her, but could find no words. He brought a glass of water and held it to her lips.

She swallowed a mouthful, and as he set the glass down on a stand by her side, took up her work again with a slight sigh. The spasm of pain seemed to have passed, and her face resumed its accustomed expression of patient endurance.

He stood gazing down on her, his eyes full of a wistful tenderness.

"Mother," he said, bending over her and speaking in a voice scarce raised above a whisper, "our God is very good, very merciful, surely He will hear our united prayers that it – that fearful curse – may never light on her."

"His will be done with me and mine," she answered low and tremulously. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

He turned and paced the room for several minutes, then came back to her side.

"And I – am I right to go and leave you thus? – alone – unprotected, if – "

She looked up with a great courage in her noble face. "Yes, go, Kenneth; I do not fear, and it is best for you and for him. You forget how fully we have both been convinced of that."

"How brave you are, how strong in faith!" he cried admiringly.

She shook her head in dissent. "You do not know how my heart fails me at times when I think of my dear boy far away in that Northwestern Territory fighting his battle with the world among strangers, often exposed to the pitiless storms, or in danger from wild beasts or savage Indians; coming home from his long rides over prairies and through forests, wet, cold, and weary, and finding no one to cheer him and comfort him."

There were tears in her eyes and in her voice.

"Don't be troubled about me," Kenneth said cheerily, "I am young and vigorous, and shall rather enjoy roughing it, in the pursuit of my calling?"

"A noble calling to one who follows it in the right spirit, Kenneth. Your arrangements are all completed?"

"Yes; we meet at the cross-roads an hour after sunrise."

She gave him a troubled, anxious look, opened her lips as if to speak, then closed them again.

"What is it, mother?" he asked. "Why should you hesitate to say to me all that is in your heart?"

"Miss Lamar! I saw her the other day. She is sweet and fair to look upon, and very winsome in her ways, but – "

The sentence was left unfinished, while her eyes sought his with a yearning, wistful look.

"I will be on my guard," he said, huskily. "I know that marriage is not for me – as a physician I am convinced of it as another might not be – unless – oh, there will come to me, at times, a wild hope that there may one day be an end to this suspense – this torturing doubt and fear!"

"Too many years have passed," she answered sadly. "I have no longer any expectation that it will ever be cleared up this side the grave."

"Do not say it," he entreated, "it must be done! I shall never resign hope till – I have attained to some certainty; and yet, and yet – in either case it must be grief of heart to me."

"My poor boy!" she murmured, regarding him with tenderly compassionate gaze; then after a pause, "Kenneth," she remarked, "there is little Clendenin about you except the name; you strongly resemble my mother's family in both disposition and personal appearance."

"And yet," he said, with a melancholy smile, "there is nothing more certain than that I am a Clendenin."

"Well," she said, gazing upon him with loving pride, yet with eyes dim with unshed tears, "it is a family of no mean extraction; and an honest, pious ancestry is something to be thankful for."

CHAPTER II

Kenneth Clendenin, having completed his medical studies at Philadelphia, graduated with honor, and afterward spent a year in the hospitals there, was now about emigrating to Chillicothe, a town recently laid out by General Nathaniel Massie, in what was then the Northwestern Territory; now the state of Ohio.

None of his family were to accompany him, but he was to act as escort to two ladies, who, with their children, were also going thither to join their husbands. One of them had under her care a young orphan girl, bound to the same place, where she was to make her home with a married brother, Major Lamar.

The Clendenin household were early astir on the morning succeeding the events related in the former chapter. Before the sun had peeped above the mountain tops they were summoned to a savory and substantial breakfast, prepared by old Vashti, who had been cook in the family since Kenneth's earliest recollection.

He was the first to answer the call; coming in from a farewell tramp about the premises, to find the faithful old creature in the act of setting the last dish upon the table.

"I'se done my bes', honey," she said to him, with tears in her eyes. "It mos' breaks dis ole heart to tink you won't eat no mo' dis chile's cookin'."

"I don't know that, Aunt Vashti," he responded, smiling, "I'm not going quite out of the world."

"'Pears mighty like it, honey," she said; then seeing his eyes wandering uneasily about the room and the porch beyond, "You's lookin' for ole marster?" she whispered, coming close to his side. "He was off to de woods wid his gun 'fore daylight. 'Spect he didn't want to say good-by."

"Probably," he answered, with a slight sigh; then turned with an affectionate greeting to his mother and Marian, who entered the room at that instant.

They sat down at once to their repast, without the husband and father, no one remarking upon his absence, or asking any questions in regard to it; the meal was, indeed, almost a silent one; the hearts were too full for much speech.

Kenneth's saddle-bags and portmanteau were in readiness, packed by the mother's loving hands, and Romeo stood pawing at the gate. Zeb's horse, too, was there, tied to the fence near by, while its rider was eating his breakfast in the kitchen.

The travelers had no time for loitering, for many miles of rough road must be passed over that day.

The adieus were quickly spoken, and the windings of the road soon hid master and servant from the view of the weeping, disconsolate Marian and her sorrowful-faced mother.

Kenneth's heart, too, was heavy, spite of the cheerful air he had assumed for the sake of the dear ones he was leaving behind; but Zeb seemed in fine spirits. He was young and light-hearted, had no relatives to leave, in fact loved "de doctah" better than any other human creature.

And he was going to see the world, a prospect which thrilled him with delight.

The sun was now shining brightly, birds sang cheerily in the trees that bordered the roadside, the morning air was fresh and exhilarating, and Zeb's spirits rose high as he cantered along at a respectful distance behind his master.

A mile away from Glen Forest, as the Clendenin place was called, they came out upon a cleared place where stood a little country church in the midst of an enclosure, whose grass-covered mounds, with here and there a stone slab, proclaimed it the settlers' last resting place.

Here Kenneth drew rein, and calling to Zeb bade him ride on to the cross-roads and there await his coming; and if their fellow travellers should arrive first, tell them he would join them in a few moments.

"Yes, sah," returned the lad, whipping up his horse, while Kenneth dismounted and made his way to a spot where four or five little graves, and one somewhat longer, were ranged side by side.

Giving only a glance at the others, the young man turned to this last and stood for some moments gazing down upon it with a look of grave, sad tenderness upon his noble, manly face.

"Angus Clendenin, aged fourteen," he murmured in low, moved tones, reading from the inscription on the headstone. "Ah, brother beloved, why were we so soon parted by grim death? We whose hearts were knit together as the hearts of David and Jonathan!"

But time pressed and he must away. Plucking a violet from the sod that covered the sleeping dust, and placing it carefully between the leaves of his note book, he remounted and pursued his journey.

As he reached the place of rendezvous, where Zeb was lazily sunning himself, seated on a fallen tree, with his horse's bridle in his hand, three large wagons came toiling along the intersecting roads; beside the foremost a graceful girlish figure, tastefully attired in riding hat and habit, and mounted upon a beautiful and spirited pony, which she was managing with the utmost apparent ease and skill; curbing its evident impatience to outstrip the slower and more clumsily built animals attached to the vehicles.

At sight of Kenneth, however, she loosened her hold upon the rein, and came cantering briskly up with a gay "Good-morning, Dr. Clendenin."

The face that met his gaze was so fair and winsome, so bright with youthful animation, that the grave young doctor could not forbear a smile as he returned her greeting with courtly grace.

Nellie Lamar's beauty was of a very delicate type – a sylph-like form, delicately moulded features, a sweet, innocent expression, complexion of lilies and roses, a profusion of pale golden hair, beautifully arched and pencilled brows, large melting blue eyes, "deeply, darkly, beautifully blue," and fringed with heavy silken lashes, many shades darker than the hair.

She was but fifteen, just out of school and quite as guileless and innocent as she looked.

A charming blush mantled her cheek as she caught the admiring glance of Kenneth's eye.

"So, so, Fairy, be quiet, will you?" she said, tightening her rein with one hand, while bending low over her pony's neck she softly patted and stroked it with the other. "If those clumsy, slow-moving creatures would but travel faster!" she exclaimed with pretty petulance, lifting her head again and sending an impatient glance in the direction of the approaching wagons. "Neither Fairy nor I can well brook having to keep pace with them."

"They are somewhat more heavily laden than she," he said smilingly, with some difficulty restraining the impetuosity of his own steed, as he spoke; "she should have charity for them. But I fear Romeo is disposed to join her in leaving them behind. We will lead the van, however, Miss Lamar, and sometimes indulge these restless spirits in a run of a few miles ahead; if it is but to return again."

"Ah, that will be delightful!" she cried with almost childish vehemence. "I have fairly dreaded the thought of travelling at this snail's pace all the way to Chillicothe."

The wagons had now come up, and from the foremost peered out two chubby, rosy boy faces.

"O Doctor Clendenin! won't you take me up behind you?" shouted the owner of one, the other chiming in, "Me, too, doctor, me too!"

"Hush, Tom! hush, Billy! you should not ask such a thing. Doctor, don't mind them," quickly interposed the mother, showing her cheery, matronly face alongside of theirs.

"Good morning, Mrs. Nash," Kenneth said, moving to the side of the wagon. "We have an auspicious day for starting upon our long journey."

"Yes, indeed, doctor; and how thankful I am that we're all well and so comfortably accommodated."

"You don't seem to care at all for the old home scenes and friends we're leaving behind, Sarah," whined a woman's voice from the second vehicle; "but for my part I shall never, never forget them,

and I think it's dreadfully hard I should have to go away from them all into that howling wilderness, as one may say," and the voice was lost in a burst of sobs.

"But we're going to our husbands, Nancy, and they ought to be more to us than all the world beside," returned Mrs. Nash, cheerfully. "Dear me, I'm just as glad as can be to think that in a few weeks my Robert and I will be together again for good and all."

It was characteristic of the two, who were sisters-in-law, the one always looking at the bright side of life, the other at the dark; the one counting up her mercies, the other her trials.

"It'll be a rough, hard journey, and some of us will be sure to get sick," sighed Mrs. Barbour. "Flora's always been a delicate child, and I'll never take her there alive."

"She's looking well," remarked Kenneth, glancing in at the bright eyes and pink cheeks of a little girl, sitting contentedly by Mrs. Barbour's side.

"And we'll have the doctor handy all the way, you know," suggested Mrs. Nash. "Tom, Tom, be quiet," for the boy was still clamoring for a ride on Romeo.

"So you shall," Kenneth said, lifting him to the coveted place, "and, Billy, you shall have your turn another time."

The third wagon carried no passenger; its load consisting of baggage, household stuff, a tent and provision for the way, for there were few houses of entertainment on the route and it would often be necessary to camp out for the night.

The roads were new and rough; in many places in very bad condition. Sometimes there was a mere bridle path, and bushes and branches must be cut away, or fallen trees removed, to allow the wagons to pass.

At noon of this first day they halted on the banks of a bright little stream, dined upon such fare as they had brought with them, and rested for an hour or two; allowing their horses to graze and the children to disport themselves in racing about through the underbrush in search of wild flowers, in which Miss Nell presently joined them.

Kenneth, leaving the two women sitting together on a log, strolled away in another direction, toward Zeb and the drivers who were keeping guard over the horses and wagons.

"Dear me!" sighed Mrs. Barbour, "what a journey we have before us! how we're ever to stand it I don't know; I am tired already."

"Already!" echoed her sister; "why I don't intend to be really tired for a week."

"I'd like to know what intentions have to do with it," returned the first speaker, rather angrily.

"A good deal, I assure you," asserted Mrs. Nash, with decision. "Make up your mind to be miserable and you can't fail to be so; resolve to enjoy yourself, and you're almost equally sure to do that."

"Humph!" grunted her companion, turning away with a scornful toss of the head.

"What's wrong?" asked Miss Lamar, coming toward them with her hands full of delicate spring blossoms.

"Wrong! where?" returned Mrs. Barbour, sharply, thinking the query aimed at her.

"Yonder," Nell answered, gazing anxiously in the direction of the group about the wagons; "they all seem to be busying themselves about that wheel."

"There, I knew it!" cried Mrs. Barbour, "something's broken, and we'll be kept here all night; and we'll be having such accidents all the way. Nobody ever was so unfortunate as I am."

"Why you more than the rest of us?" asked her sister, dryly. "If one is delayed, we all are."

"It was only a broken linchpin, already replaced by another," announced Kenneth a few moments later; "and now, if you please, ladies, we will go on our way again."

At dusk the party arrived at a lonely log cabin in the woods, where they found shelter for the night.

Fare and accommodations were none of the best – the one consisting of fat pork, hominy, and coarse corn bread, the other of hastily improvised beds, upon the floor of the lower room for the women and children; upon that of the loft overhead for the men.

Mrs. Barbour, according to her wont, passed the time previous to retiring in fretting and complaining; talking of herself as the most ill-used and unfortunate of the human race, though no one else in the company was in any respect faring better than she, and all were not only bearing their discomforts with patience and resignation, but cheerfully and with an emotion of thankfulness that they had a roof over their heads; as a heavy rain storm had come on shortly after their arrival, and continued till near morning.

But that was another of the complainer's grievances; "The roads would be flooded, the streams so swollen that it would be impossible to cross with the wagons."

Nell, hearing these doleful prognostications, turned an anxious enquiring look upon Kenneth.

"Do not be alarmed," he said, leaning toward her, and speaking in an undertone of quiet assurance: "the rain is much needed and therefore a cause for thankfulness; and if streams cannot be forded immediately, we can encamp beside them and wait for the abating of the waters."

"But our provisions may give out," she suggested.

"Then we will look for game in the woods, and fish in the streams. No fear, little lady, that we shall not be fed."

Nell liked the title, and felt it restful to lean upon one who showed so much quiet confidence in – was it his own powers and resources or something higher?

The journey was a tedious and trying one, occupying several weeks; and Kenneth's office as leader of the party was no sinecure.

There were many vexatious delays, some occasioned by the wretched state of the roads, others incident to the moving of the cumbrous and heavily laden wagons; which latter might have been avoided had he travelled alone, or in company with none but equestrians.

But Kenneth was of too noble and unselfish a nature to grudge the cost of kindness to others.

And on him fell all the care and responsibility of directing, controlling, and providing ways and means; settling disputes among the drivers, and attending to the safety and comfort of the women and children.

These various duties were performed with the utmost fidelity, energy, and tact, and all annoyances borne with unvarying patience and cheerfulness; even Mrs. Barbour's peevish complainings and martyrlike airs failing to move him out of his quiet self-possession, or goad him into treating her with anything but the greatest courtesy and kindness.

He showed the same to all in the little company, and to those with whom they sought temporary lodgings here and there along the route; more especially to any who were sick, exercising his skill as a physician for their relief, and that without charge, though sometimes it cost him the loss of a much needed night's rest.

Mrs. Barbour was too completely wrapped up in herself and her own grievances, real or imaginary, to take note of these things beyond a passing feeling of wonder that Dr. Clendenin should bestow so much attention upon people who were not likely ever to make him any return; but ere the journey's end they had won for him a very high place in the respect and esteem of the other adults of the party, and in the hearts of the children.

Nell, who was often sorely tried by these same vexations and delays, formed an unbounded admiration for Kenneth's powers of forbearance and self-control.

She gave expression to it in talking with Mrs. Nash, as they found themselves alone for a few moments on the evening previous to their arrival at their destination.

"Yes," was the reply, "I am astonished at his patience; particularly with Nancy. She exasperates me beyond everything – she is such a martyr. Yes, always, in all places, and under all circumstances, she's a martyr."

CHAPTER III

Within five or six miles of Chillicothe an approaching horseman was espied by our travellers, and, as he drew near, Mrs. Nash and her two boys recognized him with a simultaneous cry of delight.

"Robert!"

"Father, father!"

To which he responded with a glad "Hurrah! so there you are at last!" as he put spurs to his horse and came dashing up to the side of the wagon containing his wife and children.

There was a halt of several minutes while joyous greetings, and eager questions and answers were exchanged; then leaving Mr. Nash in charge of the slow-moving vehicles, Kenneth and Nellie rode on toward the town.

It was the afternoon of a perfect day in May. Their path led them, now through the depths of a forest where grew in abundance the sugar maple, black walnut, buckeye, hackberry, cherry and other trees which give evidence of a rich soil; now across a beautiful prairie covered with grass from four to five feet high, and spangled with loveliest wild flowers, which with the blossoms of the plum tree, mulberry, crab apple and red and black haw, fringing the outer edge of the prairies, filled the air with delicious perfume, and feasted the eye with beauty.

Nellie was in ecstasies. "It is a paradise, Dr. Clendenin! is it not?" she cried.

"An earthly one," he answered with his grave kindly smile. "May you find much happiness in it, little lady."

"And you too, doctor," she said gaily, turning her bright, winsome face to his. "I'm sure you ought."

"You think it a duty to be happy? and you are right."

"A duty? I never thought of it in that light," she said laughing lightly.

"Ah! are we not bidden to be content with such things as we have, and to be always rejoicing?"

They had become excellent friends – these two – as day after day they rode side by side a little in advance of the wagons.

There was some ten years difference in their ages, a good deal seemingly at Nell's time of life. She looked up to Kenneth as to one much older and wiser than herself, and won by his ever ready sympathy and interest, talked to him with the charming frankness of her confiding nature and extreme youth. She told the history of her past years, particularly the last five, which had been spent in a boarding school in Philadelphia, and about the brother she was going to: – how he fought bravely for his country in the Continental army, had been taken prisoner by the British, what he had suffered on one of those dreadful prison-ships, till peace at last set him free, that he had married since and now had a family of children.

He was very much older than herself, she explained, being the eldest born while she was the youngest, and as both parents had died while she was a mere infant, he was like a father to her. Kenneth seldom spoke of himself, but she sometimes led him on by her questions to talk of his home at Glen Forest, his mother and Marian, for both of whom he evidently cherished a deep and tender affection.

Nell remarked that she had seen them at church once or twice, had thought Mrs. Clendenin very sweet and noble looking, and Marian the loveliest of little girls.

"You read them both aright," was Kenneth's answer, with a look and smile that made him, Nell thought, the handsomest man she had ever seen.

"If he were not quite so old," she said to herself, "perhaps, I don't know, but perhaps I might fall in love with him. It would be very foolish though, for of course he could never care for such a silly young thing as I am."

She had observed that he seemed a skilful physician and surgeon, and had discovered that he could tell her a vast deal about trees and plants and the birds and wild animals of the woods through which they passed.

They had never met in Philadelphia though living there at the same time, but it was pleasant to talk with him about the city and its various attractions.

So they had not been at a loss for subjects of conversation, nor were they to-day.

Silence fell between them for a few moments after Kenneth's last remark, then Nell said, with a saucy smile, "So you, I suppose, are never sad, Dr. Clendenin."

"Alas, Miss Lamar," he answered with a far away look in his eyes, an expression of keen anguish sweeping across his features, yet passing away so quickly that she could hardly feel sure it had been there, "my theory and practice do not always agree."

"Well," said she, "I don't believe there is anybody in the world who is not sad at times. Yet we have a great deal to make us glad, and just now I feel as blithe as a bird. We are coming to a river."

"Yes, the Scioto."

"Oh, then we must be near Chillicothe, are we not?"

"Yes, here is the ferry, and yonder, on the farther side, lies the town."

"That! I see only a few log cabins scattered here and there in a dense forest."

"True, miss, that is just what it is," said the ferryman, pushing off, for they were already on board his flat boat; "but you'll find more houses than you'd think, and the streets marked out quite straight and wide."

"And can you tell me in which Major Lamar lives?" Nell asked eagerly.

"Certainly, miss, there are not so many of us that we don't all know each other's faces, and houses too. The major lives on Walnut Street, but a step from where I shall land you. And yonder he comes," he added as the boat touched the bank and Romeo and Fairy bounded ashore.

Another moment and the girl was in her brother's arms, weeping for very joy, as if her heart would break, he soothing her with caresses and tender, loving words.

"There, there, Nell, darling, my sweet little sister, we're together at last, and don't mean to be parted ever again. Come, come, don't spoil your pretty eyes with crying."

She brushed away her tears at that, raised her head, saying, "O Percy, I'm so glad, so happy! How are Clare and the children?"

Then without waiting for an answer, "Oh how forgetful I am!" she cried turning to Kenneth, who with half averted face and dewy eyes, was thinking of Marian, and could almost feel the clinging of her arms about his neck. "Percy, this is Dr. Clendenin, who has cared for me like a brother, through all this long, tiresome journey."

The two grasped each other's hands warmly, and the major insisted on carrying Kenneth off with him to share the hospitality of his house.

It was a pleasant home circle into which he was presently introduced, – Mrs. Lamar, a fair, graceful, bright-faced lady, still young, and three or four rosy, bright-eyed boys and girls.

He received a warm welcome, while Nellie was embraced, kissed and rejoiced over to her heart's content, a heart that went out in strong affection to her kindred and craved a full return.

The evening meal was already prepared, the table set in the living room. Its snowy linen, delicate china and shining silver would not have disgraced a much more lordly dwelling; and the viands which presently came in smoking from the kitchen, fresh fish, game and hot corn-bread, might have tempted the appetite of an epicure; much more that of our travellers, who had fared but indifferently well for some days past.

The major's house was but a log cabin, the only kind of building in the settlement at that time, simply furnished, and consisted of only three rooms beside kitchen and garret; yet a great deal of comfort and enjoyment were to be found there, and Kenneth was not ill-pleased to be tendered the freedom of the house, and accepted the offer with hearty thanks.

"We elect you our family physician, sir, if you will not decline the office," said the major, as they rose from the table; "and as such you will of course consider yourself perfectly at home among us."

Kenneth was beginning to express his sense of his host's kindness when he was interrupted by a hasty summons to the bedside of a sick woman at the other end of the village.

"Come, Nell, and take a look at Chillicothe," the major said, leading the way to the grass plot in front of the house, where they seated themselves upon a log.

There were many such lying about the streets, many trees and stumps of those which had been felled, still standing; in fact nearly the whole town was still a wilderness; yet though not a year old, it already contained, beside private dwellings, two taverns and several stores and shops of mechanics, but among them all there were but four shingled houses, and on one the shingles were fastened with pegs. The streets were very wide and straight, crossing at right angles; not all cleared yet, but marked out by blazing the trees of the thick wood in whose midst the town was located.

There were many Indians in the vicinity. They had a town not far away, on the north fork of Paint Creek, and here in Chillicothe their wigwams were interspersed among the dwellings of the whites as Nellie noticed with some uneasiness.

But her brother reassured her. "There is no danger," he said, "they are perfectly friendly."

"Ah, but they are a treacherous race," she sighed with a dubious shake of the head.

"Quite a change from Philadelphia, Nell," Clare remarked, joining them with her knitting in her hand.

"Yes, but it is many weeks since I left there."

"Is it nice in Philadelphia, Aunt Nellie?" asked Bess, the eldest of the children, hanging affectionately about the young girl. "Do tell us what it's like, and about the pretty things in the shop windows."

"Another time, Bess," interposed the major. "Run away to your play now, and let older people talk. Nell, you saw Washington more than once?"

"Ah yes! many times – and he asked for you, Percy, in the kindest way, speaking in the highest terms of your services to the country."

"It is like him," the major exclaimed with emotion.

"And this young doctor, Nell," pursued Clare, with a meaning smile, "what is he like?"

"Just what he has shown himself to-night," the girl answered, blushing slightly, as she had a trick of doing, the rich blood showing readily through the clear, transparent skin.

"A handsome, polished, courteous gentleman, intelligent and well informed above the generality, that is about all one could learn in so short an interview," and Clare laughed low and musically. "But you have had an opportunity to study his character pretty thoroughly."

"A thing I never thought of doing," returned Nell, with some annoyance; "but I can tell you that he is very patient and very kind."

"Any one might well be that to you, Nell," remarked her brother, regarding her with a proud, affectionate smile.

"But it was not only to me, but to everybody, and to the very horses and dogs. He seems to be always thinking of others, never of himself, and to have a kind look or word or smile for the humblest and meanest creature that crosses his path, and," low and hesitatingly, "I believe it's because he is a real, true Christian."

"I know it, one can read it in his face," said the major heartily, "and I am rejoiced; for such men are needed here."

"There they are!" cried Nell, starting up. "See! the wagons are just crossing the ferry!"

The Nashes and Barbours had been old friends and neighbors of the Lamars before the emigration of the latter to Ohio, and the major and his wife now hurried to meet and welcome them; Nell and the children following.

Kenneth, having bestowed all needed attention upon his patient, was hurrying toward the ferry also, as indeed was nearly every man and women in the village, all alike rejoicing in every new accession to their numbers, and eager for news from the older settlements.

There were joyous greetings, hearty handshakings, and quite a crowd gathered around Kenneth, giving him welcome, expressing unfeigned satisfaction with the advent among them of a good physician.

"Why, hollo! I recognize an old friend! Kenneth Clenendin, I was never more surprised and delighted in my life!" cried a familiar voice, and our hero's hand was warmly grasped in that of a former schoolmate, a young man of pleasing, open countenance, and bluff, hearty manner.

"Is it you, Godfrey Dale?" Kenneth exclaimed, shaking the hand cordially, his face lighting up with pleasure. "Why, where did you come from?"

"From Tiffen's tavern over yonder, the sign of the General Anthony Wayne," returned Dale, laughing.

"You are here as a settler?"

"Yes, and as land agent and lawyer. It's a fine country, Kenneth, and men of both your profession and mine are needed in it. Come, let me show you my quarters. You must share them for the present, at all events."

And linking his arm in that of his friend, he led the way, nearly all the men of the crowd following.

The General Anthony Wayne was no spacious modern hotel, but like its neighbors a log building with windows of greased paper, its accommodations of the plainest.

A cheerful wood fire blazed in its wide chimney, but the evening was a warm one for the time of year, and the company preferred the outer air.

They grouped themselves about the door, sitting on stumps and logs, or leaning against the trees, while Kenneth, the centre of the throng, patiently answered questions and gave all the information in his power regarding matters of public interest both at home and abroad.

The sun went down behind the hill overlooking the valley on the west, the stars shone from a clear sky overhead, and lights twinkled here and there among the trees.

Nell, standing in the doorway of her brother's house, asked what they were, remarking:

"They are many more in number than the cabins."

"Yes," answered Clare, "do you not know that the Indians have a way of lighting up their wigwams with torches made of the splinters of birch and pine?"

"I wish," murmured the girl, with a slight shudder, "that they could be kept away – miles away from the town."

CHAPTER IV

Early hours were the rule among the settlers in those primitive days, and by nine o'clock all was darkness and silence in the dwelling of the Lamars.

A bed stood in one corner of the large family room, a trundle bed beneath it, which was drawn out at night; and here slept the parents and younger children.

One of two smaller apartments between this and the kitchen was appropriated to Nell; the other occupied by the older children.

The young girl was roused from her sleep in the middle of the night by something falling down the wall close to her side.

"Percy! Percy!" she screamed in affright.

"What is it, Nell?" answered the major, springing out of bed.

"Oh, I don't know, I don't know! It's too dark to see! But, oh, come and bring a light quickly!"

That was more easily said than done; friction matches were as yet an unknown luxury; the choice was between flint and steel and the fire covered upon the kitchen hearth.

He chose the latter, but it was a work of time to hunt out a coal from the ashes, and blow it into life till it would ignite the wick of a candle.

The thing was accomplished at last, however, and the light revealed a viper beneath Nell's bed.

The major succeeded in killing it, and soothing his sister's alarm with a few kindly reassuring words, again retired to rest.

It was some time before Nell's fears were forgotten in sleep, and a grumbling voice from the kitchen woke her early in the morning.

"Dear me, who's been rakin' ober dis fire? It's clar out, every spark of it; an', Tig, you'll have to run over nex' do' for a bran' to start it wid."

Silvy the cook was evidently very much out of humor.

"Pshaw! you didn't cober it up right," returned the boy.

"You git along!" was the wrathful answer. "I reckon you done raked it ober yourself; and I'll tell de major ef you don' quit cuttin' up sech shines. Be off after dat bran' now, fast as you kin go."

Nell turned over on her pillow and listened.

"Percy must have forgotten to cover up the coals again," she said to herself. "What a narrow escape I had! What with Indians and vipers in the town, bears, wolves and panthers in the woods, I seem to have come into a dangerous place."

She sighed rather drearily, a homesick feeling creeping over her, spite of her love for Percy and the rest.

But that presently vanished before the beauty of a balmy, sunshiny May morning, the sight of the well-spread breakfast table, and the affectionate greetings of her brother and the children.

"I'm going shopping, Nell," announced Mrs. Lamar two hours later, when the house had been set to rights, and Silvy given her orders for the day; "will you go with me?"

"Shopping!" echoed the young girl in incredulous surprise.

"Yes; do you think Philadelphia is the only place where one may shop?"

"No; but here in the woods?"

"Yes, here in the woods we can shop; we have already three stores."

So they donned their bonnets and sallied forth.

It was pleasant walking in the shade of the great forest trees, traversing at the same time woodland paths and village streets, the twitter of birds and rustling of leaves in the breeze mingling with the busy hum of human voices and the sound of the woodman's axe; for men were engaged here and there in laying the foundations for new dwellings or clearing spaces preparatory to doing so.

Not many rods from the General Anthony Wayne they came upon Dr. Clendenin and his friend Godfrey Dale, standing together in earnest conversation, while some workmen stood near apparently awaiting their directions.

The gentlemen lifted their hats, Kenneth with the grave, quiet smile Nell had learned to know so well, Godfrey saying "A pleasant morning, ladies."

"Are you going to build?" asked Mrs. Lamar, nodding in return.

"Yes; a double office with a hall between," said Dale. "We think it will be sociable."

A man came staggering up axe in hand. "I – I'm after – a job; and you – you wa – want these trees cut down?"

"We do, Davis, but you're in no condition to wield an axe at present," returned Dale; and growling out an oath the fellow staggered away.

"It's perfectly dreadful the amount of drunkenness we have here of late!" remarked Mrs. Lamar looking after him.

"Yes, whiskey's too cheap," said Dale; "men, women and children are getting drunk."

"How is that?" enquired Kenneth, "there is no distillery in the vicinity?"

"No; but since keel boats have begun to run on the Scioto the Monongahela whiskey manufacturers have rushed their firewater in here in such quantities that the cabins are crowded with it and it has fallen in price to fifty cents a gallon."

"They'll be making work for you, doctor," said Mrs. Lamar, "and I hope you'll try to convince the people that whiskey taken in such quantities is ruinous to health."

"Ruinous to body and soul," he said. "You may rest assured, Mrs. Lamar, that my influence will be decidedly against its use."

"We will take a stroll round the town, Nell, before making our purchases," Clare said, moving on. "What a grave, quiet manner Dr. Clendenin has, for so young a man!"

It was a new phase of life now presenting itself to the young girl, and she found it interesting. Her attention was presently attracted by a squaw walking a little distance ahead of them, wearing a shawl completely covered with silver brooches.

"They get them at Detroit in exchange for furs, moccasins and baskets," explained Clare. "You know, I suppose, that they are quite skilled in ornamental work with beads and porcupine quills."

The major joined them and they extended their walk for a mile or more through the woods, climbing the hill that forms the western boundary of the valley, from which they had a birdseye view of the village and the surrounding country, a beautiful landscape, in all its native wildness, diversified with hill and valley, forest and prairie, traversed by streams of living water.

Returning, they called upon Mrs. Nash, whom they found in excellent spirits, full of enthusiastic delight with her new home and her restoration to the companionship of her husband, after months of separation. That seemed to make amends for everything: accustomed comforts could be done without, inconveniences easily borne, they would soon be remedied, and in the meantime were mere subjects for mirth.

"She's a cheery and wise little woman," was the major's remark, as they went on their way again.

"Yes; always the same," assented his wife; "but we'll hear a different story here," as they approached another cabin. "This is where the Barbours live, Nell, and I know Nancy of old."

"So do I, and we part company here," said the major laughingly, lifting his hat to his wife and sister, and hurrying on his way, while they drew near the open door of the dwelling.

"Walk in, ladies," said Mr. Barbour, putting his little girl off his knee, and trying to give them seats.

"How do you do?" said his wife, coming forward. "I was just wondering if you two were going to be formal with an old friend like me. How fortunate you are in being able to run about enjoying yourselves, while here I've been hard at work since daylight; no time to rest after my long journey, but I must go to work washing up our dirty clothes the first thing."

"No, now, Nancy," expostulated her husband, "you needn't have done it. I told you there were camp-women about, from Wayne's army, that would be glad of the job."

"And I wouldn't have one of them near me if I never have any help," she retorted; "but I never get any thanks from you, work as hard as I will."

"Father's been at work too," put in Flora, leaning up affectionately against him; "and so have I, and we've got most everything fixed now."

"Yes, you look quite settled already," Mrs. Lamar remarked, glancing round the room.

"It needn't take long for that when you've but one room and next to nothing to put in it," whined Mrs. Barbour. "But perhaps it's just as well not to have much, or it might be stolen from you; for I dare say those camp-women and soldiers are thievish; and I don't suppose there's any sort of government here yet, to protect property."

"I've never heard of anything being stolen here," said Mrs. Lamar; "though to be sure the town is not a year old yet."

"Well, there was a suspicious looking woman prowling about here last night; she came in making an excuse that she wanted to light her pipe at the fire, and stared round as if she was taking note where things were, in case she should get a chance to help herself."

"Pooh! only idle curiosity," said Mr. Barbour. "You're always meeting trouble more than half way, Nancy."

"We're out shopping," remarked Nell, willing to change the subject of conversation.

"Shopping!" echoed Mrs. Barbour with a derisive laugh.

"Yes," said Mrs. Lamar, rising; "and that reminds me, Nell, that we should be attending to it at once."

It was no very arduous undertaking; in the first store they entered they were promptly supplied with the darning needle and skein of thread they were in search of. Change was made in a novel way; literally made by cutting a silver dollar into halves, quarters and eighths.

The merchant, an unmarried man, was extremely polite and courteous, and while waiting upon the ladies cast many a furtive, admiring glance at the slight, graceful figure and fair face of the major's young sister.

Kenneth had a call that afternoon to a case of delirium tremens, which took him past the dwelling of the Barbours.

He knew they were not in, having seen them but a few moments before strolling in the opposite direction, and was therefore surprised, within a few yards of the cabin, to see a man issue from the back door, with a bundle under his arm, and disappear among the trees.

The doctor paused for an instant, with the thought of giving pursuit, but the call for his services was urgent, and he hurried on again.

Turning a corner the next moment he came suddenly upon a man and woman conversing together in low tones, who at sight of him shrank guiltily back into the shadow of the trees; but not before his quick eye had caught a sight of their faces in the gathering gloom, for twilight had already set in, and his ear a few words of their talk.

"A pretty good haul considering."

"Yes; and now we'd best be off."

Suspicious words enough, but Kenneth had no time to think of them then, nor for hours afterward – so critical was the condition of his patient. It was only when on returning about sunrise the next morning, they were recalled to his mind by the sound of Mrs. Barbour's voice lifted up in scolding and lamentation.

"Yes, they're gone, every one of them; – that overcoat, just as good as new, the shirt I finished only the day before I started from home, and that elegant bandanna handkerchief. I told you somebody would get in and rob us in our sleep, if you didn't fasten the door well. Perhaps you'll believe another time that my opinion's worth something."

"There, there, Nancy, don't go on as if everything we had was lost. The town isn't so large that a thief can keep himself hid very long in it," Mr. Barbour was replying as the doctor stepped up to the open door.

"Good morning," he said, "I accidentally overheard Mrs. Barbour's lament, in passing, and I think I can throw some light on this matter," then went on to tell of what he had seen and heard the previous evening.

"So you see, Nancy, we weren't robbed in our sleep after all," was Mr. Barbour's comment, addressed to his wife.

"No thanks to you, anyhow," she retorted; "and it's your fault all the same; because I wouldn't have gone out and left the house alone if I'd had my way."

Mr. Barbour subsided. Why could he not learn how utterly useless it was to attempt to justify himself under the accusations of his wife?

"And there you sit never moving hand or foot to find the thief and get your own out of his clutches!" she whined, moving about with disconsolate and martyrlike air at her work of preparing the morning meal.

"Well, well, I'll go and see what can be done," he said, rising and putting on his hat. "Doctor, would you recognize the thief?"

"I am quite sure I should know again the suspicious looking persons I have been telling you of," Kenneth answered as they stepped out together.

"Now don't be gone all day, Mr. Barbour; breakfast will be on the table in half an hour," his wife called after him.

"Very well," he said looking back, "am I to let the thief escape rather than keep you waiting for an hour?"

"Of course you'll do one or the other – probably both," she fretted, as he walked on without waiting for an answer, "though it needn't take half that time to scour this wretched little town from end to end."

It did not; scarcely ten minutes had elapsed before it was known by every inhabitant that a theft had been committed, and that a man named Brannon and his wife, people of low character, whose absence would be gain to the place, had absconded during the night. They were not desirable citizens, but the stolen property must be recovered, and the larceny punished.

A hot pursuit was immediately begun, and before noon the culprits were taken and brought back in triumph.

But as yet the town had no constituted authorities. What was to be done?

The citizens gathered together on the river bank, chose one of their number, a Mr. Samuel Smith, as judge, and proceeded to try Brannon in due form; a jury was empanelled, the judge appointed Godfrey Dale as attorney for the prosecution, and another young lawyer, Maurice Gerard by name, for the defence.

Witnesses were called and examined. The goods had been found in possession of the accused, but he stoutly affirmed that they were his own.

Barbour, however, was able to prove property, and Dr. Clendenin's evidence was strong against the prisoner, whom he identified without hesitation as the man he had seen carrying away a bundle from Barbour's cabin the previous evening.

There was other testimony, but Kenneth's was the most conclusive.

The judge summed up the evidence, the jury retired to a short distance, and in a few moments returned with the verdict of guilty, and that the culprit be sentenced according to the discretion of the judge.

The latter presently announced his decision: – ten lashes upon the naked back of the prisoner, or that he should sit upon a bare pack-saddle on his pony, while his wife taking it by the bridle

should lead it through every street of the village, pausing before the door of each house with the announcement, "This is Brannon who stole the great-coat, handkerchief, and shirt."

Brannon chose the latter horn of the dilemma, and a responsible person was appointed by the judge to see the sentence immediately and faithfully executed.

The crowd waited to see the man mounted upon the pony, then scattered to their homes or other positions favorable for watching his progress through the town.

He submitted to his punishment in dogged silence: glancing about him with an air of sullen defiance as he took his seat. Then his eye caught that of Kenneth fixed upon him in grave pity, and the look was returned with one of bitter hatred and revenge.

"Curse you!" he muttered under his breath, "the day will come when you'll repent of this."

CHAPTER V

The Brannons fled immediately upon being released, after the carrying out of the sentence. No one mourned their departure: but Nell Lamar, having heard from Dale of the look the culprit had cast upon Kenneth, rejoiced not a little in secret that they were gone.

"Dr. Clendenin had been so kind to her on her journey," she explained to herself, "that in common gratitude she must care for his safety."

Naturally, being both friend and physician to the major's family, Kenneth was a frequent visitor at their house. Though noticeably quiet and undemonstrative in manner, he soon became a great favorite with them all, from the parents down to the youngest child; and Nell saw no reason to appropriate his visits to herself, even when unprofessional.

Nor had she any desire to do so; and in fact his conversation was seldom directed to her. Yet it did not escape Clare's quick observation that the calm gray eye saw every movement of her young sister, and that no tone of the sweet girlish voice ever fell unheeded upon his ear.

She was well pleased, Nell could not help loving such a man, or being happy with him, so would soon be provided for, and the major relieved of her support.

That last would never have been the major's thought, his darling little sister was esteemed no burden by him. He was one of the wealthiest men in the place, held a highly responsible office under the general government, and had received large grants of land in compensation for his services in the Revolutionary war.

Nell was fond of her brother, yet stood somewhat in awe of him. He was a reserved, rather taciturn man, and military life had increased a natural tendency to sternness of manner toward those under his authority which belied his real kindness of heart. He had never a harsh word or look for Nell, yet she dared not lavish upon him the demonstrations of affection her loving young heart longed to bestow; dared not offer him a caress; and he rarely gave them unasked to her or to any one else except the youngest of his children.

Clare was more demonstrative and really meant to be very kind, but was as dictatorial and domineering in her way as the major in his, and before many days had passed she began to treat the young girl as a child, checking, criticising, reproving, and directing with the most exasperating persistency, and as having an undoubted right.

This was very trying to Nell's sense of womanly dignity; and though by no means an ill-tempered little body, she sometimes found it difficult to possess her soul in patience.

"Where now?" asked Clare one morning, addressing her.

"To the woods with the children, after wild flowers and mosses," returned the young girl gaily.

She was standing in the doorway swinging a broad-brimmed hat by its strings, her beautiful uncovered hair glittering like burnished gold in the sunbeams sifting down upon it through the leaves of the overshadowing trees, as they stirred restlessly to and fro in the pleasant summer breeze.

She was in a happy mood, light-hearted and free from care as the birds warbling overhead, and had been humming snatches of song till interrupted by Clare's question.

"You have been here nearly a week now," pursued that lady in precisely the tone she would have used to one of her children, "don't you think it is time to begin to make yourself useful? Life was never meant for a perpetual holiday."

Nell's cheek crimsoned.

"What would you have me do? offer my services as assistant to Silvy the cook, Maria the nurse-maid, or Tig the stable boy?" she asked in a slightly sarcastic tone.

"Silvy is an excellent cook, and it might not be at all amiss for you to take some lessons of her," said Clare. "But there are other employments. The children need instruction, and you ought to be able to give it. Then there are spinning and sewing."

"I don't know anything about spinning."

"I'll teach you, in return for the lessons you give the children in spelling, reading and writing."

"Very well, we'll talk of it when I come back from my walk," Nell answered, tying on her hat.

She was willing enough to make herself useful, but Clare's manner was irritating.

Her annoyance was, however, soon forgotten in the prattle of the children, and the beauty of the woods.

They wandered about till weary, then sat down on a log to rest.

"Now if I only had a book," remarked Nell.

"Why didn't you bring one?" asked Bess.

"I don't mean a Sunday book, such as those on the shelves in the sitting-room," was the half scornful reply.

"Aunt Nell, there are some other kinds of books up in the garret."

"What kinds?"

"Oh, I don't know; stories, I believe, but not fit for me to read, mother says."

Nell rose eagerly. "Come, let us go back," she said, "I must see those books. But how came they there?"

Bess explained as they wended their homeward way, she walking soberly by her aunt's side, the boys racing on before, climbing and jumping over stumps and logs.

The major had formerly been in the mercantile business, and in the garret were stowed away boxes of goods – a medley of many odds and ends which had fallen to his share in the division of unsold stock made by himself and partner in the winding up of the joint concern.

The garret was the favorite resort of the children when kept within doors by stormy weather, and Bess had made herself well acquainted with the contents of the boxes, turning them over and over in search of "pretty things" with which to bedeck her dolls and herself.

The books proved to be novels – "Claremont" complete in several volumes and an odd volume of "Peregrine Pickle."

Nell seized upon them with delight and carried them off to her bed-room. Books were rare luxuries in those days, there were no newspapers or magazines published in that region of country, and as yet there was no regular mail.

Nell read and re-read "Claremont," devoting to its perusal every spare moment when she could steal away unobserved to the solitude of her room, and carrying a volume with her in her rambles with the children.

Then she took up "Peregrine Pickle," but with sore disappointment that the first volume was missing; so much so that she at length plucked up courage to ask her brother what had become of it; though quite fearful that he would disapprove of her reading it.

"Well," he said with a smile, "I suppose my former partner has it, and somebody is probably as anxious for this as you are for it. I'm sorry, for your sake, that we were so careless in dividing our stock."

"It is just as well," said Clare; "time can be more profitably employed than in the reading of such trash."

"I consider it a very innocent amusement," replied the major, shortly; not over-pleased with the remark, seeing that it called a flush of wounded feeling to Nellie's fair cheek. "I remember that I enjoyed reading it myself. If it were in my power to get it for you, Nell, you should have it."

She thanked him with a look, then rose and left the room.

"This is but a dull place for her after Philadelphia," he said to his wife. "I have no doubt she misses the weekly newspaper and many another source of entertainment which she enjoyed there, but must do without here."

"Probably; but she is no worse off in regard to those things than any of the rest of us," said Clare coolly.

"You forget, my dear, that you have me," returned the major with playful pleasantry. "And the children," he added, taking his youngest on his knee. "We're worth a good deal, aren't we, Ralph?"

The major so sincerely regretted his sister's disappointment that it was frequently in his thoughts during the next week, and he was seriously considering the feasibility of sending to Philadelphia or New York for a box of books such as she would find both entertaining and instructive, when the want was supplied in an unlooked for manner.

Dr. Clendenin and his friend Dale had pushed forward their office building as fast as possible and taken possession.

Making a call upon Kenneth one afternoon, the major found him unpacking books and arranging them upon shelves he had had put up along the wall.

"Books!" cried the major. "You have quite a library. All medical works?"

"Oh, no," said Kenneth. "Will you step up and look at them? My stock is not large, but valuable, to me at least, and I hope to add to it from time to time."

"Valuable! yes, indeed, to a lover of literature," remarked the major running his eye over the titles. "Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Dryden, Gray, Goldsmith, Gibbon, Plutarch, Rollins, etc., etc. Poetry, history, fiction are well represented, and I see you have a goodly supply of religious works of the best class, also. Medical books, too, in plenty, but of their quality I am no judge."

"Yes, I shall not want for good companionship here in my somewhat rough bachelor quarters," Kenneth answered, surveying his treasures with an air of quiet content. "But I do not mean to be selfish, major, make yourself at home among my friends."

"Thank you," returned the major heartily, wishing that Nell had been included in the invitation; when Kenneth, as if in answer to his thoughts, said, "The ladies of your family, too, might find something here to enjoy."

Then the major told of Nell's disappointment, and half an hour later was on his way home, carrying her the "Vicar of Wakefield," and the assurance that Dr. Clendenin's entire library was at her service.

Nell's face sparkled with delight at the news, and the sight of the book.

"How kind in him!" she said. "I'll handle them with the greatest care."

For many months those books and the talks with their owner which naturally grew out of their perusal, were her greatest enjoyment; for as yet she had very few companions near her own age.

But as the town grew there was a corresponding increase in its young society and in the sources of amusement and entertainment open to her. She had many admirers and Kenneth stepped quietly aside, as one who had no desire to win the prize.

Mrs. Lamar did not understand it, no more did Dale, or Nell herself, though Kenneth had never comported himself as a lover and she had not consciously thought of him.

There were other things about Kenneth that puzzled Dale. He seemed to have some secret grief; there were times when his look and manner betokened inexpressible sadness, though he always shook it off and assumed an air of cheerfulness on being spoken to.

Dale's curiosity was piqued, and indeed he would have rejoiced to give all the sympathy and comfort that might be in his power; but there was a quiet, reserved dignity about Kenneth that forbade any intrusion into his private affairs.

He rarely spoke of himself or his own concerns; he sometimes mentioned his mother or sister, always with the greatest respect and affection, but his talk when they were alone together was of literature, of the interests of the community in which they lived, the state, the country, the acts of the government, and what was going on in foreign lands, or of Dale's own plans and prospects, in which Kenneth took the most generous, unselfish interest.

As a physician he was untiring in his efforts to relieve, patient and sympathizing, in manner gentle even to tenderness with the aged and with the little ones.

He soon came to have great influence in the community and it was always cast on the side of right. A man of pure morals and an earnest Christian, he was as ready and competent to pray with the sick and dying, and to point out to the troubled soul the paths of peace, as any minister could be.

These offices were performed as simply and easily as those others in which the healing of the body only was concerned.

Another thing Dale noticed, with the thought that it was decidedly odd, that Kenneth took evident pains to make acquaintance with all the Indians in the vicinity, and of every white man who had visited their tribes, whether near or far off, or had had much to do with them in any way: that he asked many questions, wording each with care to avoid arousing suspicion in regard to his motives, and that invariably his main object seemed to be to gain information in regard to whites living among the Indians.

Once Dale ventured to ask if he had ever had a friend or relative carried off by them; but the answer was a quiet "No," that while it left his curiosity entirely unsatisfied, gave no encouragement to further questioning.

They were in Dale's office; Kenneth had come across the connecting hall with some enquiry in regard to a piece of land for the disposal of which Dale was the agent, and a casual mention of the Indians had made a favorable opening for his query.

A moment's silence followed Kenneth's reply, then Zeb came rushing in.

"Somefin goin' on down to de rivah, sahs, Squire Smith goin' for to hol' court, dey say. Sent de constable to cotch the tief an' fotch him along double quick."

Dale sprang from his chair and caught up his hat.

"My services may be needed," he said, laughing, "though the squire doesn't make much account of law. Come on, doc; if the sentence should be flogging you may be needed too."

A man named Adam McMurdy, who cultivated some land on the station prairie below the town, had come in to Squire Smith with a complaint that during his absence the previous night, some one had stolen his horse collar; that he had examined the collars on the horses of the ploughmen at work this morning, recognized one of them as his, and claimed it of the horse's owner, Bill Slack.

That Slack had not only refused to restore it, insisting that it was his own, but used very abusive language toward him (McMurdy), and threatened to whip him for accusing him of the theft.

On hearing the story the squire immediately despatched his constable in search of Slack, with strict orders to bring him and the collar at once into court.

The court had already convened under the trees by the river side, and the constable was hurrying toward it with the collar in one hand, the accused tightly grasped in the other, as Dr. Clendenin and Dale stepped into the street.

They followed quickly on the heels of the constable. Life had so little of the spice of variety then and there that even so trivial an affair created some stir and excitement.

Also the squire had an amusing method of dealing out justice that made a trial conducted by him somewhat entertaining to those who were spectators.

Nearly all the men of the town were there.

The prisoner being arraigned at the bar of justice, the squire turned to McMurdy and asked, "How can you prove this collar to be yours?"

"If the collar is mine," he replied, "Mr. Spear, who is present, can testify."

Mr. Spear, the Presbyterian minister, stepped forward.

"If the collar is McMurdy's," he said, "I wrote his name on it, on the inner side of the ear."

"Hand it to me," said the squire. Taking it from the constable and turning up the ear, "Yes, here's the name. No better proof could be given, and my sentence is – "

"If the court will excuse the interruption," began Dale, a mischievous twinkle in his eye; "let me say that according to law, as – "

"No, the court won't be interrupted," returned the squire, frowning him down. "All laws were intended for the purpose of enforcing justice. I know what's right and what's wrong as well as the man that made the laws; therefore stand in no need of laws to govern my actions.

"My sentence is that the prisoner be tied up forthwith to your buckeye and receive five lashes well laid on."

It was done and the crowd dispersed. The trial had occupied scarcely five minutes and every one was satisfied except the culprit.

CHAPTER VI

"There's even-handed justice for ye, stranger?"

A stalwart backwoodsman in hunting garb of dressed skins was the speaker, and the words were addressed to Kenneth, near to whom he had stood during the brief trial of Bill Slack.

Dale had walked away in company with a brother lawyer, and Kenneth was turning from the unpleasant scene with a thought of pity for the weakness and wickedness of the unhappy criminal.

"Yes," he answered, "Squire Smith is a man of discriminating mind and judgment, very impartial in his decisions, and prompt in seeing them carried out. But what a happy world this might be if all were honest and upright!"

"That's true; but we've got to take it as it is.

"Got quite a town here," pursued the hunter, moving along by Kenneth's side as he walked up the street. "Last time I was round here in these parts, there wasn't so much as an Injun wigwam to be seen; nothin' but the thickest kind o' thick woods."

"I thought your face was quite new to me," said Kenneth. "May I ask where you are from?"

"You kin ask, sir, and I haven't the least objection in life to tellin'. I've been huntin' and trappin' all through this Northwestern Territory, along the Ohio and the Little Miami, and away up north by the great lakes; and even as far as the head waters of the Mississippi. And I come back with a lot of furs and skins. Sold 'em mostly in Detroit."

"Ah!" exclaimed Kenneth, with interest. "You must have had an adventurous life, and fallen in with many tribes of Indians."

"Humph! yes, young man; saw a good deal more of the ugly, treacherous varmints than I cared to. I hain't no love for 'em, and no more have they for me."

"You have had some encounters with them?"

"More'n a few, stranger. I've taken their scalps, and been mighty near losin' my own; have been in their clutches several times, run the gauntlet twice, and would have been burnt at the stake if I hadn't made my escape. However, I haven't any more to tell than any other man that's been huntin' and trappin' for ten or a dozen years."

Kenneth invited him into his office, set food and drink before him, and by dint of adroit questioning drew from him a good deal of information in regard to the various tribes among whom he had been.

"Have you ever met with any whites living with them?" he asked at length.

"Yes, occasionally. There's Simon Gerty; I saw him, and he's a worse savage than the redskins."

"But any others? Any women?"

"I met another man that was a prisoner, got away afterwards; and saw children at different times, girls and boys, both, that they'd stole away from their folks and adopted. And I saw a white woman a few weeks ago, that's been with 'em for years, and is married to an Injun; got a family of pappooses."

In reply to further questions he went on to describe the situation of the Indian village where he had seen this woman, but could give no description of her, except that she was very much tanned, dressed like the squaws, and had scarcely a more civilized look than they.

"I hope she's no kin o' yours?" he remarked, looking keenly at his questioner.

"No; I never had friend or relative taken by them," Kenneth answered, "though our family were pioneers, and several of them lost their lives by the Indians."

"Humph! then I reckon you hain't no love for 'em either?"

"Not so much as I ought to have, I'm afraid."

"How's that? Can't say as I see any call to love 'em at all."

"They are human creatures, and Christ died for them as well as for the white man. Doubtless they are equally dear to Him," Kenneth answered, with gentle gravity, fixing a kindly look upon his rough companion.

"Well, now, that may be," the man returned thoughtfully. "Fact is, I've never paid much attention to those things. Minister, are ye?"

"No; a doctor."

"Find much to do about here?"

"Not just now," Kenneth answered aloud, adding to himself, "Happily I can very well be spared for a few days."

Upon the departure of the backwoodsman from the office, Zeb was summoned and directed to saddle Romeo and have him at the door by the time his master should return from a round of visits among his town patients.

"I am going off on a hunt, Zeb, and shall want my gun, blanket and some provisions; get me some parched corn, bread and a little salt, and pack them in one end of my saddle-bags," was his final order.

"Yes, sah. You'll take me 'long, I s'pose?" interrogatively.

"No, Zeb, I'm going alone; I must leave you to take care of the office and see who calls. I shall be away for two or three days, or longer, and shall want to know when I return who have been wanting the doctor, that I may go to them at once."

"'Tain't jes' the very bestest time ob yeah for a hunt," muttered the boy, watching his master as he strode rapidly down the street. "Wondah what sort ob game Massa Doctah's gwine arter."

By noon of that day Kenneth had put several miles of hill and valley between him and Chillicothe.

He had gone, telling no one whither, or on what errand he was bound, and those who saw him leaving the town took it for granted that he had had a call to some sick person in the country.

His course was northwesterly, and for days he pressed on sturdily in that direction, taking an hour's rest at noon, subsisting on the provisions in his saddle-bags, and such small game as came in his way, at night kindling a fire to keep off the wild beasts, and sleeping on the ground, wrapped in his blanket, with his horse picketed near by.

His way lay through pathless forests and over trackless prairies where perhaps the foot of white man had never trod; the solitude was utter and the compass his only guide; not a human creature did he meet; but during the hours of darkness his ears were greeted with the cry of the panther and the howl of the wolf, now far in the distance, now close at hand.

But brave by nature and strong in faith, Kenneth committed himself to the care of Him who neither slumbers nor sleeps, and there in the wilderness rested as securely in the shadow of His wing, as though in the midst of civilization and compassed by walls and bulwarks.

But in regard to the success or failure of the object of his journey he was not equally calm and trustful. How is it that our faith is apt to be so weak in respect to our Father's loving control of those things which affect our happiness in this life, even when we trust to Him unhesitatingly the far greater interests of eternity? Ah how slow we are to believe that word, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God."

Such was Kenneth's experience at this time, earnestly striving, yet with but partial success, to throw off the burden of care and anxiety that oppressed him, now urging his steed forward with almost feverish haste, himself half panting with eagerness and excitement, and anon bringing it to a walk, while with head drooping and heavy sighs bursting from his bosom he seemed half inclined to turn and retrace his steps.

This hesitation, this shirking from the result of his quest, grew upon him as he advanced; but at length, "What weakness is this?" he cried aloud. "God helping me, I will throw it off and meet this crisis with Christian courage. Should the very worst come, it cannot peril that which I have committed

to His hand. Blessed be His holy name for that gracious word, 'I give unto them eternal life: and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.'"

With the last words his voice rang out triumphantly on the silent air. Romeo pricked up his ears at the sound and quickened his pace to a rapid canter.

"Right, my brave fellow!" said his master, patting his neck; "on now with spirit, we are not far from the end of this long jaunt."

They were crossing a prairie, a sea of waving grass bespangled with flowers of many and gorgeous hues, beyond which lay a thick wood.

It was afternoon of the third day and the sun near its setting, as they plunged into the wood. Here the light had already grown dim, and soon darkness compelled a halt.

Kenneth dismounted, secured his horse in the usual way, gathered dry branches and leaves, and with the aid of flint and steel had presently a bright fire blazing.

A couple of birds which he had shot during the day, hung at his saddle bow. These he quickly stripped of their feathers and prepared for cooking, which he managed by suspending them before the fire, each on the end of a pointed stick whose other end was thrust well into the ground.

A bit of corn-bread from his saddle-bags, and water from a running stream near by, filled up the complement of viands that formed his simple repast.

He had but just begun it when a slight sound like the crackling of a dry twig, near at hand, made him look up.

The flickering firelight showed him a tall dark form creeping stealthily toward him, another and much smaller one close at its heels.

He instinctively put out his hand for his gun, lying by his side, then drew it back as he perceived that the approaching strangers were a woman and child. The former was wrapped in an Indian blanket, and carried a papoose on her back.

"Me friend," she said in broken English. "Me hungry; papoose hungry," pointing to the little one trotting at her side.

"Sit down and I will feed you," Kenneth answered, making room for her near the fire.

She seated herself upon the roots of a tree, the child crouching at her feet, laid the babe, which was sleeping soundly, across her lap, and taking the food he offered shared it with the other child.

Something in her look and manner half startled Kenneth. He hastily threw a pine knot upon the fire. It burst into a bright blaze, throwing a strong light upon the face and figure of the stranger, and Kenneth's heart throbbed as he looked keenly at her, at first beating high with hope, then almost it stood still in disappointment and despair.

"She is too young," he sighed to himself; then speaking aloud, "You are a white woman," he said.

"Squaw," she answered, shaking her head.

"You have grown up among the Indians and perhaps forgotten your own parents," he remarked, gazing earnestly upon her, "but your blood is white; you have not an Indian feature; your eyes are blue, your hair is red and curly."

She evidently but half comprehended what he was saying, gave him no answer save an enquiring bewildered look.

He called to his aid the slight knowledge he had gained of the Indian tongue, and at length succeeded in making himself understood.

At first she utterly denied that she belonged to the white race, repeating her assertion that she was a squaw, but finally admitted that he was right, acknowledging that she had a faint recollection of being carried away by the Indians in her very early childhood.

He asked if she would not like to go back; at which she answered very emphatically that she would not, she was the squaw of a young Indian brave, and the mother of these his children; loved husband and children dearly, and would on no account leave them.

She had strayed from her camp that day and lost her way in the woods, but would find it again and go back to the Indian village, distant not more than two or three miles, when the moon was up.

He ceased his persuasions, but regarded her with interest, thinking how sad it was that the child of civilized, perhaps Christian, parents should have become so entirely savage.

He asked if she knew of any other white woman among the Indians.

She did not.

He talked to her of God and of Christ, telling the sweet story of the cross, but was doubtful how much of it she was able to grasp.

She listened with a half interested, half puzzled air, a gleam of intelligence occasionally lighting up her somewhat stolid face.

But the silvery rays of the moon came stealing through the branches overhead, and, rousing the older child, who had fallen asleep on the ground at her feet, the woman arose, shouldered her still slumbering babe, and wrapping her blanket about her, gave Kenneth a farewell nod, and with the little one trotting at her heels as before, quickly disappeared amid the deep shadows of the wood.

The object of Kenneth's journey had been accomplished; the tiny flame of hope enkindled by the information gleaned from the hunter had gone out in darkness, and naught remained for him but to take up again his burden of secret grief and care, and go on with life's duties with what courage and patience he might.

Weary with the day's travel, he yet made no movement toward preparation for sleep. Long hours he sat over his fire in an attitude of deep despondency, hands clasped about his knees, head bowed upon his breast; then kneeling upon the ground he poured out his soul in prayer.

"Lord, the cross is very heavy, the cup very bitter, yet how light and sweet compared with what thou didst bear and drink for me! Forgive, oh, forgive the sin of thy servant! Who am I that I dare complain or murmur? Lord, hear the cry of thy servant! strengthen him that he rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; though it be till his feet stand upon the other shore."

CHAPTER VII

There was as yet no post-office in Chillicothe, and no regular mail. One came occasionally, brought by a man on horseback, and its arrival was always an event fraught with deep interest to most of the inhabitants.

This occurred during Kenneth's absence, for the first time in many weeks. There was a letter for him from Glen Forest, of which Dale took possession, paying the postage.

"When will your master be home?" he asked of Zeb, who was lounging before the office door.

"Dunno, sah; he didn't say, sah."

"Where did he go?"

"Dunno, sah; said he gwine on a hunt; wouldn't be home for two or three days."

"Two or three days! and he's been gone nearly a week," exclaimed Dale, stepping into his office. "Nearly a week," he went on thinking aloud, as he seated himself at his desk and laid the letter on it. "I wonder if we shouldn't turn out in a body and hunt for him; he may have met with an accident or – the treacherous savage!"

He frowned anxiously at the letter for a moment, then with sudden recollection turned from it to busy himself with his own correspondence. Several letters had come for him, and they must be read, digested, and answered. They absorbed his attention for some hours, then came the call to supper, and still Dr. Clendenin was missing.

Dale was growing very uneasy; Kenneth had become as a brother to him. "I must do something," he said to himself on his return to his office, taking up the letter again and gazing earnestly at it. "What can have become of him? Where can he have gone? If he isn't here within an hour, I shall go and consult the major.

"Ah!" he went on musingly, still gazing at the missive in his hand, "wouldn't he put spurs to his horse, if he knew this was here waiting for him, that is, if he's alive and free? How eager he always is for these letters, yet never opens one before anybody, never alludes to their contents.

"And they always seem to increase that mysterious trouble that he keeps so carefully to himself, and tries so hard to throw off, even when he and I are quite alone together."

But at that instant there was a sound of horse's hoofs in the street without, then a glad exclamation from Zeb, "Ki, massa doctah! thought the Injuns got you dis time, suah!" and, throwing down the letter, Dale rushed to the door to greet his friend.

Kenneth was in the act of dismounting, saying in a kindly tone to Zeb, as he gave him the reins, "No; here I am quite safe. Has there been any letter or message for me?"

"Yes; there was a mail to-day," Dale said, stepping forward and grasping his friend's hand with affectionate warmth. "A letter for you. Come in, I have it here. But," with a look of surprise and concern at the haggard face and drooping figure, "you are ill, my dear fellow!"

"Not at all, only somewhat weary and worn," Kenneth answered, with a faint smile that had neither mirth nor gladness in it. "But the letter, Godfrey! Is it from – "

"Glen Forest? Yes; the superscription, I noticed, is in the usual hand, post-mark the same as on the others. Here it is. Take this chair, and while you read I'll run over and tell Tiffin to see that they get a hot supper ready for you."

Putting the missive into Kenneth's eager, almost trembling, hand, he hurried away before the latter could utter a word of thanks.

For weeks Kenneth had been hungering for this letter, yet now that he held it in his hand he seemed to have need to gather up courage for its perusal. For a moment he sat with closed eyes, lips moving, though no sound came from them; then he broke the seal and read; at first eagerly, hastily, with bated breath, then, turning back to the beginning, with more care and deliberation, dwelling

upon each sentence, while the shadow deepened on his brow, and again and again his broad breast heaved with a heavy sigh.

At length, at the sound of approaching footsteps, he rose and retreated to his own office, at the same time refolding the letter and putting it in his pocket.

Dale had delayed purposely on his errand, stopping to chat now with one, now with another, in the tavern, then in the street.

At his own door he was met by Major Lamar with the question, "Any news of the doctor yet?"

"Yes, he's just back; looking quite worn out, too."

"Ah! I'm sorry to hear that. I can see him, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes; walk right in. I left him – why, no, he isn't here! Sit down, major, and I'll hunt him up."

But here let us go back and tell of some occurrences of the previous day in the major's family.

Early in the afternoon Tig was standing with elbows on the fence and chin in hands, lazily watching the sports of the children as they vied with each other in the agility with which they could leap over stumps and logs, when Silvy's voice came sharply to his ears, "Tiglath Pileser, you lazy niggah, what you doin' dar? Didn't I tole you to clean de knives? Now Miss Nell is ready for to go ridin' and you just go right 'long and fotch de hosses roun' soon's eber you kin git dem saddled."

"Am I to go 'long, mother?" queried Tig, turning with alacrity to obey; for the horses were the pride of his heart, a ride with Miss Nell his greatest delight, especially when he was her sole companion and protector; and to-day he thought he should be, as he knew of no other escort.

His mother's reply confirmed his hopes. "Course you is; you always gets dat honor when dar ain't no gentleman 'bout."

Tig made haste to the stable, saddled and bridled Fairy and a pony belonging to the major with unaccustomed speed, and led them round to the front door, where Miss Nell was waiting in riding hat and habit.

"You were very quick this time, Tig," she said with an approving smile.

"Ki! Miss Nell," he answered, grinning from ear to ear, "no wondah; I'se in a big hurry, les' some dem gentlemen mout be comin' 'long 'fo' we gets off."

"What gentlemen, Tig?" she asked, laughing, as she stepped upon the horse-block and sprang lightly into the saddle.

"Oh, de doctah, or Mistah Dale, or some dem other gentlemen. 'Tain't often dis chile gets a chance to take care ob you, Miss Nell."

"Do you think you can take care of her, Tig?" asked Mrs. Lamar, coming to the door with a basket in her hand.

"Guess I kin, mistis, I ain't 'fraid no Injuns, nor b'ars, nor painters!" cried the boy, straightening himself with an air of injured dignity.

"Don't boast, Tig, till your courage has been put to the test," answered his mistress. "Here, take this basket and see if you can get it full of ripe mulberries for tea. Nell, I really don't feel quite sure that I ought to let you go without a better protector."

"Nonsense, Clare! I've done it before," returned the young girl, her color rising. "And the responsibility is not yours, I'm old enough to decide such matters for myself." And with that she touched Fairy lightly with the whip and cantered off, Tig following close in her rear. It was a lovely summer afternoon, the heat of the sun tempered by a cool, refreshing breeze. Fairy had scarcely been out of the stable for a day or two and was full of spirit, and Nell reveled in the delight of dashing away at almost headlong speed through the forest and over the prairies.

So enjoyable did she find the swift movement, with the sense of wild freedom it gave her, the beauty of the landscape, the sweet scent of the woods and wild flowers, that she went much farther than she had at first intended, or, indeed, was aware of.

Then coming back she stopped with Tig under a cluster of mulberry trees on the edge of a prairie, to fill the basket with fruit.

Not caring to stain her pretty fingers, she left the boy to fulfil the task alone, while she wandered to and fro, gathering flowers.

The sun was getting low as they remounted.

"We must hurry, Tig," Nell said, glancing uneasily toward the west. "I did not think we had been here so long."

They sped across the prairie and entered the wood that lay between it and the town. Here it was already dusk, and Nell urged Fairy on, her heart beating fast, while she glanced hither and thither, seeming to see an Indian, a bear, wolf, or panther behind every tree.

Suddenly she caught sight of a pair of fiery eyes glaring upon her from an overhanging branch, and the next instant, with a low, fierce growl, something leaped upon the back of her horse, a huge paw was laid on her shoulder, a hot breath fanned her cheek, while a wild shriek from Tig rang in her ears, and Fairy reared and snorted with fear.

Oh, the mortal terror that seized upon Nell, almost freezing the blood in her veins! Closing her eyes she leant forward and threw her arms about the neck of her pony, clinging to it in frantic terror for what seemed an age of suffering, but was in reality scarcely a moment.

A bullet, sped by an unerring hand, struck the panther in the eye, and it fell to the ground dead.

A horseman, hurrying from the direction of the town, put spurs to his steed at sound of the report of the gun, and almost before its echoes had died away, Nell was in her brother's arms.

He soothed and caressed her, she lying on his breast, sobbing and speechless with fright.

"Ugh! big fellow!" grunted a voice near at hand, and Nell, looking up, saw a tall Indian standing over the prostrate wild cat, the outline of whose form could be dimly discovered in the fading light.

"Wawillaway," said the major, holding out his hand to the chief, "you have saved my sister's life, and I can never fully return the obligation! Come with us to Chillicothe. My house shall be your home whenever you choose to make it so."

Wawillaway grasped the offered hand in one of his own, while with the other he held the bridle of Fairy, who was shying at the dead panther, and trembling and snorting with fear.

"Indian good gun," he said. "Indian go to white man's wigwam. Come, white squaw very much 'fraid."

"Yes, Nell, we had better go; for it grows darker every moment. Can you sit your horse now?"

"Yes," she whispered, "I must. But oh, Percy, keep close to me!"

"As close as I can. I will lead your horse," he answered, as he placed her in the saddle. "But where is Tig? I thought he was with you."

Tig had fled in overpowering terror, at the instant of the discharge of Wawillaway's gun, and on reaching home they found him there, telling an incoherent story of attacking Indians and wild cats, that filled the household with alarm.

Great was their relief at the sight of the major and his sister, though Nell was in a state of nervous prostration and excitement that made it necessary to put her at once to bed and watch by her during the night.

The next day she was but little better, and on her account her brother had been anxiously looking for Dr. Clendenin's return, and had now come in search of him.

Kenneth was not long in making his appearance. His manner was calm and quiet as usual, and shaking hands with the major, who expressed hearty satisfaction at seeing him again, he asked if the family were all well.

"All but Nell," was the reply, "and I don't know that there's much amiss with her. But I should like you to see her. She had a terrible fright yesterday, and doesn't seem to get over it."

Kenneth's look was anxious and inquiring.

"I supposed you had heard – " the major began, but Dale interrupted, "No, no, he hasn't had time to hear anything yet, or even to eat; and here comes Zeb with his supper. I told him to bring it over to your office, doctor."

"Thank you," said Kenneth, "but it can wait. I will go with you at once, major."

But the major would not hear of it.

"There is no hurry," he insisted. "Besides you ought to hear the story of her fright before seeing her, and may as well do so while breaking your fast."

Kenneth yielded, for he had not tasted food since early morning, and felt in sore need of it.

"What can we do for her?" asked the major in conclusion.

"Divert her mind from the subject as much as possible," returned the doctor. "Dosing is not what she needs."

"My opinion exactly," responded the major, "but I must crave your assistance in applying your prescription."

"Certainly, my dear sir, I will do my best."

It was a fair summer evening, the sun just touching the treetops, as Kenneth left his office in company with the major.

People were gathered about the doors of their dwellings or places of business, the day's work done for most of the men, though the busy housewives still plied the needle, sewing or knitting; thus exemplifying the truth of the old adage, "Man's work is from sun to sun, but a woman's work is never done."

Children played hide and seek among the trees, their glad voices ringing out upon the quiet air in merry shouts and silvery laughter; but many of them, on catching sight of Kenneth, left their sport to run and take him by the hand, welcoming him with eager delight, and asking him where he had been so long.

Older people, too, crowded about him with a like greeting and the same question.

He parried it as best he might, not feeling disposed to be communicative on the subject, returned the handshakings and kindly greetings, and asked after the health of each family represented.

"You have won all hearts here, Dr. Clendenin," the major remarked, when at length they had parted with the last of the friendly interrogators and were drawing near his own door.

"Oh, I believe it is so!" Kenneth answered, with a glad lighting up of his grave, almost sad face, "and I sometimes wonder how it has come about."

"Love begets love, and so it is with disinterested kindness also," the major answered.

Mrs. Lamar, coming to meet them, caught the last words. "Quite true," she assented, holding out a hand to Kenneth, "and I know of no one else in whose case we see such an exemplification of that fact as in Dr. Clendenin's. Doctor, running away so suddenly and mysteriously, you left many an anxious heart behind you."

She gave him a look of keen curiosity as she spoke. But he would not take the hint.

"My friends are very kind and I would not willingly cause them a moment's uneasiness," was all he said. It was gently spoken, but tone and manner did not invite a further display of inquisitiveness.

Nell, seated in the doorway in a listless attitude, rose suddenly on perceiving her brother's approach and who was with him, and, overcome by an unaccountable fit of shyness, hastily retreated into the house, her heart beating fast, the hot blood dyeing her cheek.

Then, much vexed with herself, she turned at the sound of Kenneth's voice saying "Good evening," and gave him her hand with a murmured "How do you do, doctor?"

He made her sit down, and drew up a chair for himself close to her side.

"Don't be afraid of me because I come in my professional capacity," he said in a playful tone, again taking her hand and laying a finger on her pulse.

"You needn't," she said with a little pout, and seeming half inclined to jerk the hand away. "I'm not sick. I wonder what nonsense Percy's been telling you."

They were alone; the major and his wife had wandered on up the street; the children were sporting outside with their mates.

"None at all," he answered with his grave smile, "only that your nerves have had a shock from which they do not find it easy to recover."

"I'm not sick, and I won't be called nervous! I just wish people would let me alone!" she cried angrily, bursting into tears in spite of herself. "Oh dear! oh dear!" she sobbed, "I don't know what has come over me! I never was so ill-tempered or so babyish before!"

"Don't be vexed with me for saying it is because you are not well," he answered soothingly. "Let the tears have their way and they will relieve you greatly."

She cried quite heartily for a moment, then wiping away her tears, said with half averted face, and in a tone of suppressed horror, shuddering as she spoke, "Oh, I cannot forget it! – those fiery eyes gleaming out at me in the darkness, the heavy paw on my shoulder, the hot breath on my cheek! I seem to see and feel them all the time, sleeping or waking. What shall I do?"

"Try to forget it," he said gently; "turn your thoughts as much as possible to other things, and the effect of your fright will gradually wear away."

"I cannot forget it," she answered sadly. "I shall always be afraid to go into the woods now, and my walks and rides were the greatest pleasures I had."

"Ah, well," he said, "the wild animals will soon be driven from our immediate neighborhood; and in the meantime you must go well protected. My dear Miss Nell," he added in lower, sweeter tones, "you know there is One whose protecting care is over us at all times and in all places. Try to trust in Him with a simple, childlike confidence; such faith will do more to give you calmness and peace than anything else can."

A moment's pause; then turning the conversation upon other themes, he exerted himself for her entertainment till the major and his wife came in, when he shortly took his leave; for there were other patients requiring his attention.

CHAPTER VIII

"How did you find Miss Lamar, doctor? Anything much the matter?" asked Dale, sauntering into his friend's office that evening, shortly after the return of the latter from his round of visits among his patients.

Kenneth sat at his table, spatula in hand, making pills, a slight cloud of care on his brow.

His reply was not a direct answer to the question.

"Sit down, Godfrey," he said. "I've been thinking of calling in your aid in the management of this case."

"Mine?" laughed Dale.

"Yes, as consulting physician."

"You are certainly jesting, yet you look as grave as a judge on the bench."

"I wish," Kenneth said, pausing for an instant in his work and looking earnestly at Dale, "that there was more young society here, more to amuse and interest a young girl like Miss Lamar. Can't you help me to think of something new?"

"Boating parties," suggested Dale.

"That will do for one thing. Now what else?"

"Get up a class in botany. I'll join it. You are quite an enthusiast in that line and know a great deal more on the subject than any one else about here."

"Thank you. I should enjoy it if others would. Anything more?"

"No, I should say I'd done my share of thinking, and you must finish up the job yourself, you who are to pocket the fee," returned Dale laughing. "Now I'm off, prescribing a night's rest for you, to be taken at once; for you are looking wretchedly worn out."

Very weary Kenneth certainly was, yet the friendly counsel was not taken. His work finished, he pushed his implements aside, and sat long with his folded arms upon the table, his head resting on them; not sleeping, for now and again a heavy sigh, or a few low breathed words of prayer came from his lips.

"Oh Lord, for them, for them, I beseech thee, in the midst of wrath remember mercy! Let them rest under the shadow of thy wing, till these calamities be overpast."

Both Dale's suggestions in the line of amusements were promptly carried out, and with excellent effect upon the patient. She was fond of plants and flowers, and Kenneth proved a capital teacher. Mrs. Lamar and several others, both married and single, joined the class and they had many a pleasant ramble over hill and valley in search of specimens.

The major provided a boat for the rowing parties and frequently made one of them himself, taking special care of his young sister.

When he was not present Kenneth took his place in this particular, but not at all in a lover-like way; his manner was fraternal, "sometimes almost paternal," Nell thought, with an emotion of anger and pique at "being treated so like a child."

"It is because I was so silly as to cry before him! He thinks me a mere baby," she said to herself now and again, in extreme vexation.

She was apt to be frank in the expression, or rather exhibition of her feelings, and Kenneth was at times not a little puzzled to understand in what he had offended. He never blamed her, however, but, attributing her displeasure to some fault or awkwardness in himself, redoubled his kindly attention, and his efforts to give pleasant and healthful occupation to her thoughts.

With this in view he would often take a book from his pocket, when he found himself alone with her, read aloud some passage that he particularly admired, and draw her into conversation about it.

Also he tried to interest her in his patients, occasionally taking her with him where he knew her visits would be welcome, and engaging her to prepare dainties to tempt the sickly appetites, and clothing for such as were poor enough to need assistance of that kind.

His only thought, so far as she was concerned, was to comfort and relieve, and it did not occur to him that there might be danger in the cure, for her as for himself.

Yet there was; for how could the girl gain such an insight into the noble generosity and unselfishness of his character, without learning to love him? It was not only his unvarying kindness towards herself, his patient forbearance even in her most petulant and unreasonable moods, but also his sympathy for, and gentleness toward, even the very poorest and most uninteresting and ungrateful of those who invoked his aid as a physician, his anxiety and untiring efforts to relieve suffering, and his unselfish joy when those efforts were successful.

Also his deep, humble, unassuming piety, and earnest desire to lead to the Great Physician, that there might be healing of soul as well as body.

Her admiration and respect grew day by day, until he seemed to her an example of all that was good and great and lovable.

Dale, too, unwittingly helped on the mischief. He had some notion of courting pretty Nell himself, so did not care to interest her too much in Kenneth; but his thoughts were often full of the latter, the strange secret that seemed to darken his life; and remembering Kenneth's expressed desire to engage Nell's thoughts upon matters that would take them from herself and the unfortunate occurrence that had shaken her nerves, and calling to mind also that she had come from the same neighborhood with Kenneth and would be likely to know the family history of the Clendenins, he deemed it no harm to broach the subject one day when alone with her, and ask if she could guess what their friend's sorrow was.

"No," she said in surprise. "I never heard of anything that could cause him such grief. They are well-to-do people, living on a lovely place of their own; they are most highly respected too. I frequently heard them spoken of, always in the highest terms, and never heard of any trouble, except that Kenneth's twin brother was drowned ten or twelve years ago. But surely he could not be grieving so over that now!"

"No, it can't be that." Dale said musingly, "it is evidently a deeper sorrow than any such bereavement could bring, or at least a grief and burden of a different sort."

"Are you not mistaken? May it not be a mere fancy on your part?" queried Nell. "Dr. Clendenin has always struck me as a very cheerful person."

"He is not one to obtrude his griefs upon others," observed Dale in reply. "He forces himself to be cheerful when in general society, and seldom allows even me, his intimate friend, to perceive that he has a burden to bear; but I have reason to believe that he sometimes passes half the night pacing his office instead of taking the rest he needs after his day's toil."

From that, he went on to speak of Kenneth's late mysterious, lonely journey, and to describe the state in which he had returned.

Nell's heart was deeply touched. "How noble he is!" was her mental exclamation. "But Mr. Dale should not have told me, it seems almost like betraying his friend's confidence. I suppose he does not look upon it in that light, but I am quite sure Dr. Clendenin would never have done so by him."

"Of course," said Dale, breaking the momentary silence, "this is between ourselves. I have never mentioned these things to any one else, and never shall."

"Nor shall I, Mr. Dale," she answered.

She did not, but from that time she watched Kenneth more closely than ever before, and that with the growing conviction that Dale was right.

It became with her an absorbingly interesting subject of thought; her heart was more and more filled with pity for Kenneth's silent suffering, and pity is akin to love.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.