Alcott Louisa May

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Содержание

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"Life is a train of moods like a string of beads; and as we pass through them they prove to be many colored lenses, which paint the world their own hue, and each shows us only what lies in its own focus."
Emerson.

CHAPTER I.
IN A YEAR

The room fronted the west, but a black cloud, barred with red, robbed the hour of twilight's tranquil charm. Shadows haunted it, lurking in corners like spies set there to watch the man who stood among them mute and motionless as if himself a shadow. His eye turned often to the window with a glance both vigilant and eager, yet saw nothing but a tropical luxuriance of foliage scarcely stirred by the sultry air heavy with odors that seemed to oppress not refresh. He listened with the same intentness, yet heard only the clamor of voices, the tramp of feet, the chime of bells, the varied turmoil of a city when night is defrauded of its peace by being turned to day. He watched and waited for something; presently it came. A viewless visitant, welcomed by longing soul and body as the man, with extended arms and parted lips received the voiceless greeting of the breeze that came winging its way across the broad Atlantic, full of healthful cheer for a home-sick heart. Far out he leaned; held back the thick-leaved boughs already rustling with a grateful stir, chid the shrill bird beating its flame-colored breast against its prison bars, and drank deep draughts of the blessed wind that seemed to cool the fever of his blood and give him back the vigor he had lost.

A sudden light shone out behind him filling the room with a

glow that left no shadow in it. But he did not see the change, nor hear the step that broke the hush, nor turn to meet the woman who stood waiting for a lover's welcome. An indefinable air of sumptuous life surrounded her, and made the brilliant room a fitting frame for the figure standing there with warm-hued muslins blowing in the wind. A figure full of the affluent beauty of womanhood in its prime, bearing unmistakable marks of the polished pupil of the world in the grace that flowed through every motion, the art which taught each feature to play its part with the ease of second nature and made dress the foil to loveliness. The face was delicate and dark as a fine bronze, a low forehead set in shadowy waves of hair, eyes full of slumberous fire, and a passionate yet haughty mouth that seemed shaped alike for caresses and commands.

A moment she watched the man before her, while over her countenance passed rapid variations of pride, resentment, and tenderness. Then with a stealthy step, an assured smile, she went to him and touched his hand, saying, in a voice inured to that language which seems made for lovers' lips —

"Only a month betrothed, and yet so cold and gloomy, Adam!"

With a slight recoil, a glance of soft detestation veiled and yet visible, Warwick answered like a satiric echo —

"Only a month betrothed, and yet so fond and jealous, Ottila!"

Unchilled by the action, undaunted by the look, the white arm took him captive, the beautiful face drew nearer, and the persuasive voice asked wistfully —

"Was it of me you thought when you turned with that longing in your eye?"

"No."

"Was it of a fairer or a dearer friend than I?"

"Yes."

The black brows contracted ominously, the mouth grew hard, the eyes glittered, the arm became a closer bond, the entreaty a command.

"Let me know the name, Adam."

"Self-respect."

She laughed low to herself, and the mobile features softened to their former tenderness as she looked up into that other face so full of an accusing significance which she would not understand.

"I have waited two long hours; have you no kinder greeting, love?"

"I have no truer one. Ottila, if a man has done unwittingly a weak, unwise, or wicked act, what should he do when he discovers it?"

"Repent and mend his ways; need I tell you that?"

"I have repented; will you help me mend my ways?"

"Confess, dear sinner; I will shrive you and grant absolution for the past, whatever it may be."

"How much would you do for love of me?"

"Anything for you, Adam."

"Then give me back my liberty."

He rose erect and stretched his hands to her with a gesture of

entreaty, an expression of intense desire. Ottila fell back as if the forceful words and action swept her from him. The smile died on her lips, a foreboding fear looked out at her eyes, and she asked incredulously —

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes; now, entirely, and forever!"

If he had lifted his strong arm and struck her, it would not have daunted with such pale dismay. An instant she stood like one who saw a chasm widening before her, which she had no power to cross. Then as if disappointment was a thing impossible and unknown, she seized the imploring hands in a grasp that turned them white with its passionate pressure as she cried —

"No, I will not! I have waited for your love so long I cannot give it up; you shall not take it from me!"

But as if the words had made the deed irrevocable, Warwick put her away, speaking with the stern accent of one who fears a traitor in himself.

"I cannot take from you what you never had. Stand there and hear me. No; I will have no blandishments to keep me from my purpose, no soft words to silence the hard ones I mean to speak, no more illusions to hide us from each other and ourselves."

"Adam, you are cruel."

"Better seem cruel than be treacherous; better wound your pride now than your heart hereafter, when too late you discover that I married you without confidence, respect, or love. For once in your life you shall hear the truth as plain as words can make

it. You shall see me at my best as at my worst; you shall know what I have learned to find in you; shall look back into the life behind us, forward into the life before us, and if there be any candor in you I will wring from you an acknowledgment that you have led me into an unrighteous compact. Unrighteous, because you have deceived me in yourself, appealed to the baser, not the nobler instincts in me, and on such a foundation there can be no abiding happiness."

"Go on, I will hear you." And conscious that she could not control the will now thoroughly aroused, Ottila bent before it as if meekly ready to hear all things for love's sake.

A disdainful smile passed over Warwick's face, as with an eye that fixed and held her own, he rapidly went on, never pausing to choose smooth phrases or soften facts, but seeming to find a relish in the utterance of bitter truths after the honeyed falsehood he had listened to so long. Yet through all the harshness glowed the courage of an upright soul, the fervor of a generous heart.

"I know little of such things and care less; but I think few lovers pass through a scene such as this is to be, because few have known lives like ours, or one such as we. You a woman stronger for good or ill than those about you, I a man untamed by any law but that of my own will. Strength is royal, we both possess it; as kings and queens drop their titles in their closets, let us drop all disguises and see each other as God sees us. This compact must be broken; let me show you why. Three months ago I came here to take the chill of an Arctic winter out of blood and brain.

I have done so and am the worse for it. In melting frost I have kindled fire; a fire that will burn all virtue out of me unless I quench it at once. I mean to do so, because I will not keep the ten commandments before men's eyes and break them every hour in my heart."

He paused a moment, as if hotter words rose to his lips than generosity would let him utter, and when he spoke again there was more reproach than anger in his voice.

"Ottila, till I knew you I loved no woman but my mother; I wooed no wife, bought no mistress, desired no friend, but led a life austere as any monk's, asking only freedom and my work. Could you not let me keep my independence? Were there not men enough who would find no degradation in a spiritual slavery like this? Would nothing but my subjection satisfy your unconquerable appetite for power?"

"Did I seek you, Adam?"

"Yes! Not openly, I grant, your art was too fine for that; you shunned me that I might seek you to ask why. In interviews that seemed to come by chance, you tried every wile a woman owns, and they are many. You wooed me as such as you alone can woo the hearts they know are hardest to be won. You made your society a refreshment in this climate of the passions; you hid your real self and feigned that for which I felt most honor. You entertained my beliefs with largest hospitality; encouraged my ambitions with a sympathy so genial that I thought it genuine; professed my scorn for shammery, and seemed an earnest

woman, eager to find the true, to do the right; a fit wife for any man who desired a helpmate, not a toy. It showed much strength of wit and will to conceive and execute the design. It proved your knowledge of the virtues you could counterfeit so well, else I never should have been where I am now."

"Your commendation is deserved, though so ungently given, Adam."

"There will be no more of it. If I am ungentle, it is because I despise deceit, and you possess a guile that has given me my first taste of self-contempt, and the draught is bitter. Hear me out; for this reminiscence is my justification; you must listen to the one and accept the other. You seemed all this, but under the honest friendliness you showed lurked the purpose you have since avowed, to conquer most entirely the man who denied your right to rule by the supremacy of beauty or of sex alone. You saw the unsuspected fascination that detained me here when my better self said 'Go.' You allured my eye with loveliness, my ear with music; piqued curiosity, pampered pride, and subdued will by flatteries subtly administered. Beginning afar off, you let all influences do their work till the moment came for the effective stroke. Then you made a crowning sacrifice of maiden modesty and owned you loved me."

Shame burned red on Ottila's dark cheek, and ire flamed up in her eyes, as the untamable spirit of the woman answered against her will —

"It was not made in vain; for, rebellious as you are, it subdued

you, and with your own weapon, the bare truth."

He had said truly, "You shall see me at my best as at worst." She did, for putting pride underneath his feet he showed her a brave sincerity, which she could admire but never imitate, and in owning a defeat achieved a victory.

"You think I shall deny this. I do not, but acknowledge to the uttermost that, in spite of all resistance, I was conquered by a woman. If it affords you satisfaction to hear this, to know that it is hard to say, harder still to feel, take the ungenerous delight; I give it to you as an alms. But remember that if I have failed, no less have you. For in that stormy heart of yours there is no sentiment more powerful than that you feel for me, and through it you will receive the retribution you have brought upon yourself. You were elated with success, and forgot too soon the character you had so well supported. You thought love blinded me, but there was no love; and during this month I have learned to know you as you are. A woman of strong passions and weak principles; hungry for power and intent on pleasure; accomplished in deceit and reckless in trampling on the nobler instincts of a gifted but neglected nature. Ottila, I have no faith in you, feel no respect for the passion you inspire, own no allegiance to the dominion you assert."

"You cannot throw it off; it is too late."

It was a rash defiance; she saw that as it passed her lips, and would have given much to have recalled it. The stern gravity of Warwick's face flashed into a stern indignation. His eye shone

like steel, but his voice dropped lower and his hand closed like a vice as he said, with the air of one who cannot conceal but can control sudden wrath at a taunt to which past weakness gives a double sting —

"It never is too late. If the priest stood ready, and I had sworn to marry you within the hour, I would break the oath, and God would pardon it, for no man has a right to embrace temptation and damn himself by a life-long lie. You choose to make it a hard battle for me; you are neither an honest friend nor a generous foe. No matter, I have fallen into an ambuscade and must cut my way out as I can, and as I will, for there is enough of this Devil's work in the world without our adding to it."

"You cannot escape with honor, Adam."

"I cannot remain with honor. Do not try me too hardly, Ottila. I am not patient, but I do desire to be just. I confess my weakness; will not that satisfy you? Blazon your wrong as you esteem it; ask sympathy of those who see not as I see; reproach, defy, lament. I will bear it all, will make any other sacrifice as an atonement, but I will 'hold fast mine integrity' and obey a higher law than your world recognizes, both for your sake and my own."

She watched him as he spoke, and to herself confessed a slavery more absolute than any he had known, for with a pang she felt that she had indeed fallen into the snare she spread for him, and in this man, who dared to own his weakness and her power, she had found a master. Was it too late to keep him? She knew that soft appeals were vain, tears like water on a rock,

and with the skill that had subdued him once she endeavored to retrieve her blunder by an equanimity which had more effect than prayers or protestations. Warwick had read her well, had shown her herself stripped of all disguises, and left her no defence but tardy candor. She had the wisdom to see this, the wit to use it and restore the shadow of the power whose substance she had lost. Leaving her beauty to its silent work, she fixed on him eyes whose lustre was quenched in unshed tears, and said with an earnest, humble voice —

"I, too, desire to be just. I will not reproach, defy, or lament, but leave my fate to you. I am all you say, yet in your judgment remember mercy, and believe that at twenty-five there is still hope for the noble but neglected nature, still time to repair the faults of birth, education, and orphanhood. You say, I have a daring will, a love of conquest. Can I not will to overcome myself and do it? Can I not learn to be the woman I have seemed? Love has worked greater miracles, may it not work this? I have longed to be a truer creature than I am; have seen my wasted gifts, felt my capacity for better things, and looked for help from many sources, but never found it till you came. Do you wonder that I tried to make it mine? Adam, you are a self-elected missionary to the world's afflicted; you can look beyond external poverty and see the indigence of souls. I am a pauper in your eyes; stretch out your hand and save me from myself."

Straight through the one vulnerable point in the man's pride went this appeal to the man's pity. Indignation could not turn

it aside, contempt blunt its edge, or wounded feeling lessen its force; and yet it failed: for in Adam Warwick justice was stronger than mercy, reason than impulse, head than heart. Experience was a teacher whom he trusted; he had weighed this woman and found her wanting; truth was not in her; the patient endeavor, the hard-won success so possible to many was hardly so to her, and a union between them could bring no lasting good to either. He knew this; had decided it in a calmer hour than the present, and by that decision he would now abide proof against all attacks from without or from within. More gently, but as inflexibly as before, he said —

"I do put out my hand and offer you the same bitter draught of self-contempt that proved a tonic to my own weak will. I can help, pity, and forgive you heartily, but I dare not marry you. The tie that binds us is a passion of the senses, not a love of the soul. You lack the moral sentiment that makes all gifts and graces subservient to the virtues that render womanhood a thing to honor as well as love. I can relinquish youth, beauty, worldly advantages, but I must reverence above all others the woman whom I marry, and feel an affection that elevates me by quickening all that is noblest and manliest in me. With you I should be either a tyrant or a slave. I will be neither, but go solitary all my life rather than rashly mortgage the freedom kept inviolate so long, or let the impulse of an hour mar the worth of coming years."

Bent and broken by the unanswerable accusations of what

seemed a conscience in human shape, Ottila had sunk down before him with an abandonment as native to her as the indomitable will which still refused to relinquish hope even in despair.

"Go," she said, "I am not worthy of salvation. Yet it is hard, very hard, to lose the one motive strong enough to save me, the one sincere affection of my life."

Warwick had expected a tempestuous outbreak at his decision; this entire submission touched him, for in the last words of her brief lament he detected the accent of truth, and longed to answer it. He paused, searching for the just thing to be done. Ottila, with hidden face, watched while she wept, and waited hopefully for the relenting sign. In silence the two, a modern Samson and Delilah, waged the old war that has gone on ever since the strong locks were shorn and the temple fell; a war which fills the world with unmated pairs and the long train of evils arising from marriages made from impulse, and not principle. As usual, the most generous was worsted. The silence pleaded well for Ottila, and when Warwick spoke it was to say impetuously —

"You are right! It is hard that when two err one alone should suffer. I should have been wise enough to see the danger, brave enough to fly from it. I was not, and I owe you some reparation for the pain my folly brings you. I offer you the best, because the hardest, sacrifice that I can make. You say love can work miracles, and that yours is the sincerest affection of your life; prove it. In three months you conquered me; can you conquer

yourself in twelve?"

"Try me!"

"I will. Nature takes a year for her harvests; I give you the same for yours. If you will devote one half the energy and care to this work that you devoted to that other, – will earnestly endeavor to cherish all that is womanly and noble in yourself, and through desire for another's respect earn your own, – I, too, will try to make myself a fitter mate for any woman, and keep our troth unbroken for a year. Can I do more?"

"I dared not ask so much! I have not deserved it, but I will. Only love me, Adam, and let me save myself through you."

Flushed and trembling with delight she rose, sure the trial was safely passed, but found that for herself a new one had begun. Warwick offered his hand.

"Farewell, then."

"Going? Surely you will stay and help me through my long probation?"

"No; if your desire has any worth you can work it out alone. We should be hindrances to one another, and the labor be ill done."

"Where will you go? Not far, Adam."

"Straight to the North. This luxurious life enervates me; the pestilence of slavery lurks in the air and infects me; I must build myself up anew and find again the man I was."

"When must you go? Not soon."

"At once."

"I shall hear from you?"

"Not till I come."

"But I shall need encouragement, shall grow hungry for a word, a thought from you. A year is very long to wait and work alone."

Eloquently she pleaded with voice and eyes and tender lips, but Warwick did not yield.

"If the test be tried at all it must be fairly tried. We must stand entirely apart and see what saving virtue lies in self-denial and self-help."

"You will forget me, Adam. Some woman with a calmer heart than mine will teach you to love as you desire to love, and when my work is done it will be all in vain."

"Never in vain if it be well done, for such labor is its own reward. Have no fear; one such lesson will last a lifetime. Do your part heartily, and I will keep my pledge until the year is out."

"And then, what then?"

"If I see in you the progress both should desire, if this tie bears the test of time and absence, and we find any basis for an abiding union, then, Ottila, I will marry you."

"But if meanwhile that colder, calmer woman comes to you, what then?"

"Then I will not marry you."

"Ah, your promise is a man's vow, made only to be broken. I have no faith in you."

"I think you may have. There will be no time for more folly;

I must repair the loss of many wasted days, – nay, not wasted if I have learned this lesson well. Rest secure; it is impossible that I should love."

"You believed that three months ago and yet you are a lover now."

Ottila smiled an exultant smile, and Warwick acknowledged his proven fallibility by a haughty flush and a frank amendment.

"Let it stand, then, that if I love again I am to wait in silence till the year is out and you absolve me from my pledge. Does that satisfy you?"

"It must. But you will come, whatever changes may befall you? Promise me this."

"I promise it."

"Going so soon? Oh, wait a little!"

"When a duty is to be done, do it at once; delay is dangerous. Good night."

"Give me some remembrance of you. I have nothing, for you are not a generous lover."

"Generous in deeds, Ottila. I have given you a year's liberty, a dear gift from one who values it more than life. Now I add this."

He drew her to him, kissed the red mouth and looked down upon her with a glance that made his man's face as pitiful as any woman's as he let her lean there happy in the hope given at such cost. For a moment nothing stirred in the room but the soft whisper of the wind. For a moment Warwick's austere life looked hard to him, love seemed sweet, submission possible; for in all

the world this was the only woman who clung to him, and it was beautiful to cherish and be cherished after years of solitude. A long sigh of desire and regret broke from him, and at the sound a stealthy smile touched Ottila's lips as she whispered, with a velvet cheek against his own —

"Love, you will stay?"

"I will not stay!"

And like one who cries out sharply within himself, "Get thee behind me!" he broke away.

"Adam, come back to me! Come back!"

He looked over his shoulder, saw the fair woman in the heart of the warm glow, heard her cry of love and longing, knew the life of luxurious ease that waited for him, but steadily went out into the night, only answering —

"In a year."

CHAPTER II.
WHIMS

"Come, Sylvia, it is nine o'clock! Little slug-a-bed, don't you mean to get up to-day?" said Miss Yule, bustling into her sister's room with the wide-awake appearance of one to whom sleep was a necessary evil, to be endured and gotten over as soon as possible.

"No, why should I?" And Sylvia turned her face away from the flood of light that poured into the room as Prue put aside the curtains and flung up the window.

"Why should you? What a question, unless you are ill; I was afraid you would suffer for that long row yesterday, and my predictions seldom fail."

"I am not suffering from any cause whatever, and your prediction does fail this time; I am only tired of everybody and everything, and see nothing worth getting up for; so I shall just stay here till I do. Please put the curtain down and leave me in peace."

Prue had dropped her voice to the foreboding tone so irritating to nervous persons whether sick or well, and Sylvia laid her arm across her eyes with an impatient gesture as she spoke sharply.

"Nothing worth getting up for," cried Prue, like an aggravating echo. "Why, child, there are a hundred pleasant things to do if

you would only think so. Now don't be dismal and mope away this lovely day. Get up and try my plan; have a good breakfast, read the papers, and then work in your garden before it grows too warm; that is wholesome exercise and you've neglected it sadly of late."

"I don't wish any breakfast; I hate newspapers, they are so full of lies; I'm tired of the garden, for nothing goes right this year; and I detest taking exercise merely because it's wholesome. No, I'll not get up for that."

"Then stay in the house and draw, read, or practise. Sit with Mark in the studio; give Miss Hemming directions about your summer things, or go into town about your bonnet. There is a matinée, try that; or make calls, for you owe fifty at least. Now I'm sure there's employment enough and amusement enough for any reasonable person."

Prue looked triumphant, but Sylvia was not a "reasonable person," and went on in her former despondingly petulant strain.

"I'm tired of drawing; my head is a jumble of other people's ideas already, and Herr Pedalsturm has put the piano out of tune. Mark always makes a model of me if I go to him, and I don't like to see my eyes, arms, or hair in all his pictures. Miss Hemming's gossip is worse than fussing over new things that I don't need. Bonnets are my torment, and matinées are wearisome, for people whisper and flirt till the music is spoiled. Making calls is the worst of all; for what pleasure or profit is there in running from place to place to tell the same polite fibs over and over again, and

listen to scandal that makes you pity or despise your neighbors. I shall not get up for any of these things."

Prue leaned on the bedpost meditating with an anxious face till a forlorn hope appeared which caused her to exclaim —

"Mark and I are going to see Geoffrey Moor, this morning, just home from Switzerland, where his poor sister died, you know. You really ought to come with us and welcome him, for though you can hardly remember him, he's been so long away, still, as one of the family, it is a proper compliment on your part. The drive will do you good, Geoffrey will be glad to see you, it is a lovely old place, and as you never saw the inside of the house you cannot complain that you are tired of that yet."

"Yes I can, for it will never seem as it has done, and I can no longer go where I please now that a master's presence spoils its freedom and solitude for me. I don't know him, and don't care to, though his name is so familiar. New people always disappoint me, especially if I've heard them praised ever since I was born. I shall not get up for any Geoffrey Moor, so that bait fails."

Sylvia smiled involuntarily at her sister's defeat, but Prue fell back upon her last resource in times like this. With a determined gesture she plunged her hand into an abysmal pocket, and from a miscellaneous collection of treasures selected a tiny vial, presenting it to Sylvia with a half pleading, half authoritative look and tone.

"I'll leave you in peace if you'll only take a dose of chamomilla. It is so soothing, that instead of tiring yourself with

all manner of fancies, you'll drop into a quiet sleep, and by noon be ready to get up like a civilized being. Do take it, dear; just four sugar-plums, and I'm satisfied."

Sylvia received the bottle with a docile expression; but the next minute it flew out of the window, to be shivered on the walk below, while she said, laughing like a wilful creature as she was —

"I have taken it in the only way I ever shall, and the sparrows can try its soothing effects with me; so be satisfied."

"Very well. I shall send for Dr. Baum, for I'm convinced that you are going to be ill. I shall say no more, but act as I think proper, because it's like talking to the wind to reason with you in one of these perverse fits."

As Prue turned away, Sylvia frowned and called after her —

"Spare yourself the trouble, for Dr. Baum will follow the chamomilla, if you bring him here. What does he know about health, a fat German, looking lager beer and talking sauer-kraut? Bring me *bona fide* sugar-plums and I'll take them; but arsenic, mercury, and nightshade are not to my taste."

"Would you feel insulted if I ask whether your breakfast is to be sent up, or kept waiting till you choose to come down?"

Prue looked rigidly calm, but Sylvia knew that she felt hurt, and with one of the sudden impulses which ruled her the frown melted to a smile, as drawing her sister down she kissed her in her most loving manner.

"Dear old soul, I'll be good by-and-by, but now I'm tired and

cross, so let me keep out of every one's way and drowse myself into a cheerier frame of mind. I want nothing but solitude, a draught of water, and a kiss."

Prue was mollified at once, and after stirring fussily about for several minutes gave her sister all she asked, and departed to the myriad small cares that made her happiness. As the door closed, Sylvia sighed a long sigh of relief, and folding her arms under her head drifted away into the land of dreams, where ennui is unknown.

All the long summer morning she lay wrapt in sleeping and waking dreams, forgetful of the world about her, till her brother played the Wedding March upon her door on his way to lunch. The desire to avenge the sudden downfall of a lovely castle in the air roused Sylvia, and sent her down to skirmish with Mark. Before she could say a word, however, Prue began to talk in a steady stream, for the good soul had a habit of jumbling news, gossip, private opinions and public affairs into a colloquial hodge-podge, that was often as trying to the intellects as the risibles of her hearers.

"Sylvia, we had a charming call, and Geoffrey sent his love to you. I asked him over to dinner, and we shall dine at six, because then my father can be with us. I shall have to go to town first, for there are a dozen things suffering for attention. You can't wear a round hat and lawn jackets without a particle of set all summer. I want some things for dinner, – and the carpet must be got. What a lovely one Geoffrey had in the library! Then I must

see if poor Mrs. Beck has had her leg comfortably off, find out if Freddy Lennox is dead, and order home the mosquito nettings. Now don't read all the afternoon, and be ready to receive any one who may come if I should get belated."

The necessity of disposing of a suspended mouthful produced a lull, and Sylvia seized the moment to ask in a careless way, intended to bring her brother out upon his favorite topic, —

"How did you find your saint, Mark?"

"The same sunshiny soul as ever, though he has had enough to make him old and grave before his time. He is just what we need in our neighborhood, and particularly in our house, for we are a dismal set at times, and he will do us all a world of good."

"What will become of me, with a pious, prosy, perfect creature eternally haunting the house and exhorting me on the error of my ways!" cried Sylvia.

"Don't disturb yourself; he is not likely to take much notice of you; and it is not for an indolent, freakish midge to scoff at a man whom she does not know, and couldn't appreciate if she did," was Mark's lofty reply.

"I rather liked the appearance of the saint, however," said Sylvia, with an expression of naughty malice, as she began her lunch.

"Why, where did you see him!" exclaimed her brother.

"I went over there yesterday to take a farewell run in the neglected garden before he came. I knew he was expected, but not that he was here; and when I saw the house open, I slipped

in and peeped wherever I liked. You are right, Prue; it is a lovely old place."

"Now I know you did something dreadfully unladylike and improper. Put me out of suspense, I beg of you."

Prue's distressful face and Mark's surprise produced an inspiring effect upon Sylvia, who continued, with an air of demure satisfaction —

"I strolled about, enjoying myself, till I got into the library, and there I rummaged, for it was a charming place, and I was happy as only those are who love books, and feel their influence in the silence of a room whose finest ornaments they are."

"I hope Moor came in and found you trespassing."

"No, I went out and caught him playing. When I'd stayed as long as I dared, and borrowed a very interesting old book —

"Sylvia! did you really take one without asking?" cried Prue, looking almost as much alarmed as if she had stolen the spoons.

"Yes; why not? I can apologize prettily, and it will open the way for more. I intend to browse over that library for the next six months."

"But it was such a liberty, – so rude, so – dear, dear; and he as fond and careful of his books as if they were his children! Well, I wash my hands of it, and am prepared for anything now!"

Mark enjoyed Sylvia's pranks too much to reprove, so he only laughed while one sister lamented and the other placidly went on —

"When I had put the book nicely in my pocket, Prue, I walked

into the garden. But before I'd picked a single flower, I heard little Tilly laugh behind the hedge and some strange voice talking to her. So I hopped upon a roller to see, and nearly tumbled off again; for there was a man lying on the grass, with the gardener's children rioting over him. Will was picking his pockets, and Tilly eating strawberries out of his hat, often thrusting one into the mouth of her long neighbor, who always smiled when the little hand came fumbling at his lips. You ought to have seen the pretty picture, Mark."

"Did he see the interesting picture on your side of the wall?"

"No, I was just thinking what friendly eyes he had, listening to his pleasant talk with the little folks, and watching how they nestled to him as if he were a girl, when Tilly looked up and cried, 'I see Silver!' So I ran away, expecting to have them all come racing after. But no one appeared, and I only heard a laugh instead of the 'stop thief' that I deserved."

"If I had time I should convince you of the impropriety of such wild actions; as I haven't, I can only implore you never to do so again on Geoffrey's premises," said Prue, rising as the carriage drove round.

"I can safely promise that," answered Sylvia, with a dismal shake of the head, as she leaned listlessly from the window till her brother and sister were gone.

At the appointed time Moor entered Mr. Yule's hospitably open door; but no one came to meet him, and the house was as silent as if nothing human inhabited it. He divined the cause

of this, having met Prue and Mark going downward some hours before, and saying to himself, "The boat is late," he disturbed no one, but strolled into the drawing-rooms and looked about him. Being one of those who seldom find time heavy on their hands, he amused himself with observing what changes had been made during his absence. His journey round the apartments was not a long one, for, coming to an open window, he paused with an expression of mingled wonder and amusement.

A pile of cushions, pulled from chair and sofa, lay before the long window, looking very like a newly deserted nest. A warm-hued picture lifted from the wall stood in a streak of sunshine; a half-cleared leaf of fruit lay on a taboret, and beside it, with a red stain on its title-page, appeared the stolen book. At sight of this Moor frowned, caught up his desecrated darling and put it in his pocket. But as he took another glance at the various indications of what had evidently been a solitary revel very much after his own heart, he relented, laid back the book, and, putting aside the curtain floating in the wind, looked out into the garden, attracted thither by the sound of a spade.

A lad was at work near by, and wondering what new inmate the house had gained, the neglected guest waited to catch a glimpse of the unknown face. A slender boy, in a foreign-looking blouse of grey linen; a white collar lay over a ribbon at the throat, stout half boots covered a trim pair of feet, and a broad-brimmed hat flapped low on the forehead. Whistling softly he dug with active gestures; and, having made the necessary cavity,

set a shrub, filled up the hole, trod it down scientifically, and then fell back to survey the success of his labors. But something was amiss, something had been forgotten, for suddenly up came the shrub, and seizing a wheelbarrow that stood near by, away rattled the boy round the corner out of sight. Moor smiled at his impetuosity, and awaited his return with interest, suspecting from appearances that this was some *protégé* of Mark's employed as a model as well as gardener's boy.

Presently up the path came the lad, with head down and steady pace, trundling a barrow full of richer earth, surmounted by a watering-pot. Never stopping for breath he fell to work again, enlarged the hole, flung in the loam, poured in the water, reset the shrub, and when the last stamp and pat were given performed a little dance of triumph about it, at the close of which he pulled off his hat and began to fan his heated face. The action caused the observer to start and look again, thinking, as he recognized the energetic worker with a smile, "What a changeful thing it is! haunting one's premises unseen, and stealing one's books unsuspected; dreaming one half the day and masquerading the other half. What will happen next? Let us see but not be seen, lest the boy turn shy and run away before the pretty play is done!"

Holding the curtain between the window and himself, Moor peeped through the semi-transparent screen, enjoying the little episode immensely. Sylvia fanned and rested a few minutes, then went up and down among the flowers, often pausing to break a dead leaf, to brush away some harmful insect, or lift some

struggling plant into the light; moving among them as if akin to them, and cognizant of their sweet wants. If she had seemed strong-armed and sturdy as a boy before, now she was tender fingered as a woman, and went humming here and there like any happy-hearted bee.

"Curious child!" thought Moor, watching the sunshine glitter on her uncovered head, and listening to the air she left half sung. "I've a great desire to step out and see how she will receive me. Not like any other girl, I fancy."

But, before he could execute his design, the roll of a carriage was heard in the avenue, and pausing an instant, with head erect like a startled doe, Sylvia turned and vanished, dropping flowers as she ran. Mr. Yule, accompanied by his son and daughter, came hurrying in with greetings, explanations, and apologies, and in a moment the house was full of a pleasant stir. Steps went up and down, voices echoed through the rooms, savory odors burst forth from below, and doors swung in the wind, as if the spell was broken and the sleeping palace had wakened with a word.

Prue made a hasty toilet and harassed the cook to the verge of spontaneous combustion, while Mark and his father devoted themselves to their guest. Just as dinner was announced Sylvia came in, as calm and cool as if wheelbarrows were myths and linen suits unknown. Moor was welcomed with a quiet hand-shake, a grave salutation, and a look that seemed to say, "Wait a little, I take no friends on trust."

All through dinner, though she sat as silent as a well-bred

child, she looked and listened with an expression of keen intelligence that children do not wear, and sometimes smiled to herself, as if she saw or heard something that pleased and interested her. When they rose from table she followed Prue up stairs, quite forgetting the disarray in which the drawing-room was left. The gentlemen took possession before either sister returned, and Mark's annoyance found vent in a philippic against oddities in general and Sylvia in particular; but his father and friend sat in the cushionless chairs, and pronounced the scene amusingly novel. Prue appeared in the midst of the laugh, and having discovered other delinquencies above, her patience was exhausted, and her regrets found no check in the presence of so old a friend as Moor.

"Something must be done about that child, father, for she is getting entirely beyond my control. If I attempt to make her study she writes poetry instead of her exercises, draws caricatures instead of sketching properly, and bewilders her music teacher by asking questions about Beethoven and Mendelssohn, as if they were personal friends of his. If I beg her to take exercise, she rides like an Amazon all over the Island, grubs in the garden as if for her living, or goes paddling about the bay till I'm distracted lest the tide should carry her out to sea. She is so wanting in moderation she gets ill, and when I give her proper medicines she flings them out of the window, and threatens to send that worthy, Dr. Baum, after them. Yet she must need something to set her right, for she is either overflowing with unnatural spirits

or melancholy enough to break one's heart."

"What have you done with the little black sheep of my flock, – not banished her, I hope?" said Mr. Yule, placidly, ignoring all complaints.

"She is in the garden, attending to some of her disagreeable pets, I fancy. If you are going out there to smoke, please send her in, Mark; I want her."

As Mr. Yule was evidently yearning for his after-dinner nap, and Mark for his cigar, Moor followed his friend, and they stepped through the window into the garden, now lovely with the fading glow of summer sunset.

"You must know that this peculiar little sister of mine clings to some of her childish beliefs and pleasures in spite of Prue's preaching and my raillery," began Mark, after a refreshing whiff or two. "She is overflowing with love and good will, but being too shy or too proud to offer it to her fellow-creatures, she expends it upon the necessitous inhabitants of earth, air, and water with the most charming philanthropy. Her dependants are neither beautiful nor very interesting, nor is she sentimentally enamored of them; but the more ugly and desolate the creature, the more devoted is she. Look at her now; most young ladies would have hysterics over any one of those pets of hers."

Moor looked, and thought the group a very pretty one, though a plump toad sat at Sylvia's feet, a roly-poly caterpillar was walking up her sleeve, a blind bird chirped on her shoulder, bees buzzed harmlessly about her head, as if they mistook her

for a flower, and in her hand a little field mouse was breathing its short life away. Any tender-hearted girl might have stood thus surrounded by helpless things that pity had endeared, but few would have regarded them with an expression like that which Sylvia wore. Figure, posture, and employment were so childlike in their innocent unconsciousness, that the contrast was all the more strongly marked between them and the sweet thoughtfulness that made her face singularly attractive with the charm of dawning womanhood. Moor spoke before Mark could dispose of his smoke.

"This is a great improvement upon the boudoir full of lap-dogs, worsted-work and novels, Miss Sylvia. May I ask if you feel no repugnance to some of your patients; or is your charity strong enough to beautify them all?"

"I dislike many people, but few animals, because however ugly I pity them, and whatever I pity I am sure to love. It may be silly, but I think it does me good; and till I am wise enough to help my fellow-beings, I try to do my duty to these humbler sufferers, and find them both grateful and affectionate."

There was something very winning in the girl's manner as she spoke, touching the little creature in her hand almost as tenderly as if it had been a child. It showed the newcomer another phase of this many-sided character; and while Sylvia related the histories of her pets at his request, he was enjoying that finer history which every ingenuous soul writes on its owner's countenance for gifted eyes to read and love. As she paused, the little mouse lay stark

and still in her gentle hand; and though they smiled at themselves, both young men felt like boys again as they helped her scoop a grave among the pansies, owning the beauty of compassion, though she showed it to them in such a simple shape.

Then Mark delivered his message, and Sylvia went away to receive Prue's lecture, with outward meekness, but such an absent mind that the words of wisdom went by her like the wind.

"Now come and take our twilight stroll, while Mark keeps Mr. Moor in the studio and Prue prepares another exhortation," said Sylvia, as her father woke, and taking his arm, they paced along the wide piazza that encircled the whole house.

"Will father do me a little favor?"

"That is all he lives for, dear."

"Then his life is a very successful one;" and the girl folded her other hand over that already on his arm. Mr. Yule shook his head with a regretful sigh, but asked benignly —

"What shall I do for my little daughter?"

"Forbid Mark to execute a plot with which he threatens me. He says he will bring every gentleman he knows (and that is a great many) to the house, and make it so agreeable that they will keep coming; for he insists that I need amusement, and nothing will be so entertaining as a lover or two. Please tell him not to, for I don't want any lovers yet."

"Why not?" asked her father, much amused at her twilight confidences.

"I'm afraid. Love is so cruel to some people, I feel as if it

would be to me, for I am always in extremes, and continually going wrong while trying to go right. Love bewilders the wisest, and it would make me quite blind or mad, I know; therefore I'd rather have nothing to do with it, for a long, long while."

"Then Mark shall be forbidden to bring a single specimen. I very much prefer to keep you as you are. And yet you may be happier to do as others do; try it, if you like, my dear."

"But I can't do as others do; I've tried, and failed. Last winter, when Prue made me go about, though people probably thought me a stupid little thing, moping in corners, I was enjoying myself in my own way, and making discoveries that have been very useful ever since. I know I'm whimsical, and hard to please, and have no doubt the fault was in myself, but I was disappointed in nearly every one I met, though I went into what Prue calls 'our best society.' The girls seemed all made on the same pattern; they all said, did, thought, and wore about the same things, and knowing one was as good as knowing a dozen. Jessie Hope was the only one I cared much for, and she is so pretty, she seems made to be looked at and loved."

"How did you find the young gentlemen, Sylvia?"

"Still worse; for, though lively enough among themselves they never found it worth their while to offer us any conversation but such as was very like the champagne and ice-cream they brought us, – sparkling, sweet, and unsubstantial. Almost all of them wore the superior air they put on before women, an air that says as plainly as words, 'I may ask you and I may not.' Now that is very

exasperating to those who care no more for them than so many grasshoppers, and I often longed to take the conceit out of them by telling some of the criticisms passed upon them by the amiable young ladies who looked as if waiting to say meekly, 'Yes, thank you.'"

"Don't excite yourself, my dear; it is all very lamentable and laughable, but we must submit till the world learns better. There are often excellent young persons among the 'grasshoppers,' and if you cared to look you might find a pleasant friend here and there," said Mr. Yule, leaning a little toward his son's view of the matter.

"No, I cannot even do that without being laughed at; for no sooner do I mention the word friendship than people nod wisely and look as if they said, 'Oh, yes, every one knows what that sort of thing amounts to.' I should like a friend, father; some one beyond home, because he would be newer; a man (old or young, I don't care which), because men go where they like, see things with their own eyes, and have more to tell if they choose. I want a person simple, wise, and entertaining; and I think I should make a very grateful friend if such an one was kind enough to like me."

"I think you would, and perhaps if you try to be more like others you will find friends as they do, and so be happy, Sylvia."

"I cannot be like others, and their friendships would not satisfy me. I don't try to be odd; I long to be quiet and satisfied, but I cannot; and when I do what Prue calls wild things, it is not because I am thoughtless or idle, but because I am trying to

be good and happy. The old ways fail, so I attempt new ones, hoping they will succeed; but they don't, and I still go looking and longing for happiness, yet always failing to find it, till sometimes I think I am a born disappointment."

"Perhaps love would bring the happiness, my dear?"

"I'm afraid not; but, however that may be, I shall never go running about for a lover as half my mates do. When the true one comes I shall know him, love him at once, and cling to him forever, no matter what may happen. Till then I want a friend, and I will find one if I can. Don't you believe there may be real and simple friendships between men and women without falling into this everlasting sea of love?"

Mr. Yule was laughing quietly under cover of the darkness, but composed himself to answer gravely —

"Yes, for some of the most beautiful and famous friendships have been such, and I see no reason why there may not be again. Look about, Sylvia, make yourself happy; and, whether you find friend or lover, remember there is always the old Papa glad to do his best for you in both capacities."

Sylvia's hand crept to her father's shoulder, and her voice was full of daughterly affection, as she said —

"I'll have no lover but 'the old Papa' for a long while yet. But I will look about, and if I am fortunate enough to find and good enough to keep the person I want, I shall be very happy; for, father, I really think I need a friend."

Here Mark called his sister in to sing to them, a demand that

would have been refused but for a promise to Prue to behave her best as an atonement for past pranks. Stepping in she sat down and gave Moor another surprise, as from her slender throat there came a voice whose power and pathos made a tragedy of the simple ballad she was singing.

"Why did you choose that plaintive thing, all about love, despair, and death? It quite breaks one's heart to hear it," said Prue, pausing in a mental estimate of her morning's shopping.

"It came into my head, and so I sung it. Now I'll try another, for I am bound to please you – if I can." And she broke out again with an airy melody as jubilant as if a lark had mistaken moonlight for the dawn and soared skyward, singing as it went. So blithe and beautiful were both voice and song they caused a sigh of pleasure, a sensation of keen delight in the listener, and seemed to gift the singer with an unsuspected charm. As she ended Sylvia turned about, and seeing the satisfaction of their guest in his face, prevented him from expressing it in words by saying, in her frank way —

"Never mind the compliments. I know my voice is good, for that you may thank nature; that it is well trained, for that praise Herr Pedalsturm; and that you have heard it at all, you owe to my desire to atone for certain trespasses of yesterday and to-day, because I seldom sing before strangers."

"Allow me to offer my hearty thanks to Nature, Pedalsturm, and Penitence, and also to hope that in time I may be regarded, not as a stranger, but a neighbor and a friend."

Something in the gentle emphasis of the last word struck pleasantly on the girl's ear, and seemed to answer an unspoken longing. She looked up at him with a searching glance, appeared to find some 'assurance given by looks,' and as a smile broke over her face she offered her hand as if obeying a sudden impulse, and said, half to him, half to herself —

"I think I have found the friend already."

CHAPTER III.
AFLOAT

Sylvia sat sewing in the sunshine with an expression on her face half mirthful, half melancholy, as she looked backward to the girlhood just ended, and forward to the womanhood just beginning, for on that midsummer day, she was eighteen. Voices roused her from her reverie, and, looking up, she saw her brother approaching with two friends, their neighbor Geoffrey Moor and his guest Adam Warwick. Her first impulse was to throw down her work and run to meet them, her second to remember her new dignity and sit still, awaiting them with well-bred composure, quite unconscious that the white figure among the vines added a picturesque finish to the quiet summer scene.

They came up warm and merry, with a brisk row across the bay, and Sylvia met them with a countenance that gave a heartier welcome than her words, as she greeted the neighbor cordially, the stranger courteously, and began to gather up her work when they seated themselves in the bamboo chairs scattered about the wide piazza.

"You need not disturb yourself," said Mark, "we are only making this a way-station, *en route* for the studio. Can you tell me where my knapsack is to be found? after one of Prue's stowages, nothing short of a divining-rod will discover it, I'm afraid."

"I know where it is. Are you going away again so soon, Mark?"

"Only a two days' trip up the river with these mates of mine. No, Sylvia, it can't be done."

"I did not say anything."

"Not in words, but you looked a whole volley of 'Can't I goes?' and I answered it. No girl but you would dream of such a thing; you hate picnics, and as this will be a long and rough one, don't you see how absurd it would be for you to try it?"

"I don't quite see it, Mark, for this would not be an ordinary picnic; it would be like a little romance to me, and I had rather have it than any birthday present you could give me. We used to have such happy times together before we were grown up, I don't like to be so separated now. But if it is not best, I'm sorry that I even looked a wish."

Sylvia tried to keep both disappointment and desire out of her voice as she spoke, though a most intense longing had taken possession of her when she heard of a projected pleasure so entirely after her own heart. But there was an unconscious reproach in her last words, a mute appeal in the wistful eyes that looked across the glittering bay to the green hills beyond. Now, Mark was both fond and proud of the young sister, who, while he was studying art abroad, had studied nature at home, till the wayward but winning child had bloomed into a most attractive girl. He remembered her devotion to him, his late neglect of her, and longed to make atonement. With elevated eyebrows and inquiring glances, he turned from one friend to another. Moor

nodded and smiled, Warwick nodded, and sighed privately, and having taken the sense of the meeting by a new style of vote, Mark suddenly announced —

"You can go if you like, Sylvia."

"What!" cried his sister, starting up with a characteristic impetuosity that sent her basket tumbling down the steps, and crowned her dozing cat with Prue's nightcap frills. "Do you mean it, Mark? Wouldn't it spoil your pleasure, Mr. Moor? Shouldn't I be a trouble, Mr. Warwick? Tell me frankly, for if I can go I shall be happier than I can express."

The gentlemen smiled at her eagerness, but as they saw the altered face she turned toward them, each felt already repaid for any loss of freedom they might experience hereafter, and gave unanimous consent. Upon receipt of which Sylvia felt inclined to dance about the three and bless them audibly, but restrained herself, and beamed upon them in a state of wordless gratitude pleasant to behold. Having given a rash consent, Mark now thought best to offer a few obstacles to enhance its value and try his sister's mettle.

"Don't ascend into the air like a young balloon, child, but hear the conditions upon which you go, for if you fail to work three miracles it is all over with you. Firstly, the consent of the higher powers, for father will dread all sorts of dangers – you are such a freakish creature, – and Prue will be scandalized because trips like this are not the fashion for young ladies."

"Consider that point settled and go on to the next," said Sylvia,

who, having ruled the house ever since she was born, had no fears of success with either father or sister.

"Secondly, you must do yourself up in as compact a parcel as possible; for though you little women are very ornamental on land, you are not very convenient for transportation by water. Cambric gowns and French slippers are highly appropriate and agreeable at the present moment, but must be sacrificed to the stern necessities of the case. You must make a dowdy of yourself in some usefully short, scant, dingy costume, which will try the nerves of all beholders, and triumphantly prove that women were never meant for such excursions."

"Wait five minutes and I'll triumphantly prove to the contrary," answered Sylvia, as she ran into the house.

Her five minutes was sufficiently elastic to cover fifteen, for she was ravaging her wardrobe to effect her purpose and convince her brother, whose artistic tastes she consulted, with a skill that did her good service in the end. Rapidly assuming a gray gown, with a jaunty jacket of the same, she kilted the skirt over one of green, the pedestrian length of which displayed boots of uncompromising thickness. Over her shoulder, by a broad ribbon, she slung a prettily wrought pouch, and ornamented her hat pilgrim-wise with a cockle shell. Then taking her brother's alpen-stock she crept down, and standing in the door-way presented a little figure all in gray and green, like the earth she was going to wander over, and a face that blushed and smiled and shone as she asked demurely —

"Please, Mark, am I picturesque and convenient enough to go?"

He wheeled about and stared approvingly, forgetting cause in effect till Warwick began to laugh like a merry bass viol, and Moor joined him, saying —

"Come, Mark, own that you are conquered, and let us turn our commonplace voyage into a pleasure pilgrimage, with a lively lady to keep us knights and gentlemen wherever we are."

"I say no more; only remember, Sylvia, if you get burnt, drowned, or blown away, I'm not responsible for the damage, and shall have the satisfaction of saying, 'There, I told you so.'"

"That satisfaction may be mine when I come home quite safe and well," replied Sylvia, serenely. "Now for the last condition."

Warwick looked with interest from the sister to the brother; for, being a solitary man, domestic scenes and relations possessed the charm of novelty to him.

"Thirdly, you are not to carry a boat-load of luggage, cloaks, pillows, silver forks, or a dozen napkins, but are to fare as we fare, sleeping in hammocks, barns, or on the bare ground, without shrieking at bats or bewailing the want of mosquito netting; eating when, where, and what is most convenient, and facing all kinds of weather regardless of complexion, dishevelment, and fatigue. If you can promise all this, be here loaded and ready to go off at six o'clock to-morrow morning."

After which cheerful picture of the joys to come, Mark marched away to his studio, taking his friends with him.

Sylvia worked the three miracles, and at half past five, A. M. was discovered sitting on the piazza, with her hammock rolled into a twine sausage at her feet, her hat firmly tied on, her scrip packed, and her staff in her hand. "Waiting till called for," she said, as her brother passed her, late and yawning as usual. As the clock struck six the carriage drove round, and Moor and Warwick came up the avenue in nautical array. Then arose a delightful clamor of voices, slamming of doors, hurrying of feet and frequent peals of laughter; for every one was in holiday spirits, and the morning seemed made for pleasuring.

Mr. Yule regarded the voyagers with an aspect as benign as the summer sky overhead; Prue ran to and fro pouring forth a stream of counsels, warnings, and predictions; men and maids gathered on the lawn or hung out of upper windows; and even old Hecate, the cat, was seen chasing imaginary rats and mice in the grass till her yellow eyes glared with excitement. "All in," was announced at last, and as the carriage rolled away its occupants looked at one another with faces of blithe satisfaction that their pilgrimage was so auspiciously begun.

A mile or more up the river the large, newly-painted boat awaited them. The embarkation was a speedy one, for the cargo was soon stowed in lockers and under seats, Sylvia forwarded to her place in the bow; Mark, as commander of the craft, took the helm; Moor and Warwick, as crew, sat waiting orders; and Hugh, the coachman, stood ready to push off at word of command. Presently it came, a strong hand sent them rustling through the

flags, down dropped the uplifted oars, and with a farewell cheer from a group upon the shore the Kelpie glided out into the stream.

Sylvia, too full of genuine content to talk, sat listening to the musical dip of well-pulled oars, watching the green banks on either side, dabbling her hands in the eddies as they rippled by, and singing to the wind, as cheerful and serene as the river that gave her back a smiling image of herself. What her companions talked of she neither heard nor cared to know, for she was looking at the great picture-book that always lies ready for the turning of the youngest or the oldest hands; was receiving the welcome of the playmates she best loved, and was silently yielding herself to the power which works all wonders with its benignant magic. Hour after hour she journeyed along that fluent road. Under bridges where early fishers lifted up their lines to let them through; past gardens tilled by unskilful townsmen who harvested an hour of strength to pay the daily tax the city levied on them; past honeymoon cottages where young wives walked with young husbands in the dew, or great houses shut against the morning. Lovers came floating down the stream with masterless rudder and trailing oars. College race-boats shot by with modern Greek choruses in full blast and the frankest criticisms from their scientific crews. Fathers went rowing to and fro with argosies of pretty children, who gave them gay good morrows. Sometimes they met fanciful nutshells manned by merry girls, who made for shore at sight of them with most erratic movements and novel commands included in their Art of Navigation. Now and then

some poet or philosopher went musing by, fishing for facts or fictions, where other men catch pickerel or perch.

All manner of sights and sounds greeted Sylvia, and she felt as if she were watching a Panorama painted in water colors by an artist who had breathed into his work the breath of life and given each figure power to play its part. Never had human faces looked so lovely to her eye, for morning beautified the plainest with its ruddy kiss; never had human voices sounded so musical to her ear, for daily cares had not yet brought discord to the instruments tuned by sleep and touched by sunshine into pleasant sound; never had the whole race seemed so near and dear to her, for she was unconsciously pledging all she met in that genuine Elixir Vitæ which sets the coldest blood aglow and makes the whole world kin; never had she felt so truly her happiest self, for of all the costlier pleasures she had known not one had been so congenial as this, as she rippled farther and farther up the stream and seemed to float into a world whose airs brought only health and peace. Her comrades wisely left her to her thoughts, a smiling Silence for their figure-head, and none among them but found the day fairer and felt himself fitter to enjoy it for the innocent companionship of maidenhood and a happy heart.

At noon they dropped anchor under a wide-spreading oak that stood on the river's edge, a green tent for wanderers like themselves; there they ate their first meal spread among white clovers, with a pair of squirrels staring at them as curiously as human spectators ever watched royalty at dinner, while several

meek cows courteously left their guests the shade and went away to dine at a side-table spread in the sun. They spent an hour or two talking or drowsing luxuriously on the grass; then the springing up of a fresh breeze roused them all, and weighing anchor they set sail for another port.

Now Sylvia saw new pictures, for, leaving all traces of the city behind them, they went swiftly countryward. Sometimes by hayfields, each an idyl in itself, with white-sleeved mowers all arow; the pleasant sound of whetted scythes; great loads rumbling up lanes, with brown-faced children shouting atop; rosy girls raising fragrant winrows or bringing water for thirsty sweethearts leaning on their rakes. Often they saw ancient farm-houses with mossy roofs, and long well-sweeps suggestive of fresh draughts, and the drip of brimming pitchers; orchards and cornfields rustling on either hand, and grandmotherly caps at the narrow windows, or stout matrons tending babies in the doorway as they watched smaller selves playing keep house under the "laylocks" by the wall. Villages, like white flocks, slept on the hillsides; martinbox schoolhouses appeared here and there, astir with busy voices, alive with wistful eyes; and more than once they came upon little mermen bathing, who dived with sudden splashes, like a squad of turtles tumbling off a sunny rock.

Then they went floating under vernal arches, where a murmurous rustle seemed to whisper, "Stay!" along shadowless sweeps, where the blue turned to gold and dazzled with its unsteady shimmer; passed islands so full of birds they seemed

green cages floating in the sun, or doubled capes that opened long vistas of light and shade, through which they sailed into the pleasant land where summer reigned supreme. To Sylvia it seemed as if the inhabitants of these solitudes had flocked down to the shore to greet her as she came. Fleets of lilies unfurled their sails on either hand, and cardinal flowers waved their scarlet flags among the green. The sagittaria lifted its blue spears from arrowy leaves; wild roses smiled at her with blooming faces; meadow lilies rang their flame-colored bells; and clematis and ivy hung garlands everywhere, as if hers were a floral progress, and each came to do her honor.

Her neighbors kept up a flow of conversation as steady as the river's, and Sylvia listened now. Insensibly the changeful scenes before them recalled others, and in the friendly atmosphere that surrounded them these reminiscences found free expression. Each of the three had been fortunate in seeing much of foreign life; each had seen a different phase of it, and all were young enough to be still enthusiastic, accomplished enough to serve up their recollections with taste and skill, and give Sylvia glimpses of the world through spectacles sufficiently rose-colored to lend it the warmth which even Truth allows to her sister Romance.

The wind served them till sunset, then the sail was lowered and the rowers took to their oars. Sylvia demanded her turn, and wrestled with one big oar while Warwick sat behind and did the work. Having blistered her hands and given herself as fine a color as any on her brother's palette, she professed herself

satisfied, and went back to her seat to watch the evening-red transfigure earth and sky, making the river and its banks a more royal pageant than splendor-loving Elizabeth ever saw along the Thames.

Anxious to reach a certain point, they rowed on into the twilight, growing stiller and stiller as the deepening hush seemed to hint that Nature was at her prayers. Slowly the Kelpie floated along the shadowy way, and as the shores grew dim, the river dark with leaning hemlocks or an overhanging cliff, Sylvia felt as if she were making the last voyage across that fathomless stream where a pale boatman plies and many go lamenting.

The long silence was broken first by Moor's voice, saying —

"Adam, sing."

If the influences of the hour had calmed Mark, touched Sylvia, and made Moor long for music, they had also softened Warwick. Leaning on his oar he lent the music of a mellow voice to the words of a German Volkslied, and launched a fleet of echoes such as any tuneful vintager might have sent floating down the Rhine. Sylvia was no weeper, but as she listened, all the day's happiness which had been pent up in her heart found vent in sudden tears, that streamed down noiseless and refreshing as a warm south rain. Why they came she could not tell, for neither song nor singer possessed the power to win so rare a tribute, and at another time, she would have restrained all visible expression of this indefinable yet sweet emotion. Mark and Moor had joined in the burden of the song, and when that was done

took up another; but Sylvia only sat and let her tears flow while they would, singing at heart, though her eyes were full and her cheeks wet faster than the wind could kiss them dry.

After frequent peerings and tackings here and there, Mark at last discovered the haven he desired, and with much rattling of oars, clanking of chains, and splashing of impetuous boots, a landing was effected, and Sylvia found herself standing on a green bank with her hammock in her arms and much wonderment in her mind whether the nocturnal experiences in store for her would prove as agreeable as the daylight ones had been. Mark and Moor unloaded the boat and prospected for an eligible sleeping-place. Warwick, being an old campaigner, set about building a fire, and the girl began her sylvan housekeeping. The scene rapidly brightened into light and color as the blaze sprang up, showing the little kettle slung gipsywise on forked sticks, and the supper prettily set forth in a leafy table-service on a smooth, flat stone. Soon four pairs of wet feet surrounded the fire; an agreeable oblivion of *meum* and *tuum* concerning plates, knives, and cups did away with etiquette, and every one was in a comfortable state of weariness, which rendered the thought of bed so pleasant that they deferred their enjoyment of the reality, as children keep the best bite till the last.

"What are you thinking of here all by yourself?" asked Mark, coming to lounge on his sister's plaid, which she had spread somewhat apart from the others, and where she sat watching the group before her with a dreamy aspect.

"I was watching your two friends. See what a fine study they make with the red flicker of the fire on their faces and the background of dark pines behind them."

They did make a fine study, for both were goodly men yet utterly unlike, one being of the heroic type, the other of the poetic. Warwick was a head taller than his tall friend, broad-shouldered, strong-limbed, and bronzed by wind and weather. A massive head, covered with rings of ruddy brown hair, gray eyes, that seemed to pierce through all disguises, an eminent nose, and a beard like one of Mark's stout saints. Power, intellect, and courage were stamped on face and figure, making him the manliest man that Sylvia had ever seen. He leaned against the stone, yet nothing could have been less reposeful than his attitude, for the native unrest of the man asserted itself in spite of weariness or any soothing influence of time or place. Moor was much slighter, and betrayed in every gesture the unconscious grace of the gentleman born. A most attractive face, with its broad brow, serene eyes, and the cordial smile about the mouth. A sweet, strong nature, one would say, which, having used life well had learned the secret of a true success. Inward tranquillity seemed his, and it was plain to see that no wave of sound, no wandering breath, no glimpse of color, no hint of night or nature was without its charm and its significance for him.

"Tell me about that man, Mark. I have heard you speak of him since you came home, but supposing he was some blowzy artist, I never cared to ask about him. Now I've seen him, I want to

know more," said Sylvia, as her brother laid himself down after an approving glance at the group opposite.

"I met him in Munich, when I first went abroad, and since then we have often come upon each other in our wanderings. He never writes, but goes and comes intent upon his own affairs; yet one never can forget him, and is always glad to feel the grip of his hand again, it seems to put such life and courage into one."

"Is he good?" asked Sylvia, womanlike, beginning with the morals.

"Violently virtuous. He is a masterful soul, bent on living out his beliefs and aspirations at any cost. Much given to denunciation of wrong-doing everywhere, and eager to execute justice upon all offenders high or low. Yet he possesses great nobility of character, great audacity of mind, and leads a life of the sternest integrity."

"Is he rich?"

"In his own eyes, because he makes his wants so few."

"Is he married?"

"No; he has no family, and not many friends, for he says what he means in the bluntest English, and few stand the test his sincerity applies."

"What does he do in the world?"

"Studies it, as we do books; dives into everything, analyzes character, and builds up his own with materials which will last. If that's not genius it's something better."

"Then he will do much good and be famous, won't he?"

"Great good to many, but never will be famous, I fear. He is too fierce an iconoclast to suit the old party, too individual a reformer to join the new, and being born a century too soon must bide his time, or play out his part before stage and audience are ready for him."

"Is he learned?"

"Very, in uncommon sorts of wisdom; left college after a year of it, because it could not give him what he wanted, and taking the world for his university, life for his tutor, says he shall not graduate till his term ends with days."

"I know I shall like him very much."

"I hope so, for my sake. He is a grand man in the rough, and an excellent tonic for those who have courage to try him."

Sylvia was silent, thinking over all she had just heard and finding much to interest her in it, because, to her imaginative and enthusiastic nature, there was something irresistibly attractive in the strong, solitary, self-reliant man. Mark watched her for a moment, then asked with lazy curiosity —

"How do you like this other friend of mine?"

"He went away when I was such a child that since he came back I've had to begin again; but if I like him at the end of another month as much as I do now, I shall try to make your friend my friend, because I need such an one very much."

Mark laughed at the innocent frankness of his sister's speech but took it as she meant it, and answered soberly —

"Better leave Platonics till you're forty. Though Moor is twelve

years older than yourself he is a young man still, and you are grown a very captivating little woman."

Sylvia looked both scornful and indignant.

"You need have no fears. There is such a thing as true and simple friendship between men and women, and if I can find no one of my own sex who can give me the help and happiness I want, why may I not look for it anywhere and accept it in whatever shape it comes?"

"You may, my dear, and I'll lend a hand with all my heart, but you must be willing to take the consequences in whatever shape *they* come," said Mark, not ill pleased with the prospect his fancy conjured up.

"I will," replied Sylvia loftily, and fate took her at her word.

Presently some one suggested bed, and the proposition was unanimously accepted.

"Where are you going to hang me?" asked Sylvia, as she laid hold of her hammock and looked about her with nearly as much interest as if her suspension was to be of the perpendicular order.

"You are not to be swung up in a tree to-night but laid like a ghost, and requested not to walk till morning. There is an unused barn close by, so we shall have a roof over us for one night longer," answered Mark, playing chamberlain while the others remained to quench the fire and secure the larder.

An early moon lighted Sylvia to bed, and when shown her half the barn, which, as she was a Marine, was very properly the bay, Mark explained, she scouted the idea of being nervous or

timid in such rude quarters, made herself a cosy nest and bade her brother a merry good night.

More weary than she would confess, Sylvia fell asleep at once, despite the novelty of her situation and the noises that fill a summer night with fitful rustlings and tones. How long she slept she did not know, but woke suddenly and sat erect with that curious thrill which sometimes startles one out of deepest slumber, and is often the forerunner of some dread or danger. She felt this hot tingle through blood and nerves, and stared about her thinking of fire. But everything was dark and still, and after waiting a few moments she decided that her nest had been too warm, for her temples throbbed and her cheeks were feverish with the close air of the barn half filled with new-made hay.

Creeping up a fragrant slope she spread her plaid again and lay down where a cool breath flowed through wide chinks in the wall. Sleep was slowly returning when the rustle of footsteps scared it quite away and set her heart beating fast, for they came toward the new couch she had chosen. Holding her breath she listened. The quiet tread drew nearer and nearer till it paused within a yard of her, then some one seemed to throw themselves down, sigh heavily a few times and grow still as if falling asleep.

"It is Mark," thought Sylvia, and whispered his name, but no one answered, and from the other corner of the barn she heard her brother muttering in his sleep. Who was it, then? Mark had said there were no cattle near, she was sure neither of her comrades had left their bivouac, for there was her brother talking

as usual in his dreams; some one seemed restless and turned often with decided motion, that was Warwick, she thought, while the quietest sleeper of the three betrayed his presence by laughing once with the low-toned merriment she recognized as Moor's. These discoveries left her a prey to visions of grimy strollers, maudlin farm-servants, and infectious emigrants in dismal array. A strong desire to cry out possessed her for a moment, but was checked; for with all her sensitiveness Sylvia had much common sense, and that spirit which hates to be conquered even by a natural fear. She remembered her scornful repudiation of the charge of timidity, and the endless jokes she would have to undergo if her mysterious neighbor should prove some harmless wanderer or an imaginary terror of her own, so she held her peace, thinking valiantly as the drops gathered on her forehead, and every sense grew painfully alert —

"I'll not call if my hair turns gray with fright, and I find myself an idiot to-morrow. I told them to try me, and I won't be found wanting at the first alarm. I'll be still, if the thing does not touch me till dawn, when I shall know how to act at once, and so save myself from ridicule at the cost of a wakeful night."

Holding fast to this resolve Sylvia lay motionless; listening to the cricket's chirp without, and taking uncomfortable notes of the state of things within, for the new comer stirred heavily, sighed long and deeply, and seemed to wake often, like one too sad or weary to rest. She would have been wise to have screamed her scream and had the rout over, for she tormented herself with

the ingenuity of a lively fancy, and suffered more from her own terrors than at the discovery of a dozen vampires. Every tale of *diablerie* she had ever heard came most inopportunely to haunt her now, and though she felt their folly she could not free herself from their dominion. She wondered till she could wonder no longer what the morning would show her. She tried to calculate in how many springs she could reach and fly over the low partition which separated her from her sleeping body-guard. She wished with all her heart that she had stayed in her nest which was nearer the door, and watched for dawn with eyes that ached to see the light.

In the midst of these distressful sensations the far-off crow of some vigilant chanticleer assured her that the short summer night was wearing away and relief was at hand. This comfortable conviction had so good an effect that she lapsed into what seemed a moment's oblivion, but was in fact an hour's restless sleep, for when her eyes unclosed again the first red streaks were visible in the east, and a dim light found its way into the barn through the great door which had been left ajar for air. An instant Sylvia lay collecting herself, then rose on her arm, looked resolutely behind her, stared with round eyes a moment, and dropped down again, laughing with a merriment, which coming on the heels of her long alarm was rather hysterical. All she saw was a little soft-eyed Alderney, which lifted its stag-like head, and regarded her with a confiding aspect that won her pardon for its innocent offence.

Through the relief of both mind and body which she

experienced in no small degree, the first thought that came was a thankful "what a mercy I didn't call Mark, for I should never have heard the last of this;" and having fought her fears alone she enjoyed her success alone, and girl-like resolved to say nothing of her first night's adventures. Gathering herself up she crept nearer and caressed her late terror, which stretched its neck toward her with a comfortable sound, and munched her shawl like a cosset lamb. But before this new friendship was many minutes old, Sylvia's heavy lids fell together, her head dropped lower and lower, her hand lay still on the dappled neck, and with a long sigh of weariness she dropped back upon the hay, leaving little Alderney to watch over her much more tranquilly than she had watched over it.

CHAPTER IV.
THROUGH FLOOD AND FIELD AND FIRE

Very early were they afloat again, and as they glided up the stream Sylvia watched the earth's awakening, seeing in it what her own should be. The sun was not yet visible above the hills, but the sky was ready for his coming, with the soft flush of color dawn gives only to her royal lover. Birds were chanting matins as if all the jubilance of their short lives must be poured out at once. Flowers stirred and brightened like children after sleep. A balmy wind came whispering from the wood, bringing the aroma of pines, the cool breath of damp nooks, the healthful kiss that leaves a glow behind. Light mists floated down the river like departing visions that had haunted it by night, and every ripple breaking on the shore seemed to sing a musical good morrow.

Sylvia could not conceal the weariness her long vigil left behind; and after betraying herself by a drowsy lurch that nearly took her overboard, she made herself comfortable, and slept till the grating of the keel on a pebbly shore woke her to find a new harbor reached under the lee of a cliff, whose deep shadow was very grateful after the glare of noon upon the water.

"How do you intend to dispose of yourself this afternoon, Adam?" asked Mark, when dinner was over and his sister busy

feeding the birds.

"In this way," answered Warwick, producing a book and settling himself in a commodious cranny of the rock.

"Moor and I want to climb the cliff and sketch the view; but it is too rough a road for Sylvia. Would you mind mounting guard for an hour or two? Read away, and leave her to amuse herself; only pray don't let her get into any mischief by way of enjoying her liberty, for she fears nothing and is fond of experiments."

"I'll do my best," replied Warwick, with an air of resignation.

Having slung the hammock and seen Sylvia safely into it, the climbers departed, leaving her to enjoy the luxury of motion. For half an hour she swung idly, looking up into the green pavilion overhead, where many insect families were busy with their small joys and cares, or out over the still landscape basking in the warmth of a cloudless afternoon. Then she opened a book Mark had brought for his own amusement, and began to read as intently as her companion, who leaned against the boulder slowly turning his pages, with leafy shadows flickering over his uncovered head and touching it with alternate sun and shade. The book proved interesting, and Sylvia was rapidly skimming into the heart of the story, when an unguarded motion caused her swing to slope perilously to one side, and in saving herself she lost her book. This produced a predicament, for being helped into a hammock and getting out alone are two very different things. She eyed the distance from her nest to the ground, and fancied it had been made unusually great to keep her stationary.

She held fast with one hand and stretched downward with the other, but the book insolently flirted its leaves just out of reach. She took a survey of Warwick; he had not perceived her plight, and she felt an unwonted reluctance to call for help, because he did not look like one used to come and go at a woman's bidding. After several fruitless essays she decided to hazard an ungraceful descent; and, gathering herself up, was about to launch boldly out, when Warwick cried, "Stop!" in a tone that nearly produced the catastrophe he wished to avert. Sylvia subsided, and coming up he lifted the book, glanced at the title, then keenly at the reader.

"Do you like this?"

"So far very much."

"Are you allowed to read what you choose?"

"Yes, sir. That is Mark's choice, however; I brought no book."

"I advise you to skim it into the river; it is not a book for you."

Sylvia caught a glimpse of the one he had been reading himself, and impelled by a sudden impulse to see what would come of it, she answered with a look as keen as his own —

"You disapprove of my book; would you recommend yours?"

"In this case, yes; for in one you will find much falsehood in purple and fine linen, in the other some truth in fig-leaves. Take your choice."

He offered both; but Sylvia took refuge in civility.

"I thank you, I'll have neither; but if you will please steady the hammock, I will try to find some more harmless amusement

for myself."

He obeyed with one of the humorous expressions which often passed over his face. Sylvia descended as gracefully as circumstances permitted, and went roving up and down the cliffs. Warwick resumed his seat and the "barbaric yawp," but seemed to find Truth in demi-toilet less interesting than Youth in a gray gown and round hat, for which his taste is to be commended. The girl had small scope for amusement, and when she had gathered moss for pillows, laid out a white fungus to dry for a future pin-cushion, harvested penny-royal in little sheaves tied with grass-blades, watched a battle between black ants and red, and learned the landscape by heart; she was at the end of her resources, and leaning on a stone surveyed earth and sky with a somewhat despondent air.

"You would like something to do, I think."

"Yes, sir; for being rather new to this sort of life, I have not yet learned how to dispose of my time."

"I see that, and having deprived you of one employment will try to replace it by another."

Warwick rose, and going to the single birch that glimmered among the pines like a delicate spirit of the wood, he presently returned with strips of silvery bark.

"You were wishing for baskets to hold your spoils, yesterday; shall we make some now?" he asked.

"How stupid in me not to think of that! Yes, thank you, I should like it very much;" and producing her housewife, Sylvia

fell to work with a brightening face.

Warwick sat a little below her on the rock, shaping his basket in perfect silence. This did not suit Sylvia, for feeling lively and loquacious she wanted conversation to occupy her thoughts as pleasantly as the birch rolls were occupying her hands, and there sat a person who, she was sure, could do it perfectly if he chose. She reconnoitered with covert glances, made sundry overtures, and sent out envoys in the shape of scissors, needles, and thread. But no answering glance met hers; her remarks received the briefest replies, and her offers of assistance were declined with an absent "No, thank you." Then she grew indignant at this seeming neglect, and thought, as she sat frowning over her work, behind his back —

"He treats me like a child, – very well, then, I'll behave like one, and beset him with questions till he is driven to speak; for he can talk, he ought to talk, he shall talk."

"Mr. Warwick, do you like children?" she began, with a determined aspect.

"Better than men or women."

"Do you enjoy amusing them?"

"Exceedingly, when in the humor."

"Are you in the humor now?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Then why don't you amuse me?"

"Because you are not a child."

"I fancied you thought me one."

"If I had, I probably should have put you on my knee, and told you fairy tales, or cut dolls for you out of this bark, instead of sitting respectfully silent and making a basket for your stores."

There was a curious smile about Warwick's mouth as he spoke, and Sylvia was rather abashed by her first exploit. But there was a pleasure in the daring, and choosing another topic she tried again.

"Mark was telling me last night about the great college you had chosen; I thought it must be a very original and interesting way to educate one's self, and wanted very much to know what you had been studying lately. May I ask you now?"

"Men and women," was the brief answer.

"Have you got your lesson, sir?"

"A part of it very thoroughly, I believe."

"Would you think me rude if I asked which part?"

"The latter."

"And what conclusions do you arrive at concerning this branch of the subject?" asked Sylvia, smiling and interested.

"That it is both dangerous and unsatisfactory."

He spoke so gravely, looked so stern, that Sylvia obeyed a warning instinct and sat silent till she had completed a canoe-shaped basket, the useful size of which produced a sudden longing to fill it. Her eye had already spied a knoll across the river covered with vines, and so suggestive of berries that she now found it impossible to resist the desire for an exploring trip in that direction. The boat was too large for her to manage alone,

but an enterprising spirit had taken possession of her, and having made one voyage of discovery with small success she resolved to try again, hoping a second in another direction might prove more fruitful.

"Is your basket done, sir?" she asked.

"Yes; will you have it?"

"Why, you have made it as an Indian would, using grass instead of thread. It is much more complete than mine, for the green stitches ornament the white bark, but the black ones disfigure it. I should know a man made your basket and a woman mine."

"Because one is ugly and strong, the other graceful but unable to stand alone?" asked Warwick, rising, with a gesture that sent the silvery shreds flying away on the wind.

"One holds as much as the other, however; and I fancy the woman would fill hers soonest if she had the wherewithal to do it. Do you know there are berries on that hillside opposite?"

"I see vines, but consider fruit doubtful, for boys and birds are thicker than blackberries."

"I've a firm conviction that they have left some for us; and as Mark says you like frankness, I think I shall venture to ask you to row me over and help me fill the baskets on the other side."

Sylvia looked up at him with a merry mixture of doubt and daring in her face, and offered him his hat.

"Very good, I will," said Warwick, leading the way to the boat with an alacrity which proved how much pleasanter to him was

action than repose.

There was no dry landing-place just opposite, and as he rowed higher, Adam fixed his eyes on Sylvia with a look peculiar to himself, a gaze more keen than soft, which seemed to search one through and through with its rapid discernment. He saw a face full of contradictions, – youthful, maidenly, and intelligent, yet touched with the unconscious melancholy which is born of disappointment and desire. The mouth was sweet and tender as a woman's should be, the brow spirited and thoughtful; but the eyes were by turns eager, absent, or sad, and there was much pride in the carriage of the small head with its hair of wavy gold gathered into a green snood, whence little tendrils kept breaking loose to dance upon her forehead, or hang about her neck. A most significant but not a beautiful face, because of its want of harmony. The dark eyes, among their fair surroundings, disturbed the sight as a discord in music jars upon the ear; even when the lips smiled the sombre shadow of black lashes seemed to fill them with a gloom that was never wholly lost. The voice, too, which should have been a girlish treble, was full and low as a matured woman's, with now and then a silvery ring to it, as if another and a blither creature spoke.

Sylvia could not be offended by the grave penetration of this glance, though an uncomfortable consciousness that she was being analyzed and tested made her meet it with a look intended to be dignified, but which was also somewhat defiant, and more than one smile passed over Warwick's countenance as

he watched her. The moment the boat glided with a soft swish among the rushes that fringed the shore, she sprang up the bank, and leaving a basket behind her by way of hint, hurried to the sandy knoll, where, to her great satisfaction, she found the vines heavy with berries. As Warwick joined her she held up a shining cluster, saying with a touch of exultation in her voice —

"My faith is rewarded; taste and believe."

He accepted them with a nod, and said pleasantly —

"As my prophecy has failed, let us see if yours will be fulfilled."

"I accept the challenge." And down upon her knees went Sylvia among the vines, regardless of stains, rents, or wounded hands.

Warwick strolled away to leave her "claim" free, and silence fell between them; for one was too busy with thorns, the other with thoughts, to break the summer stillness. Sylvia worked with as much energy as if a silver cup was to be the reward of success. The sun shone fervently and the wind was cut off by the hill, drops gathered on her forehead and her cheeks glowed; but she only pushed off her hat, thrust back her hair, and moved on to a richer spot. Vines caught at her by sleeve and skirt as if to dishearten the determined plunderer, but on she went with a wrench and a rip, an impatient "Ah!" and a hasty glance at damaged fabrics and fingers. Lively crickets flew up in swarms about her, surly wasps disputed her right to the fruit, and drunken bees blundered against her as they met zigzagging homeward

much the worse for blackberry wine. She never heeded any of them, though at another time she would gladly have made friends with all, but found compensation for her discomforts in the busy twitter of sand swallows perched on the mullein-tops, the soft flight of yellow butterflies, and the rapidity with which the little canoe received its freight of "Ethiop sweets." As the last handful went in she sprung up crying "Done!" with a suddenness that broke up the Long Parliament and sent its members skimming away as if a second "Noll" had appeared among them. "Done!" came back Warwick's answer like a deep echo from below, and hurrying down to meet him she displayed her success, saying archly —

"I am glad we both won, though to be perfectly candid I think mine is decidedly the fullest." But as she swung up her birch pannier the handle broke, and down went basket, berries and all, into the long grass rustling at her feet.

Warwick could not restrain a laugh at the blank dismay that fell upon the exultation of Sylvia's face, and for a moment she was both piqued and petulant. Hot, tired, disappointed, and, hardest of all, laughed at, it was one of those times that try girls' souls. But she was too old to cry, too proud to complain, too well-bred to resent, so the little gust passed over unseen, she thought, and joining in the merriment she said, as she knelt down beside the wreck —

"This is a practical illustration of the old proverb, and I deserve it for my boasting. Next time I'll try to combine strength

and beauty in my work."

To wise people character is betrayed by trifles. Warwick stopped laughing, and something about the girlish figure in the grass, regathering with wounded hands the little harvest lately lost, seemed to touch him. His face softened suddenly as he collected several broad leaves, spread them on the grass, and sitting down by Sylvia, looked under her hat-brim with a glance of mingled penitence and friendliness.

"Now, young philosopher, pile up your berries in that green platter while I repair the basket. Bear this in mind when you work in bark: make your handle the way of the grain, and choose a strip both smooth and broad."

Then drawing out his knife he fell to work, and while he tied green withes, as if the task were father to the thought, he told her something of a sojourn among the Indians, of whom he had learned much concerning their woodcraft, arts, and superstitions; lengthening the legend till the little canoe was ready for another launch. With her fancy full of war-trails and wampum, Sylvia followed to the river-side, and as they floated back dabbled her stained fingers in the water, comforting their smart with its cool flow till they swept by the landing-place, when she asked, wonderingly —

"Where are we going now? Have I been so troublesome that I must be taken home?"

"We are going to get a third course to follow the berries, unless you are afraid to trust yourself to me."

"Indeed, I'm not; take me where you like, sir."

Something in her frank tone, her confiding look, seemed to please Warwick; he sat a moment looking into the brown depths of the water, and let the boat drift, with no sound but the musical drip of drops from the oars.

"You are going upon a rock, sir."

"I did that three months ago."

He spoke as if to himself, his face darkened, and he shook the hair off his forehead with an impatient gesture. A swift stroke averted the shock, and the boat shot down the stream, leaving a track of foam behind it as Warwick rowed with the energy of one bent on outstripping some importunate remembrance or dogging care. Sylvia marvelled greatly at the change which came upon him, but held fast with flying hair and lips apart to catch the spray, enjoying the breezy flight along a path tessellated with broad bars of blue and gold. The race ended as abruptly as it began, and Warwick seemed the winner, for when they touched the coast of a floating lily-island, the cloud was gone. As he shipped his oars he turned, saying, with very much the look and manner of a pleasant boy —

"You were asleep when we passed this morning; but I know you like lilies, so let us go a fishing."

"That I do!" cried Sylvia, capturing a great white flower with a clutch that nearly took her overboard. Warwick drew her back and did the gathering himself.

"Enough, sir, quite enough. Here are plenty to trim our table

and ourselves with; leave the rest for other voyagers who may come this way."

As Warwick offered her the dripping nosegay he looked at the white hand scored with scarlet lines.

"Poor hand! let the lilies comfort it. You are a true woman, Miss Sylvia, for though your palm is purple there's not a stain upon your lips, and you have neither worked nor suffered for yourself it seems."

"I don't deserve that compliment, because I was only intent on outdoing you if possible; so you are mistaken again you see."

"Not entirely, I think. Some faces are so true an index of character that one cannot be mistaken. If you doubt this look down into the river, and such an one will inevitably smile back at you."

Pleased, yet somewhat abashed, Sylvia busied herself in knotting up the long brown stems and tinging her nose with yellow pollen as she inhaled the bitter-sweet breath of the lilies. But when Warwick turned to resume the oars, she said —

"Let us float out as we floated in. It is so still and lovely here I like to stay and enjoy it, for we may never see just such a scene again."

He obeyed, and both sat silent, watching the meadows that lay green and low along the shore, feeding their eyes with the beauty of the landscape, till its peaceful spirit seemed to pass into their own, and lend a subtle charm to that hour, which henceforth was to stand apart, serene and happy, in their memories forever.

A still August day, with a shimmer in the air that veiled the distant hills with the mellow haze, no artist ever truly caught. Midsummer warmth and ripeness brooded in the verdure of field and forest. Wafts of fragrance went wandering by from new-mown meadows and gardens full of bloom. All the sky wore its serenest blue, and up the river came frolic winds, ruffling the lily leaves until they showed their purple linings, sweeping shadowy ripples through the long grass, and lifting the locks from Sylvia's forehead with a grateful touch, as she sat softly swaying with the swaying of the boat. Slowly they drifted out into the current, slowly Warwick cleft the water with reluctant stroke, and slowly Sylvia's mind woke from its trance of dreamy delight, as with a gesture of assent she said —

"Yes, I am ready now. That was a happy little moment, and I am glad to have lived it, for such times return to refresh me when many a more stirring one is quite forgotten." A moment after she added, eagerly, as a new object of interest appeared: "Mr. Warwick, I see smoke. I know there is a wood on fire; I want to see it; please land again."

He glanced over his shoulder at the black cloud trailing away before the wind, saw Sylvia's desire in her face, and silently complied; for being a keen student of character, he was willing to prolong an interview that gave him glimpses of a nature in which the woman and the child were curiously blended.

"I love fire, and that must be a grand one, if we could only see it well. This bank is not high enough; let us go nearer and

enjoy it," said Sylvia, finding that an orchard and a knoll or two intercepted the view of the burning wood.

"It is too far."

"Not at all. I am no helpless, fine lady. I can walk, run, and climb like any boy; so you need have no fears for me. I may never see such a sight again, and you know you'd go if you were alone. Please come, Mr. Warwick."

"I promised Mark to take care of you, and for the very reason that you love fire, I'd rather not take you into that furnace, lest you never come out again. Let us go back immediately."

The decision of his tone ruffled Sylvia, and she turned wilful at once, saying in a tone as decided as his own —

"No; I wish to see it. I am always allowed to do what I wish, so I shall go;" with which mutinous remark she walked straight away towards the burning wood.

Warwick looked after her, indulging a momentary desire to carry her back to the boat, like a naughty child. But the resolute aspect of the figure going on before him, convinced him that the attempt would be a failure, and with an amused expression he leisurely followed her.

Sylvia had not walked five minutes before she was satisfied that it *was* too far; but having rebelled, she would not own herself in the wrong, and being perverse, insisted upon carrying her point, though she walked all night. On she went over walls, under rails, across brooks, along the furrows of more than one ploughed field, and in among the rustling corn, that turned its broad leaves

to the sun, always in advance of her companion, who followed with exemplary submission, but also with a satirical smile, that spurred her on as no other demonstration could have done. Six o'clock sounded from the church behind the hill; still the wood seemed to recede as she pursued, still close behind her came the steady footfalls, with no sound of weariness in them, and still Sylvia kept on, till, breathless, but successful, she reached the object of her search.

Keeping to the windward of the smoke, she gained a rocky spot still warm and blackened by the late passage of the flames, and pausing there, forgot her own pranks in watching those which the fire played before her eyes. Many acres were burning, the air was full of the rush and roar of the victorious element, the crash of trees that fell before it, and the shouts of men who fought it unavailingly.

"Ah, this is grand! I wish Mark and Mr. Moor were here. Aren't you glad you came, sir?"

Sylvia glanced up at her companion, as he stood regarding the scene with the intent, alert expression one often sees in a fine hound when he scents danger in the air. But Warwick did not answer, for as she spoke a long, sharp cry of human suffering rose above the tumult, terribly distinct and full of ominous suggestion.

"Someone was killed when that tree fell! Stay here till I come back;" and Adam strode away into the wood as if his place were where the peril lay.

For ten minutes Sylvia waited, pale and anxious; then her

patience gave out, and saying to herself, "I can go where he does, and women are always more helpful than men at such times," she followed in the direction whence came the fitful sound of voices. The ground was hot underneath her feet, red eyes winked at her from the blackened sod, and fiery tongues darted up here and there, as if the flames were lurking still, ready for another outbreak. Intent upon her charitable errand, and excited by the novel scene, she pushed recklessly on, leaping charred logs, skirting still burning stumps, and peering eagerly into the dun veil that wavered to and fro. The appearance of an impassable ditch obliged her to halt, and pausing to take breath, she became aware that she had lost her way. The echo of voices had ceased, a red glare was deepening in front, and clouds of smoke enveloped her in a stifling atmosphere. A sense of bewilderment crept over her; she knew not where she was; and after a rapid flight in what she believed a safe direction had been cut short by the fall of a blazing tree before her, she stood still, taking counsel with herself. Darkness and danger seemed to encompass her, fire flickered on every side, and suffocating vapors shrouded earth and sky. A bare rock suggested one hope of safety, and muffling her head in her skirt, she lay down faint and blind, with a dull pain in her temples, and a fear at her heart fast deepening into terror, as her breath grew painful and her head began to swim.

"This is the last of the pleasant voyage! Oh, why does no one think of me?"

As the regret rose, a cry of suffering and entreaty broke from her. She had not called for help till now, thinking herself too remote, her voice too feeble to overpower the din about her. But some one had thought of her, for as the cry left her lips steps came crashing through the wood, a pair of strong arms caught her up, and before she could collect her scattered senses she was set down beyond all danger on the green bank of a little pool.

"Well, salamander, have you had fire enough?" asked Warwick, as he dashed a handful of water in her face with such energetic goodwill that it took her breath away.

"Yes, oh yes, – and of water, too! Please stop, and let me get my breath!" gasped Sylvia, warding off a second baptism and staring dizzily about her.

"Why did you quit the place where I left you?" was the next question, somewhat sternly put.

"I wanted to know what had happened."

"So you walked into a bonfire to satisfy your curiosity, though you had been told to keep out of it? You'd never make a Casabianca."

"I hope not, for of all silly children, that boy was the silliest, and he deserved to be blown up for his want of common sense," cried the girl, petulantly.

"Obedience is an old-fashioned virtue, which you would do well to cultivate along with your common sense, young lady."

Sylvia changed the subject, for Warwick stood regarding her with an irate expression that was somewhat alarming. Fanning

herself with the wet hat, she asked abruptly —

"Was the man hurt, sir?"

"Yes."

"Very much?"

"Yes."

"Can I not do something for him? He is very far from any house, and I have some experience in wounds."

"He is past all help, above all want now."

"Dead, Mr. Warwick?"

"Quite dead."

Sylvia sat down as suddenly as she had risen, and covered her face with a shiver, remembering that her own wilfulness had tempted a like fate, and she too, might now have been 'past help, above all want.' Warwick went down to the pool to bathe his hot face and blackened hands; as he returned Sylvia met him with a submissive —

"I will go back now if you are ready, sir."

If the way had seemed long in coming it was doubly so in returning, for neither pride nor perversity sustained her now, and every step cost an effort. "I can rest in the boat," was her sustaining thought; great therefore was her dismay when on reaching the river no boat was to be seen.

"Why, Mr. Warwick, where is it?"

"A long way down the river by this time, probably. Believing that we landed only for a moment, I did not fasten it, and the tide has carried it away."

"But what shall we do?"

"One of two things, – spend the night here, or go round by the bridge."

"Is it far?"

"Some three or four miles, I think."

"Is there no shorter way? no boat or carriage to be had?"

"If you care to wait, I can look for our runaway, or get a wagon from the town."

"It is growing late and you would be gone a long time, I suppose?"

"Probably."

"Which had we better do?"

"I should not venture to advise. Suit yourself, I will obey orders."

"If you were alone what would you do?"

"Swim across."

Sylvia looked disturbed, Warwick impenetrable, the river wide, the road long, and the cliffs the most inaccessible of places. An impressive pause ensued, then she said frankly —

"It is my own fault and I'll take the consequences. I choose the bridge and leave you the river. If I don't appear till dawn, tell Mark I sent him a good night," and girding up her energies she walked bravely off with much external composure and internal chagrin.

As before, Warwick followed in silence. For a time she kept in advance, then allowed him to gain upon her, and presently

fell behind, plodding doggedly on through thick and thin, vainly trying to conceal the hunger and fatigue that were fast robbing her of both strength and spirits. Adam watched her with a masculine sense of the justice of the retribution which his wilful comrade had brought upon herself. But as he saw the elasticity leave her steps, the color fade from her cheeks, the resolute mouth relax, and the wistful eyes dim once or twice with tears of weariness and vexation, pity got the better of pique, and he relented. His steady tramp came to a halt, and stopping by a wayside spring, he pointed to a mossy stone, saying with no hint of superior powers —

"We are tired, let us rest."

Sylvia dropped down at once, and for a few minutes neither spoke, for the air was full of sounds more pertinent to the summer night than human voices. From the copse behind them, came the coo of wood-pigeons, from the grass at their feet the plaintive chirp of crickets; a busy breeze whispered through the willow, the little spring dripped musically from the rock, and across the meadows came the sweet chime of a bell. Twilight was creeping over forest, hill, and stream, and seemed to drop refreshment and repose upon all weariness of soul and body, more grateful to Sylvia, than the welcome seat and leafy cup of water Warwick brought her from the spring.

The appearance of a thirsty sparrow gave her thoughts a pleasant turn, for, sitting motionless, she watched the little creature trip down to the pool, drink and bathe, then flying

to a willow spray, dress its feathers, dry its wings, and sit chirping softly as if it sang its evening hymn. Warwick saw her interest, and searching in his pocket, found the relics of a biscuit, strewed a few bits upon the ground before him, and began a low, sweet whistle, which rose gradually to a varied strain, alluring, spirited, and clear as any bird voice of the wood. Little sparrow ceased his twitter, listened with outstretched neck and eager eye, hopping restlessly from twig to twig, until he hung just over the musician's head, agitated with a small flutter of surprise, delight, and doubt. Gathering a crumb or two into his hand, Warwick held it toward the bird, while softer, sweeter, and more urgent rose the invitation, and nearer and nearer drew the winged guest, fascinated by the spell.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.