Reid Mayne

# The Wild Huntress: Love in the Wilderness

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# Содержание

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## Chapter One
## The Squatter's Clearing

The white-headed eagle, soaring above the spray of a Tennessean forest, looks down upon the clearing of the squatter. To the eye of the bird it is alone visible; and though but a spot in the midst of that immense green sea, it is conspicuous by the colour of the trees that stand over it. They stand, but grow not: the girdling ring around their stems has deprived them of their sap; the ivory bill of the *log-cock* has stripped them of their bark; their leaves and twigs have long since disappeared; and only the trunks and greater branches remain, like blanched skeletons, with arms upstretched to heaven, as if mutely appealing for vengeance against their destroyer.

The squatter's clearing, still thus encumbered, is a mere vistal opening in the woods, from which only the underwood has been removed. The more slender saplings have been cut down or rooted up; the tangle of parasitical plants have been torn from the

trees; the cane-brake has been fired; and the brush, collected in heaps, has melted away upon the blazing pile. Only a few stumps of inferior thickness give evidence, that some little labour has been performed by the axe.

Even thus the clearing is a mere patch – scarcely two acres in extent – and the rude rail-fence, that zig-zags around it, attests that the owner is satisfied with the dimensions of his agricultural domain. There are no recent marks of the axe – not even the "girdling" of a tree – nothing to show that another rood is required. The squatter is essentially a hunter; and hates the sight of an extensive clearing – as he would the labour of making one. The virgin forest is his domain, and he is not the man to rob it of its primeval charms. The sound of the lumberer's axe, cheerful to the lonely traveller, has no music for his ear: it is to him a note of evil augury – a knell of dread import. It is not often that he hears it: he dwells beyond the circle of its echoes. His nearest neighbour – a squatter like himself – lives at least a mile off; and the most proximate "settlement" is six times that distance from the spot he has chosen for his cabin. The smoke of his chimney mingles with that of no other: its tall column ascends to heaven solitary as the squatter himself.

The clearing is of an irregular semi-circular shape – a deep narrow stream forming the chord, and afterwards cleaving its way through the otherwise unbroken forest. In the convexity of the arc, at that point most remote from the water, stands the cabin – a log "shanty" with "clapboard" roof – on one side flanked by a

rude horse-shed, on the other by a corn-crib of split rails.

Such a picture is almost peculiar to the backwoods of America. Some may deem it commonplace. For my part, I cannot regard it in this light. I have never looked upon this primitive homestead of the pioneer without receiving from it an impression of romantic pleasure. Something seems to impart to it an air of vague and mystic grandeur. Perhaps I associate the picture with the frame in which it is set – the magnificent forest that surrounds it, every aisle of which is redolent of romance. Such a scene is suggestive of hunter lore and legend – of perils by flood and field, always pleasant to be remembered – of desperate deeds of heroism performed by gallant backwoodsmen or their equally gallant antagonists – those red warriors who once strode proudly along the forest-path, but whose upright forms are no longer seen under the shadows of its trees.

Perhaps it is from reflections of this kind, that I view with interest the clearing and cabin of the squatter; or it may be from having at one period of my life encountered incidents, in connection with such a scene, of a character never to be forgotten.

In spring this picture is transformed – suddenly as by the shifting of a panoramic view; or, as upon the stage, the Harlequin and brilliant Columbine emerge from the sober disguisement of their dominoes. If in winter the scene might be termed rude or commonplace, it now no longer merits such titles. Nature has girded on her robe of green, and by the touch of her magical

wand, has toned down its rough features to an almost delicate softness. The young maize – planted in a soil that has lain fallow, perhaps for a thousand years – is rapidly culming upward; and the rich sheen of the long lance-like leaves, as they bend gracefully over, hides from view the sombre hues of the earth. The forest trees appear with their foliage freshly expanded – some; as the tulip-tree, the dogwood, and the white magnolia, already in the act of inflorescence. The woods no longer maintain that monotonous silence which they have preserved throughout the winter. The red cardinal chatters among the cane; the blue jay screams in the pawpaw thicket, perhaps disturbed by the gliding of some slippery snake; while the mock-bird, regardless of such danger, from the top of the tall tulip-tree, pours forth his matchless melody in sweet ever-varying strain. The tiny bark of the squirrel, and the soft cooing of the Carolinian dove, may be heard among other sounds – the latter suggestive of earth's noblest passion, as its utterer is the emblem of devotion itself. At night other sounds are heard, less agreeable to the ear: the shrill "chirrup" of cicadas and tree-toads ringing so incessantly, that only when they cease do you become conscious of their existence; the dull "gluck-gluck" of the great bullfrog; the sharp cries of the heron and *qua-bird*; and the sepulchral screech of the great horned owl. Still less agreeable might appear the fierce miaulling of the red *puma*, and the howl of the gaunt wolf; but not so to the ears of the awakened hunter, who, through the chinks of his lone cabin, listens to such sounds with a savage joy.

These fierce notes are now rare and exceptional – even in the backwoods – though, unlike the war-whoop of the Indian, they have not altogether departed. Occasionally, their echo may be heard through the aisles of the forest, but only in its deepest recesses – only in those remote river "bottoms" where the squatter delights to dwell. Even there, they are heard only at night; and in the morning give place to softer and sweeter sounds.

Fancy, then, a fine morning in May – a sunshine that turns all it touches into gold – an atmosphere laden with the perfume of wild-flowers – the hum of honey-seeking bees – the song of birds commingling in sweetest melody – and you have the *mise en scène* of a squatter's cabin on the banks of the Obion, half an hour after the rising of the sun. Can such a picture be called *commonplace*? Rather say it is enchanting.

Forms suddenly appear upon the scene – forms living and lovely – in the presence of which the bright sunshine, the forest glories of green and gold, the bird-music among the trees, the flowery aroma in the air, are no longer needed to give grace to the clearing of the squatter. It signifies not that it is a morning in the middle of May: were it the dreariest day of December, the effect would be the same; and this resembles enchantment itself. The rude hut seems at once transformed into a palace – the dead trunks become Corinthian columns carved out of white marble – their stiff branches appear to bend gracefully over, like the leaves of the recurrent *acanthus*– and the enclosure of carelessly tended maize-plants assumes the aspect of some fair garden of

the Hesperides!

The explanation is easy. Magic is not needed to account for the transformation: since there exists a far more powerful form of enchantment in the divine presence of female beauty. And it is present there, in its distinct varieties of *dark* and *fair*– typified in the persons of two young girls who issue forth from the cabin of the squatter: more than typified – completely symbolised – since in these two young girls there appears scarce one point of resemblance, save the possession of a perfect loveliness. The eye of the soaring eagle may not discover their charms – as did the bird of Jove those of the lovely Leda – but no *human* eye could gaze for a moment on either one, without receiving the impression that it was looking upon the fairest object on earth. This impression could only be modified, by turning to gaze upon the other.

Who are these young creatures? Sisters?

There is nothing in their appearance to suggest the gentle relationship. One is tall, dark, and dark-haired, of that golden-brown complexion usually styled *brunette*. Her nose is slightly aquiline, and her eye of the oblique Indian form. Other features present an Indian character, of that type observable in the nation of the Chicasaws – the former lords of this great forest. She may have Chicasaw blood in her veins; but her complexion is too light for that of a pure Indian.

Her dress strengthens the impression that she is a *sang-mêlé*. The skirt is of the common homespun of the backwoods, striped

with a yellowish dye; but the green bodice is of finer stuff, with more pretensions to ornament; and her neck and wrists are embraced by a variety of those glancing circlets so seductive in the eyes of an Indian belle. The buskin-mocassin is purely Indian; and its lines of bead-embroidery gracefully adapt themselves to the outlines of feet and ankles of perfect form. The absence of a head-dress is another point of Indian resemblance. The luxuriant black hair is plaited, and coiled like a coronet around the head. There are no combs or pins of gold, but in their place a scarlet plumelet of feathers – from the wings of the red cardinal. This, set coquettishly behind the plaits, shows that some little attention has been given to her toilet; and simple though it be, the peculiar *coiffure* imparts to the countenance of the maiden that air usually styled "commanding."

Although there is nothing masculine in this young girl's beauty, a single glance at her features impresses you with the idea of a character of no ordinary kind – a nature more resolute than tender – a heart endowed with courage equalling that of a man. The idea is strengthened by observing that in her hand she carries a light rifle; while a horn and bullet-pouch, suspended from her left shoulder, hang under the right arm. She is not the only backwoods' maiden who may be seen thus armed and accoutred: many are even skilled in the use of the deadly weapon!

In striking contrast with all this is the appearance of her companion. The impression the eye receives in looking on the latter is that of something soft and beautiful, of a glorious golden

hue. It is the reflection of bright amber-coloured hair on a blonde skin, tinted with vermilion imparting a sort of luminous radiance divinely feminine. Scrutinise this countenance more closely; and you perceive that the features are in perfect harmony with each other, and harmonise with the complexion. You behold a face, such as the Athenian fancy has elaborated into an almost living reality in the goddess Cytherea.

This creature of golden roseate hue is yet very young – scarcely more than a child – but in the blue sky above her burns a fiery sun; and in twelve months she will be a woman.

Her costume is still more simple than that of her companion: a sleeved dress of the same striped homespun, loosely worn, and open at the breast; her fine amber-coloured hair the only covering for her head – as it is the only shawl upon her shoulders, over which it falls in ample luxuriance. A string of pearls around her neck – false pearls, poor thing! – is the only effort that vanity seems to have made in the way of personal adornment. Even shoes and stockings are wanting; but the most costly *chaussure* could not add to the elegance of those pretty *mignon* feet.

Who are they – these fair flowers of the forest?

*Let* the mystery end. They *are* sisters – though not the children of one mother. They are the daughters of the hunter – the owner of the cabin and clearing – his only children.

Happy hunter! poor you may be, and your home lowly; it can never be lonely in such companionship. The proudest prince may envy you the possession of two such treasures – beyond parallel,

beyond price!

# Chapter Two
# Marian and Lilian

Passing outward from the door, the two young girls pause in their steps: an object has attracted their attention. A large dog is seen running out from the shed – a gaunt fierce-looking animal, that answers to the very appropriate name of "Wolf." He approaches the sisters, and salutes them with an unwilling wag of his tail. It seems as though he could not look pleased, even while seeking a favour – for this is evidently the purpose that has brought him forth from his lair.

He appeals more especially to the older of the girls – Marian.

"Ho, Wolf! I see your sides are thin, old fellow: you want your breakfast! What can we give him, Lil?"

"Indeed, sister, I know not: there is nothing for the poor dog."

"There is some deer-meat inside?"

"Ah! I fear father will not allow Wolf to have that. I heard him say he expected one to take dinner with him to-day? You know who?"

An arch smile accompanies this half-interrogatory; but, for all that, the words do not appear to produce a pleasant effect. On the contrary, a shade is observable on the brow of her to whom they are addressed.

"Yes, I *do* know. Well, he shall not dine with *me*. 'Tis just for

that I've brought out my rifle. To-day, I intend to make my dinner in the woods, or go without, and that's more likely. Never fear, Wolf! you shall have your breakfast; whether I get my dinner or not. Now, for the life of me, Lil, I don't know what we can give the poor brute. Those buzzards are just within range. I could bring one of *them* down; but the filthy creatures, ugh! even a dog won't eat them."

"See, sister! yonder is a squirrel. Wolf will eat squirrels, I know: but, ah! it's a pity to kill the little creature."

"Not a bit. Yon little creature is a precious little thief; it's just been at our corn-crib. By killing it, I do justice in a double sense: I punish the thief, and reward the good dog. Here goes!"

The squirrel, scared from its depredation on the corn, sweeps nimbly over the ground towards the nearest tree. Wolf having espied it, rushes after in headlong pursuit. But it is a rare chance indeed when a dog captures one of these animals upon the ground; and Wolf, as usual, is unsuccessful.

He has "treed" the squirrel; but what of that? The nimble creature, having swooped up to a high limb, seats itself there, and looks down upon its impotent pursuer with a nonchalant defiance – at intervals more emphatically expressing the sentiment by a saucy jerk of its tail. But this false security proves the squirrel's ruin. Deceived by it, the silly animal makes no effort to conceal its body behind the branch; but, sitting upright in a fork, presents a fair mark to the rifle. The girl raises the piece to her shoulder, takes aim, and fires.

The shot tells; and the tiny victim, hurled from its high perch – after making several somersaults in the air – falls right into the jaws of that hungry savage at the bottom of the tree. Wolf makes his breakfast upon the squirrel.

This young Diana of the backwoods appears in no way astonished at the feat she has performed; nor yet Lilian. Doubtless, it is an everyday deed.

"You must learn to shoot, Lil."

"O sister, for what purpose? You know I have neither the taste for it, nor the skill that you have."

"The skill you will acquire by practice. It worth knowing how, I can assure you. Besides it is an accomplishment one might stand in need of some day. Why, do you know, sister, in the times of the Indians, every girl understood how to handle a rifle – so father says. True, the fighting Indians are gone away from here; but what if you were to meet a great hear in the woods?"

"Surely I should run away from him."

"And surely I shouldn't, Lil. I have never met a bear, but I'd just like to try one."

"Dear sister, you frighten me. Oh, do not think of such a thing! Indeed, Marian, I am never happy when you are away in the woods. I am always afraid of your meeting with some great wild beast, which may devour you. Tell me, why do you go? I am sure I cannot see what pleasure you can have in wandering through the woods alone."

"Alone! Perhaps I am not *always alone*."

These words are uttered in a low voice – not loud enough for Lilian to hear, though she observes the smile that accompanies them.

"You see, sister Lil," continues Marian in a louder tone our tastes differ. You are young, and like better to read the story-books your mother left you, and look at the pictures in them. My mother left me no story-books, nor pictures. She had none; and did not care for them, I fancy. She was half-Indian, you know; and I suppose I am like her: for I too, prefer realities to pictures. I love to roam about the woods; and as for the danger – pooh, pooh – I have no fear of that. I fear neither bear nor panther, nor any other quadruped. Ha! I have more fear of a two-legged creature I know of; and I should be in greater danger of meeting with that dreaded biped by *staying at home*?

The speech appears to give rise to a train of reflections in which there is bitterness. The heroine of the rifle remains silent while in the act of reloading; and the tinge of melancholy that pervades her countenance tells that her thoughts are abstracted. While priming the piece, she is even *maladroit* enough to spill a quantity of the powder – though evidently not from any lack of practice or dexterity.

Lilian has heard the concluding words of her sister's speech with some surprise, and also noticed the abstracted air. She is about to ask for an explanation, when the dialogue is interrupted. Wolf rushes past with a fierce growl: some one approaches the clearing.

A horseman – a man of about thirty years of age, of spare form and somewhat sinister aspect – a face to be hated on sight. And at sight of it the shadow deepens on the brow of Marian. Her sister exhibits no particular emotion. The new-comer is no stranger: it is only Josh Stebbins, the schoolmaster of Swampville. He is their father's friend, and comes often to visit them: moreover, he is that day expected, as Lilian knows. Only in one way does she show any interest in his arrival; and that is, on observing that he is better dressed than usual. The *cut* of his dress too, is different.

"See, sister Marian!" cries she in a tone of raillery, "how fine Mister Josh is! black coat and waistcoat: a standing collar too! Why, he is exactly like the Methody minister of Swampville! Perhaps he has turned one. I shouldn't wonder: for they say he is very learnt. Oh, if that be, we may hear him preach at the next camp-meeting. How I should like to hear him hold forth! – ha, ha, ha!"

The young creature laughs heartily at her own fantastic conceits; and her clear silvery voice for a moment silences the birds – as if they paused to listen to a music more melodious than their own. The mock-bird echoes back the laugh: but not so Marian. She has observed the novelty as well as her sister; but it appears to impress her in a very different manner. She does not even smile at the approach of the stranger; but, on the contrary, the cloud upon her brow becomes a shade darker.

Marian is some years older than her sister – old enough to know that there is *evil* in the world: for neither is the "backwoods"

the home of an Arcadian innocence. She knows the schoolmaster sufficiently to dislike him; and, judging by his appearance, one might give her credit for having formed a correct estimate of his character. She suspects the object of his visit; more than that, she knows it: *she is herself its object*. With indifferent grace, therefore, does she receive him: scarcely concealing her aversion as she bids him the customary welcome. Without being gifted with any very acute perception, the new-comer might observe this *dégout* on the part of the young girl. He takes no notice of it however – either by word, or the movement of a feature. On the contrary, he appears perfectly indifferent to the character of the reception given him. Not that his manner betrays anything like swagger – for he is evidently not one of the swaggering sort. Rather is his behaviour characterised by a cool, quiet effrontery – a sort of sarcastic assurance – ten times more irritating. This is displayed in the laconic style of his salutation: "Morning girls! father at home?" – in the fact of his dismounting without waiting to be invited – in sharply scolding the dog out of his way as he leads his horse to the shed; and, finally, in his throwing the saddle-bags over his arm, and stepping inside the cabin-door, with the air of one who is not only master of the house, but of the "situation."

Inside the door he is received by the squatter himself; and in the exchange of salutations, even a casual observer might note a remarkable difference in the manner of the two men; the guest cool, cynical, confident – the host agitated, with eye unsteady,

and heart evidently ill at ease. There is a strange significance in the salutation, as also in the little incident that follows. Before a dozen words have passed between the two men, the schoolmaster turns quietly upon his heel, and closes the door behind him – the squatter making no objection to the act, either by word or gesture! The incident may appear of trifling importance; but not so to Marian, who stands near, watching every movement, and listening to every word. Why is the door closed, and by Josh Stebbins? – that rude door, that, throughout the long summer-day, is accustomed to hang open on its raw-hide hinges? All day, and often all night – except during the cold wintry winds, or when rain-storms blow from the west? Why is it now closed, and thus unceremoniously? No wonder that Marian attaches a significance to the act.

Neither has she failed to note the agitated mien of her father while receiving his visitor – that father, at all other times, and in the presence of all other people, so bold, fierce, and impassible! She observes all this with a feeling of pain. For such strange conduct there must be a cause, and a serious one: that is her reflection.

The young girl stands for some moments in the attitude she has assumed. Her sister has gone aside to pluck some flowers growing by the bank of the stream, and Marian is now alone. Her eye is bent upon the door; and she appears to hesitate between two thoughts. Shall she approach and listen? She knows *a little*– she desires to know *more*.

She has not merely conjectured the object of the schoolmaster's visit; she is *certain* it concerns herself. It is not simply that which troubles her spirits. Left to herself, she would make light of such a suitor, and give him his *congé* with a brusque promptitude. But her father – why does *he* yield to the solicitations of this man? This is the mystery she desires to unravel.

Can it be a *debt*? Scarcely that. In the lawless circle of backwoods' Society, the screw of the creditor has but little power over the victim of debt – certainly not enough to enslave such a free fearless spirit as that of Hickman Holt. The girl knows this, and hence her painful suspicion that points to some *other cause*. What cause? She would know.

She makes one step towards the house, as if bent upon espionage. Again she pauses, and appears undecided. The chinks between the logs are open all round the hut – so, too, the interstices between the hewn planks of the door. No one can approach near to the walls without being seen from the inside; and a listener would be sure of being discovered. Is it this reflection that stays her in her steps? that causes her to turn back? Or does the action spring from a nobler motive? Whichever it be, it seems to bring about a change in her determination. Suddenly turning away, she stands facing to the forest – as if with the intention of launching herself into its sombre depths. A call of adieu to her sister – a signal to Wolf to follow – and she is gone.

Whither, and for what purpose? Why loves she these lone

rambles under the wild-wood shade? She has declared that she delights in them; but can we trust her declaration? True, hers a strange spirit – tinged, no doubt, with the moral tendencies of her mother's race – in which the love of solitude is almost an idiosyncrasy. But with her this forest-ranging is almost a new practice: only for a month or so has she been indulging in this romantic habit – so incomprehensible to the home-loving Lilian. Her father puts no check upon such inclinations: on the contrary, he encourages them, as if proud of his daughter's *penchant* for the chase. Though purely a white man, his nature has been Indianised by the habits of his life: and in his eyes, the chase is the noblest accomplishment – even for a woman? Does the fair Marian think so? Or has she another motive for absenting herself so frequently from her home? Let us follow her into the forest. There, perhaps, we may find an answer to the enigma.

# Chapter Three
# The Lovers' Rendezvous

Glance into the forest-glade! It is an opening in the woods – a *clearing*, not made by the labour of human hands, but a work of Nature herself: a spot of earth where the great timber grows not, but in its place shrubs and tender grass, plants and perfumed flowers.

About a mile distant from the cabin of Hickman Holt just such an opening is found – in superficial extent about equal to the squatter's corn-patch. It lies in the midst of a forest of tall trees – among which are conspicuous the tulip-tree, the white magnolia, cotton-woods, and giant oaks. Those that immediately encircle it are of less stature: graduating inward to its edge, like the seats in an amphitheatre – as if the forest trees stooped downward to kiss the fair flowers that sparkle over the glade.

These lesser trees are of various species. They are the sassafras laurel, famed for its sanitary sap; the noble Carolina bay, with its aromatic leaves; the red mulberry: and the singular Osage orange-tree (*Maclura aurantica*), the "bow-wood" of the Indians. The pawpaw also is present, to attest the extreme richness of the soil; but the flowering plants, that flourish in profuse luxuriance over the glade, are sufficient evidence of its fertility. Why the trees grow not there, is one of Nature's secrets,

not yet revealed to man.

It is easier to say why a squatter's cabin is not there. There is no mystery about this: though there might appear to be, since the *clearing* is found ready to hand. The explanation is simple: the glade is a mile distant from water – the nearest being that of the creek already mentioned as running past the cabin of the squatter. Thus Nature, as if jealous of this pretty wild-wood garden, protects it from the defilement of man.

Nevertheless, the human presence is not unknown to it. On this very morning – this fair morning in May, that has disclosed to our view the cabin and clearing of the squatter – a man may be observed entering the glade. The light elastic step, the lithe agile form, the smooth face, all bespeak his youth; while the style of his dress, his arms and equipments proclaim his calling to be that of a hunter.

He is a man of the correct size, and, it may be added, of the correct shape – that is, one with whose figure the eye finds no fault. It is pleased at beholding a certain just distribution of the members promising strength and activity for the accomplishment of any possible physical end. The countenance is equally expressive of good mental qualities. The features are regular and open, to frankness. A prominent chin denotes firmness; a soft hazel eye, gentleness; and a full rounded throat, intrepid daring. There is neither beard upon the chin, nor moustache upon the lip – not that the face is too young for either, but both have been shaven off. In the way of hair, a

magnificent *chevelure* of brown curls ruffles out under the rim of the cap, shadowing over the cheeks and neck of the wearer. Arched eyebrows, a small mouth, and regular teeth, give the finish to a face which might be regarded as a type of manly beauty.

And yet this beauty appears under a russet garb. There is no evidence of excessive toilet-care. The brush and comb have been but sparingly used; and neither perfume nor pomatum has been employed to heighten the shine of those luxuriant locks. There is sun-tan on the face, that, perhaps with the aid of soap, *might* be taken off; but it is permitted to remain. The teeth, too, might be made whiter with a dentifrice and brush; but in all likelihood the nearest approach to their having ever been cleansed has been while chewing a piece of tough deer-meat. Nevertheless, without any artificial aids, the young man's beauty proclaims itself in every feature – the more so, perhaps that, in gazing upon his face, you are impressed with the idea that there is an "outcome" in it.

In his dress, there is not much that could be altered for the better. The hunting-shirt of the finest buckskin leather with its fringed cape and skirt, hangs upon his body with all the grace of an Athenian tunic; while its open front permits to be seen the manly contour of his breast, but half concealed under the softer fawn-skin. The wrappers of green baize, though folded more than once around his legs, do not hide their elegant *tournure*; and an appropriate covering for his feet is a pair of strong mocassins, soled with thick leather. A coon-skin cap sits high upon his head

slightly slouched to the right. With the visage of the animal turned to the front, and the full plume-like tail, with its alternate rings, drooping to the shoulder, it forms a head-dress that is far from ungraceful. A belt around the waist – a short hunting-knife in its sheath – a large powder-horn hanging below the arm-pit – a bullet-pouch underneath, and *voilà tout*! No, not all, there remains to be mentioned the rifle – the arm *par excellence* of the American hunter. The portrait of Frank Wingrove – a dashing young backwoodsman, whose calling is the chase.

The hunter has entered the glade, and is advancing across it. He walks slowly, but without caution – without that habitual stealthy tread that distinguishes the sons of Saint Hubert in the West. On the contrary, his step is free, and the flowers are crushed under his feet. He is not even silent; but humming a tune as he goes. Notwithstanding that he appears accoutred for the chase, his movements are not those of one in pursuit of game. For this morning, at least, he is out upon a different errand; and, judging from his jovial aspect, it should be one of pleasure. The birds themselves seem not more gay.

On emerging from the shadow of the tall trees into the open glade effulgent with flowers, his gaiety seems to have reached its climax: it breaks forth in song; and for some minutes the forest re-echoes the well-known lay of "*Woodman spare that tree*." Whence this joyous humour? Why are those eyes sparkling with a scarce concealed triumph? Is there a sweetheart expected? Is the glade to the scene of a love-interview – that glade perfumed

and flowery, as if designed for such a purpose? The conjecture is reasonable: the young hunter has the air of one who keeps an assignation – one, too, who dreams not of disappointment. Near the edge of the glade, on the side opposite to that by which the hunter has come in, is a fallen tree. Its branches and bark have long since disappeared, and the trunk is bleached to a brilliant white. In the phraseology of the backwoods, it is no longer a tree, but a "log." Towards this the hunter advances. On arriving at the log he seats himself upon it, in the attitude of one who does not anticipate being for long alone.

There is a path that runs across the glade, bisecting it into two nearly equal parts. It is a tiny track, evidently not much used. It conducts from the stream on which stands the cabin of the squatter Holt, to another "fork" of the same river – the Obion – where clearings are numerous, and where there is also a large settlement bearing the dignified title of "town." It is the town of Swampville – a name perhaps more appropriate than euphonious. Upon this path, where it debouches from the forest, the eye of Frank Wingrove becomes fixed – not in the direction of Swampville, but towards the clearing of the squatter. From this, it would appear probable that he expects some one; and that the person expected should come from that side. A good while passes, and yet no one answers his inquiring glance. He begins to manifest signs of impatience. As if to kill time, he repeatedly rises, and again reseats himself. With his eye he measures the altitude of the sun – the watch of the backwoodsman – and as

the bright orb rises higher in the heavens, his spirits appear to sink in proportion. His look is no longer cheerful. He has long since finished his song; and his voice is now heard again, only when he utters an ejaculation of impatience. All at once the joyous expression is restored. There is a noise in the woods, and it proceeds from the right direction – a rustling of dead leaves that litter the path, and occasionally the "swish" of recoiling branches. Some one approaches the glade. The young hunter springs to his feet, and stands listening.

Presently, he hears voices; but he hears them rather with surprise than pleasure – as is indicated by another quick change passing over his countenance. The cheerful aspect has again given place to a look of disappointment – this time approaching to chagrin. "Thar's talk goin' on;" mutters he to himself. "Then she's not alone! Thar's someb'dy along wi' her. Who the darnation can it be?"

After this characteristic soliloquy, he remains silent listening far more eagerly than before. The noises become more distinct, and the voices louder. More than one can be distinguished mingling in the conversation.

For some seconds, the hunter maintains his attentive attitude – his eye sternly fixed upon the *embouchure* of the path. His suspense is of short duration. Hearing the voices more plainly, he recognises their tones; and the recognition appears to give another sudden turn to his thoughts. The expression of chagrin gives place to one of simple disappointment. "Bah!" exclaims he,

throwing himself back upon the dead-wood. “It ain’t *her*, after all! It’s only a gang o’ them rovin’ red-skins. What, in Old Nick’s name, fetches ’em this way, an’ jest at the time when they ain’t wanted?”

After a moment’s reflection, he starts up from the log, continuing to mutter: “I must hide, or they’ll be for havin’ a parley. That ’ud never do, for I guess *she* can’t be far off by this. Hang the crooked luck!”

With this elegant finish, the speaker glides rapidly round the end of the fallen tree, and makes for the nearest underwood – evidently with the design of screening himself from sight. He is too late – as the “Ugh” uttered on the opposite side of the glade convinces him – and changing his intention, he fronts round, and quietly returns to his former position upon the log.

The hunter’s conjecture has proved correct. Bronzed faces show themselves over the tops of the bushes on the opposite edge of the glade; and, the moment after, three Indians emerge into the open ground. That they are Indians, their tatterdemalion dress of coloured blankets, leggings, and mocassins would indicate; but their race is even recognisable in their mode of march. Though there are but three of them, and the path runs no longer among trees, they follow one another in single file, and in the true typical “trot” of the red aboriginal.

The presence of Indians in these woods requires explanation – for their tribe has long before this time been transported to their new lands west of the Mississippi. It only needs to be said that a

few families have preferred to remain – some from attachment to the scenes of their youth, not to be severed by the prospect of a far happier home; some from associations formed with the whites; and some from more trivial causes – perhaps from being the degraded outcasts of their tribes. Throughout the whole region of the backwoods, there still exists a sparse population of the indigenous race: dwelling, as their ancestors did, under tents or in the open air; trafficking in small articles of their own manufacture; in short, performing very much the same *métier* as the Gitanos in Europe. There are other points of resemblance between these two races – amounting almost to family likeness – and which fairly entitles the Indians to an appellation sometimes bestowed upon them —*the Gipsies of the New World*.

The three Indians who have entered the glade are manifestly what is termed an "Indian family" or part of one. They are father, and mother, and daughter – the last a girl just grown to womanhood. The man is in the lead, the woman follows, and the young girl brings up the rear. They are bent upon a journey, and its object is also manifest. The pannier borne upon the back of the woman, containing fox and coon-skins, with little baskets of stained wicker – and the bead-embroidered mocassins and wampum belts that appear in the hands of the girl – bespeak a purposed visit to the settlement of Swampville.

True to the custom "of his fathers," the Indian himself carries nothing – if we except a long rusty gun over his shoulder, and a small hatchet in his belt: rendering him rather a formidable-

looking fellow on his way to a market.

# Chapter Four
# The Catastrophe of a Kiss

The log on which the young hunter had seated himself is some paces distant from the path. He has a slight knowledge of this Indian family, and simply nods to them as they pass. He does not speak, lest a word should bring on a conversation – for the avoidance of which he has a powerful motive.

The Indian makes no halt, but strides silently onward, followed by his pannier-laden squaw. The girl, however, pauses in her steps – as if struck by some sudden thought. The action quickly follows the thought; and, turning out of the path, she approaches the spot where the hunter is seated.

What wants she with him? Can this be the *she* he has been expecting with such impatience? Surely not! And yet the maiden is by no means ill-looking. In her gleaming oblique eyes there is a certain sweetness of expression; and a tinge of purple-red, bursting through the bronze of her cheeks, lends to her countenance a peculiar charm. Add to this, luxuriant black hair, with a bosom of bold outlines – which the sparse savage costume but half conceals – and you have a portrait something more than pretty. Many a time and oft, in the history of backwoods life, has the heart of the proud pale-face offered sacrifice at such a shrine. Is this, then, the expected one? No. Her actions answer

the question; and his too. He does not even rise to receive her, but keeps his seat upon the log – regarding her approach with a glance of indifference, not unmingled with a slight expression of displeasure.

*Her* object is presently apparent. A bullet-pouch of white buckskin, richly worked with porcupine quills, is hanging over her arm. On arriving before the hunter she holds it out, as if about to present it to him. One might fancy that such is her intention; and that the pouch is designed as a *gage d'amour*; but the word "dollar," which accompanies the offer, precludes the possibility of such a supposition. It is not thus that an Indian girl makes love. She is simply soliciting the pale-face to purchase. In this design she is almost certain to be successful. The pouch proclaims its value, and promises to sell itself. Certainly it is a beautiful object – with its quills of brilliant dye, and richly-embroidered shoulder-strap. Perhaps no object could be held up before the eyes of Frank Wingrove more likely to elicit his admiration.

He sees and admires. He knows its value. It is cheap at a dollar; besides, he was just thinking of treating himself to such a one. His old catskin is worn and greasy. He has grown fastidious of late – for reasons that may be guessed. This beautiful pouch would sit well over his new hunting-shirt, and trick him out to a T. In the eyes of Marian —

His desire to become the possessor of the coveted article hinders him from continuing the reflection. Fortunately his old pouch contains the required coin; and, in another instant, a silver

dollar glances in the palm of the Indian girl.

But the "goods" are not delivered over in the ordinary manner. A thought seems to strike the fair huckster; and she stands for a moment gazing upon the face of the handsome purchaser. Is it curiosity? Or is it, perhaps, some softer emotion that has suddenly germinated in her soul? Her hesitation lasts only for an instant. With a smile that seems to solicit, she approaches nearer to the hunter. The pouch is held aloft, with the strap extended between her hands. Her design is evident – she purposes to adjust it upon his shoulders.

The young hunter does not repel the proffered service – how could he? It would not be Frank Wingrove to do so. On the contrary, he leans his body forward to aid in the action. The attitude brings their faces almost close together: their lips are within two inches of touching! For a moment the girl appears to have forgotten her purpose, or else she executes it in a manner sufficiently *maladroit*. In passing the strap over the high coon-skin cap, her fingers become entangled in the brown curls beneath. Her eyes are not directed that way: they are gazing with a basilisk glance into the eyes of the hunter.

The attitude of Wingrove is at first shrinking; but a slight smile curling upon his lip, betokens that there is not much pain in the situation. A reflection, however, made at the moment, chases away the smile. It is this: – "'Tarnal earthquakes! were Marian to see me now! She'd never believe but that I'm in love with this young squaw: she's been jealous o' her already."

But the reflection passes; and with it, for an instant, the remembrance of "Marian." The sweetest smelling flower is that which is nearest – so sings the honey-bee. Human blood cannot bear the proximity of those pretty lips; and the kindness of the Indian maiden must be recompensed by a kiss. She makes no resistance. She utters no cry. Their lips meet; but the kiss is interrupted ere it can be achieved. The bark of a dog – followed by a half-suppressed scream in a female voice – causes the interruption. The hunter starts back, looking aghast. The Indian exhibits only surprise. Both together glance across the glade. Marian Holt is standing upon its opposite edge!

Wingrove's cheek has turned red. Fear and shame are depicted upon his face. In his confusion he pushes the Indian aside – more rudely than gently. "Go!" he exclaims in an under voice. "For God's sake go! – you have ruined me!"

The girl obeys the request and gesture – both sufficiently rude after such sweet complaisance. She obeys, however; and moves off from the spot – not without reproach in her glance, and reluctance in her steps. Before reaching the path she pauses, turns in her track, and glides swiftly back towards the hunter.

Wingrove stands astonished – half afrighted. Before he can recover himself, or divine her intent, the Indian is once more by his side. She snatches the pouch from his shoulders – the place where her own hands had suspended it – then flinging the silver coin at his feet, and uttering in a loud angry tone the words, "False pale-face!" she turns from the spot, and glides rapidly away. In

another moment she has entered the forest-path, and is lost to the sight.

The scene has been short – of only a few seconds' duration. Marian has not moved since the moment she uttered that wild, half-suppressed scream. She stands silent and transfixed, as if its utterance had deprived her of speech and motion. Her fine form picturesquely draped with bodice and skirt; the moccasin buskins upon her feet; the coiled coronet of shining hair surmounting her head; the rifle in her hand, resting on its butt, as it had been dashed mechanically down; the huge gaunt dog by her side – all these outlined upon the green background of the forest leaves, impart to the maiden an appearance at once majestic and imposing. Standing thus immobile, she suggests the idea of some rival huntress, whom Diana, from jealousy, has suddenly transformed into stone. But her countenance betrays that she is no statue. The colour of her cheeks – alternately flushing red and pale – and the indignant flash of that fiery eye, tell you that you look upon a living woman – one who breathes and burns under the influence of a terrible emotion.

Wingrove is half frantic. He scarce knows what to say, or what to do. In his confusion he advances towards the young girl, calling her by name; but before he has half crossed the glade, her words fall upon his ear, causing him to hesitate and falter in his steps. "Frank Wingrove!" she cries, "come not near me. Your road lies the other way. Go! follow your Indian damsel. You will find her at Swampville, no doubt, selling her cheap kisses to triflers like

yourself. Traitor! we meet no more!"

Without waiting for a reply, or even to note the effect of her words, Marian Holt steps back into the forest, and disappears. The young hunter is too stupefied to follow. With "false pale-face" ringing in one ear, and "traitor" in the other, he knows not in what direction to turn. At length the log falls under his eye; and striding mechanically towards it, he sits down – to reflect upon the levity of his conduct, and the unpleasant consequences of an unhallowed kiss.

# Chapter Five
# Squatter and Saint

Return we to the squatter's cabin – this time to enter it. Inside, there is not much to be seen or described. The interior consists of a single room – of which the log-walls are the sides, and the clapboard roof the ceiling. In one corner there is a little partition or screen – the materials composing it being skins or the black bear and fallow deer. It is pleasant to look upon this little chamber: it is the shrine of modesty and virgin innocence. Its presence proves that the squatter is not altogether a savage.

Rude as is the interior of the sheiling, it contains a few relics of bygone, better days – not spent there, but elsewhere. Some books are seen upon a little shelf – the library of Lilian's mother – and two or three pieces of furniture, that have once been decent, if not stylish. But chattels of this land are scarce in the backwoods – even in the houses of more pretentious people than a squatter; and a log-stool or two, a table of split poplar planks, an iron pot, some pans and pails of tin, a few plates and pannikins of the same material, a gourd "dipper" or drinking-cup, and half-a-dozen common knives, forks, and spoons, constitute the whole "plenishing" of the hut. The skin of a cougar, not long killed, hangs against the wall. Beside it are the pelts of other wild animals – as the grey fox, the racoon, the rufous lynx, musk-

rats, and minks. These, draping the roughly-hewn logs, rob them to some extent of their rigidity. By the door is suspended an old saddle, of the fashion known as *American*– a sort of cross between the high-peaked *silla* of the Mexicans, and the flat pad-like English saddle. On the adjacent peg hangs a bridle to match – its reins black with age, and its bit reddened with rust. Some light articles of female apparel are seen hanging against the wall, near that sacred precinct where, during the the night-hours, repose the fair daughters of the squatter.

The cabin is a rude dwelling indeed – a rough casket to contain a pair of jewels so sparkling and priceless. Just now, it is occupied by two individuals of a very different character – two men already mentioned – the hunter Hickman Holt, and his visitor Joshua Stebbins, the schoolmaster of Swampville. The personal appearance of the latter has been already half described. It deserves a more detailed delineation. His probable age has been stated – about thirty. His spare figure and ill-omened aspect have been alluded to. Add to this, low stature, a tripe-coloured skin, a beardless face, a shrinking chin, a nose sharp-pointed and peckish, lank black hair falling over the forehead, and hanging down almost low enough to shadow a pair of deep-set weazel-like eyes: give to this combination of features a slightly sinister aspect, and you have the portrait of Joshua Stebbins. It is not easy to tell the cause of this sinister expression: for the features are not irregular; and, but for its bilious colour, the face could scarcely be termed ill-looking. The eyes do not squint; and the

thin lips appear making a constant effort to look smiling and saint-like. Perhaps it is this *outward* affectation of the saintly character – belying, as it evidently does, the spirit within, that produces the unfavourable impression. In earlier youth, the face may have been better favoured; but a career, spent in the exercise of evil passions, has left more than one "blaze" upon it.

It is difficult to reconcile such a career with the demeanour of the man, and especially with his present occupation. But Joshua Stebbins has not always been a schoolmaster; and the pedagogue of a border settlement is not necessarily, expected to be a model of morality. Even if it were so, this lord of the hickory-switch is comparatively a stranger in Swampville; and, perhaps, only the best side of his character has been exhibited to the parents and guardians of the settlement. This is of the saintly order; and, as if to strengthen the illusion, a dress of clerical cut has been assumed, as also a white cravat and black boat-brimmed hat. The coat, waistcoat, and trousers are of broad-cloth – though not of the finest quality. It is just such a costume as might be worn by one of the humbler class of Methodist border Ministers, or by a Catholic priest – a somewhat rarer bird in the backwoods.

Joshua Stebbins is neither one nor the other; although, as will shortly appear, his assumption of the ecclesiastical style is not altogether confined to his dress. Of late he has also affected the clerical calling. The *ci-devant* attorney's clerk – whilom the schoolmaster of Swampville – is now an "apostle" of the "Latter-day Saints." The character is new – the faith itself is not very old

– for the events we are relating occurred during the first decade of the Mormon revelation. Even Holt himself has not yet been made aware of the change: as would appear from a certain air of astonishment, with which at first sight he regards the clerical habiliments of his visitor.

It would be difficult to imagine a greater contrast than that presented in the appearance of these two men. Were we to select two parallel types from the animal world, they would be the sly fox and the grizzly bear – the latter represented by the squatter himself. In Hickman Holt we behold a personage of unwonted aspect: a man of gigantic stature, with a beard reaching to the second button of his coat, and a face not to be looked upon without a sensation of terror – a countenance expressive of determined courage, but at the same time of fierceness, untempered by any trace of a softer emotion. A shaggy sand-coloured beard, slightly grizzled; eyebrows like a *chevaux de frise* of hogs' bristles; eyes of a greenish-grey, and a broad livid scar across the left cheek – are component parts in producing this aspect; while a red cotton kerchief, wound turban-like around the head, and pulled low down in front, renders its expression more palpable and pronounced.

A loose surtout of thick green blanket-cloth, somewhat faded and worn, adds to the colossal appearance of the man: while a red-flannel shirt serves him also for a vest. His huge limbs are encased in pantaloons of blue Kentucky "jeans;" but these are scarcely visible – as the skirt of his ample coat drapes down so

as to cover the tops of a pair of rough horse-skin boots, that reach upwards to his knees. The costume is common enough on the banks of the Mississippi; the colossal form is not rare; but the fierce, and somewhat repulsive countenance – that is more individual.

Is this father of Marian and Lilian? Is it possible from so rude a stem could spring such graceful branches – flowers so fair and lovely? If so, then must the mothers of both have been beautiful beyond common! It is even true, and true that both were beautiful – were for they are gone, and Hickman Holt is twice a widower. Long ago, he buried the half-blood mother of Marian; and at a later period – though still some years ago – her gentle golden-haired successor was carried to an early grave.

The latter event occurred in one of the settlements, nearer to the region of civilised life. There was a murmur of mystery about the second widowhood of Hickman Holt, which only became hushed on his "moving" further west – to the wild forest where we now find him. Here no one knows aught of his past life or history – one only excepted – and that is the man who is to-day his visitor.

Contrasting the two men – regarding the superior size and more formidable aspect of the owner of the cabin, you would expect his guest to make some show of obeisance to him. On the contrary, it is the squatter who exhibits the appearance of complaisance. He has already saluted his visitor with an air of embarrassment, but ill-concealed under the words of

welcome with which he received him. Throughout the scene of salutation, and afterwards, the schoolmaster has maintained his characteristic demeanour of half-smiling, half-sneering coolness. Noting the behaviour of these two men to one another, even a careless observer could perceive that the smaller man is the *master*!

# Chapter Six
# An Apostolic Effort

The morning needed no fire, but there were embers upon the clay-hearth – some smouldering ends of faggots – over which the breakfast had been cooked. On one side of the fireplace the squatter placed a stool for his visitor; and then another for himself, as if mechanically on the opposite side. A table of rough-hewn planks stood between. On this was a bottle containing maize-corn whiskey – or, "bald face," as it is more familiarly known in the backwoods – two cracked cups to drink out of; a couple of corn-cob pipes; and some black tobacco. All these preparations had been made beforehand; and confirmed, what had dropped from the lips of Lilian, that the visitor had been expected. Beyond the customary phrases of salutation, not a word was exchanged between the host and guest, until both had seated themselves. The squatter then commenced the conversation.

"Yev hed a long ride, Josh," said he, leaning towards the table and clutching hold of the bottle: "try a taste o' this hyur *rot-gut*– 'taint the daintiest o' drink to offer a man so genteelly dressed as you air this morning; but thur's wuss licker in these hyur back'oods, I reckun. Will ye mix? Thur's water in the jug thar."

"No water for me," was the laconic reply. "Yur right 'bout that.

Its from old Hatcher's still – whar they us'ally put the water in afore they give ye the licker. I s'pose they do it to save a fellur the trouble o' mixing – Ha! ha! ha!" The squatter laughed at his own jest-mot as if he enjoyed it to any great extent, but rather as if desirous of putting his visitor in good-humour. The only evidence of his success was a dry smile, that curled upon the thin lip of the saint, rather sarcastically than otherwise.

There was silence while both drank; and Holt was again under the necessity of beginning the conversation. As already observed, he had noticed the altered style of the schoolmaster's costume; and it was to this transformation that his next speech alluded. "Why, Josh," said he, attempting an easy off-hand style of talk, "ye're bran new, spick span, from head to foot; ye look for all the world jest like one o' them ere cantin' critters o' preechers I often see prowlin' about Swampville. Durn it, man! what dodge air you up to now. *You* hain't got rileegun, I reck'n?"

"I have," gravely responded Stebbins.

"Hooraw! ha, ha, ha! Wal – what sort o' thing is't anyhow?"

"My religion is of the right sort, Brother Holt."

"Methody?"

"Nothing of the kind."

"What then? I thort they wur all Methodies in Swampville?"

"They're all *Gentiles* in Swampville – worse than infidels themselves."

"Wal – I know they brag mightily on thur genteelity. I reckon you're about right thur – them, storekeepers air stuck-up enough

for anythin'."

"No, no; it's not that I mean. My religion has nothing to do with Swampville. Thank the Lord for his mercy, I've been led into a surer way of salvation. I suppose, Brother Holt, you've heard of the new Revelation?"

"Heern o' the new rev'lation. Wal, I don't know as I hev. What's the name o't?"

"The book of *Mormon*?"

"Oh! Mormons! I've hearn o' them. Hain't they been a fightin' a spell up thur in Massouray or Illinoy, whar they built 'em a grandiferous temple? I've hearn some talk o't."

"At Nauvoo. It is even so, Brother Holt the wicked Gentiles have been persecuting the Saints: just as their fathers were persecuted by the Egyptian Pharaohs."

"An' hain't they killed their head man – Smith he wur called, if I recollex right."

"Alas, true! Joseph Smith has been made a martyr, and is by this time an angel in heaven. No doubt he is now in glory, at the head of the angelic host."

"Wal – if the angels are weemen, he'll hev a good wheen o' 'em about him, I reck'n. I've hearn he wur at the head of a putty consid'able host o' 'em up thur in Massoury – fifty wives they said he hed! Wur that ere true, Josh?"

"Scandal, Brother Holt – all scandal of the wicked enemies of our faith. They were but wives *in the spirit*. That the Gentiles can't comprehend; since their eyes have not been opened by the

Revelation."

"Wal, it 'pears to be a tol'able free sort o' rileegun anyhow. Kind o' Turk, aint it?"

"Nothing of the kind. It has nothing in common with the doctrines of Mohammedanism."

"But whar did *you* get it, Josh Stebbins? Who gin it to you?"

"You remember the man I brought over here last fall?"

"Sartint I do. Young he wur – Brig Young, I think, you called him."

"The same."

"In coorse, I remember him well enough; but I reckon our Marian do a leetle better. He tried to spark the gurl, an' made fine speeches to her; but she couldn't bar the sight o' him for all that. Ha! ha! ha. Don't ye recollex the trick that ar minx played on him? She unbuckled the girt o' his saddle, jest as he wur a-goin' to mount, and down he kim – saddle, bags, and all – cawollup to the airth! ha! ha! Arter he wur gone, I larfed till I wur like to bust."

"You did wrong, Hickman Holt, to encourage your daughter in her sauciness. Had you known the man —*that man, sir, was a prophet*!"

"A prophet!"

"Yes – the greatest perhaps the world ever saw – a man in direct communication with the Almighty himself."

"Lord! 'Twan't Joe Smith, wur it?"

"No; but one as great as he – one who has inherited his spirit;

and who is now the head of all the Saints."

"That feller at thur head? You 'stonish me, Josh Stebbins."

"Ah! well you may be astonished. That man has astonished me, Hickman Holt. He has turned me from evil ways, and led me to fear the Lord." The squatter looked incredulous, but remained silent. "Yes – that same man who was here with me in your humble cabin, is now Chief Priest of the Mormon Church! He has laid his hands on this poor head, and constituted me one of his humble Apostles. Yes, one of the *Twelve*, intrusted with spreading the true faith of the Saints over all the world."

"Hooraw for you, Josh Stebbins! You'll be jest the man for that sort o' thing; ye've got the larnin' for it, hain't you?"

"No doubt, Brother Holt, with the help of the Lord, my humble acquirements will be useful; for though *He* only can open for us poor sinners the kingdom of grace, he suffers such weak instruments, as myself, to point out the narrow path that leads to it. Just as with the Philistines of old, the hearts of the Gentiles are hardened like flint-stones, and refuse to receive the true faith. Unlike the followers of Mohammed, *we* propagate not by the sword, but by the influence of ratiocination."

"What?"

"Ratiocination."

"What mout that be?"

"Reason – reason."

"Oh! common sense you mean, I s'pose?"

"Exactly so – reasoning that produces conviction; and, I flatter

myself, that, being gifted with some little sense and skill, my efforts may be crowned with success."

"Wal, Josh, 'ithout talkin' o' common sense, ye've good grist o' lawyers' sense – that I know; an' so, I suppose, ye've tuk it into your head to make beginnin' on me. Aint that why ye've come over this mornin'?"

"What?"

"To make a Mormon o' me."

Up to this time the conversation had been carried on in a somewhat stiff and irrelevant manner; this more especially on the side of the squatter, who – notwithstanding his endeavours to assume an air of easy nonchalance – was evidently labouring under suspicion and constraint. From the fact of Stebbins having sent a message to forewarn him, of this visit, he knew that the schoolmaster had some business with him of more than usual importance; and it was a view to ascertain the nature of this business, and relieve himself from suspense, that the interrogatory was put. He would have been right glad to have received an answer in the affirmative – since it would have cost him little concern to turn Mormon, or profess to do so, notwithstanding his pretended opposition to the faith. He was half indulging himself in the hope that this might be the errand on which Stebbins had come: as was evinced by a more cheerful expression, on his countenance; but, as the Saint lingered long before making a reply, the shadows of suspicion again darkened over the brow of the squatter; and with a nervous uneasiness, he

awaited the answer.

"It'll be a tough job, Josh," said he, with an effort to appear unconcerned – "a tough job, mind ye."

"Well, so I should expect," answered the apostle drily; "and, just for that reason, I don't intend to undertake it: though I should like, Brother Holt, to see you gathered into the fold. I know our great High Priest would make much of a man like *you*. The Saints have many enemies; and need strong arms and stout hearts such as yours, Hickman Holt. The Lord has given to his Prophet the right to defend the true faith – even with carnal weapons, if others fail; and woe be to them who make war on us! Let them dread the *Destroying Angels*!"

"The Destroying Angels! What sort o' critters be they?"

"They are the *Danites*."

"Wal I'm jest as wise as ever, Josh. Dod rot it, man! don't be mystiferous. Who air the Danites, I shed like to know?"

"You can only know them by initiation; and you *should* know them. You're just the man to be one of them; and I have no doubt you'd be made one, as soon as you joined us."

The apostle paused, as if to note the effect of his words; but the colossal hunter appeared as if he had not heard them. It was not that he did not comprehend their meaning, but rather because he was not heeding what had been said – his mind being occupied with a presentiment of some more unpleasant proposal held in reserve by his visitor. He remained silent, however; leaving it to the latter to proceed to the declaration of his design. The

suspicions of the squatter – if directed to anything connected with his family affairs – were well grounded, and soon received confirmation. After a pause, the Mormon continued:

"No, Hickman Holt, it aint with *you* my business lies to-day – that is, not exactly with you."

"Who, then?"

"*Your daughter*!"

# Chapter Seven
# The Mormon's Demand

A shudder passed through the herculean frame of the hunter – though it was scarcely perceptible, from the effort he made to conceal it. It was noticed for all that; and the emotion that caused it perfectly understood. The keen eye of the *ci-devant* law clerk was too skilled in reading the human countenance, to be deceived by an effort at impassibility.

"My daughter?" muttered Holt, half interrogatively.

"Your daughter!" echoed the Mormon, with imperturbable coolness.

"But which o' 'em? Thur's two."

"Oh! you know which I mean – Marian, of course."

"An' what do ye want wi' Marian, Josh?"

"Come, Brother Holt? it's no use your feigning ignorance. I've spoken to you of this before: you know well enough what I want with her."

"Durn me, if I do! I remember what ye sayed afore; but I thort ye wur only jokin'."

"I was in earnest then, Hickman Holt; and I'm still more in earnest now. I want a wife, and I think Marian would suit me admirably. I suppose you know that the saints have moved off from Illinois, and are now located beyond the Rocky

Mountains?"

"I've heern somethin' o't."

"Well, I propose going thereto join them; and I must take a wife with me: for no man is welcome who comes there without one."

"Y-e-s," drawled the squatter, with a bitter smile, "an' from what I've heern, I reckon he'd be more welkum if he fetched half-a-dozen."

"Nonsense, Hickman Holt. I wonder a man of your sense would listen to such lies. It's a scandal that's been scattered abroad by a set of corrupt priests and Methody preachers, who are jealous of us, because we're drawing their people. Sheer wicked lies, every word of it!"

"Wal, I don't know about that. But I know one thing, to a sartinty – you will niver get Marian's consent."

"I don't want Marian's consent – that don't signify, so long as I have yours."

"Myen?"

"Ay, yours; and I must have it. Look here, Hickman Holt! Listen to me! We're making too long a talk about this business; and I have no time to waste in words. I have made everything ready; and shall leave for the Salt Lake before three more days have passed over my head. The caravan I'm going with is to start from Fort Smith on the Arkansas; and it'll be prepared by the time I get there, to move over the plains. I've bought me a team and a waggon. It's already loaded and packed; and there's a corner

in it left expressly for your daughter: therefore, she must go."

The tone of the speaker had suddenly changed, from that of saintly insinuation, to bold open menace. The squatter, notwithstanding his fierce and formidable aspect, did not dare to reply in the same strain. He was evidently cowed, and suffering under some fearful apprehension. "*Must* go!" he muttered, half involuntarily, as if echoing the other's words. "Yes, *must* and *shall*!"

"I tell ye, Josh Stebbins, she'll niver consent."

"And I tell you, Hickman Holt, I don't want her consent. That I leave *you* to obtain; and if you can't get it otherwise, you must *force* it. Bah! what is it for? A good husband – a good home – plenty of meat, drink, and dress: for don't you get it into your fancy that the Latter-Day Saints resemble your canting hypocrites of other creeds, who think they please God by their miserable penances. Quite the reverse, I can assure you. We mean to live as God intended men should live – eat, drink, and be merry. Look there!" The speaker exhibited a handful of shining gold pieces. "That's the way our church provides for its apostles. Your daughter will be a thousand times better off there, than in this wretched hovel. Perhaps *she* will not mind the change so much as *you* appear to think. I know many a first-rate girl that would be glad of the chance."

"I know *she* won't give in – far less to be made a Mormon o'. I've heern her speak agin 'em."

"I say again, she must give in. After all, you needn't tell her I'm

a Mormon: she needn't know anything about *that*. Let her think I'm only moving out west – to Oregon – where there are plenty of respectable emigrants now going. She'll not suspect anything in that. Once out at Salt Lake City, she'll soon get reconciled to Mormon life, I guess."

The squatter remained silent for some moments – his head hanging forward over his broad breast – his eyes turned inward, as if searching within his bosom for some thought to guide and direct him. In there, no doubt, a terrible struggle was going on – a tumult of mixed emotions. He loved his daughter, and would leave her to her own will; but he feared this saintly suitor, and dared not gainsay him. It must have been some dread secret, or fiendish scheme, that enabled this small insignificant man to sway the will of such a giant!

A considerable time passed, and still the squatter vouchsafed no answer. He was evidently wavering, as to the nature of the response he should make.

Twice or thrice he raised his head, stealthily directing his glance to the countenance of his visitor; but only to read, in the looks of the latter, a fixed and implacable purpose. There was no mercy there.

All at once, a change came over the colossus. A resolution of resistance had arisen within him – as was evinced by his altered attitude and the darkening shadow upon his countenance. The triumphant glances of the pseudo-saint appeared to have provoked him, more than the matter in dispute. Like the buffalo

of the plains stung with Indian arrows, or the great *mysticetus* of the deep goaded by the harpoon of the whaler, all the angry energies of his nature appeared suddenly aroused from their lethargy; and he sprang to his feet, towering erect in the presence of his tormentor. "Damnation!" cried he, striking the floor with his heavy heel, "she won't do it – she won't, and she *shan't*!"

"Keep cool, Hickman Holt!" rejoined the Mormon, without moving from his seat – "keep cool! I expected this; but it's all bluster. I tell you she will, and she *shall*!"

"Hev a care, Josh Stebbins! Hev a care what yur about! Ye don't know what you may drive me to – "

"But I know what I may *lead* you to," interrupted the other with a sneering smile.

"What?" involuntarily inquired Holt.

"The gallows," laconically answered Stebbins.

"Devils an' damnation!" This emphatic rejoinder was accompanied with a furious grinding of teeth, but with a certain recoiling – as if the angry spirit of the giant could still be stayed by such a menace.

"It's no use swearing about it, Holt," continued the Mormon, after a certain time had passed in silence. "*My* mind's made up – the girl must go with me. Say *yes* or *no*. If yes, then all's well – well for your daughter, and well for you too. I shall be out of your way – Salt Lake's a long distance off – and it's *not likely you'll ever set eyes on me again*. You understand me?"

The saint pronounced these last words with a significant

emphasis; and then paused, as if to let them have their full weight. They appeared to produce an effect. On hearing them, a gleam, like a sudden flash of sunlight, passed over the countenance of the squatter. It appeared the outward index of some consolatory thought freshly conceived; and its continuance proved that it was influencing him to take a different view of the Mormon's proposal. He spoke at length; but no longer in the tone of rage – for his passion seemed to have subsided, as speedily as it had sprung up.

"An' s'pose I say *no*?"

"Why, in that case, I shall not start so soon as I had intended. I shall stay in the settlements till I have performed a duty that, for a long time, I have left undone."

"What duty is't you mean?"

"One I owe to society; and which I have perhaps sinfully neglected —*bring a murderer to justice*!"

"Hush! Josh Stebbins – for Heaven's sake, speak low! *You know it isn't true*– but, hush! the gurls are 'thout. Don't let them hear sech talk!"

"Perhaps," continued Stebbins, without heeding the interruption, "perhaps that murderer fancies he might escape. He is mistaken if he do. One word from me in Swampville, and the hounds of the law would be upon him; ay, and if he could even get clear of *them*, he could not escape out of my power. I have told you I am an Apostle of the great Mormon Church; and that man would be cunning indeed who could shun the vengeance of

our Destroying Angels. Now, Hickman Holt, which is it to be? *yes or no*?" The pause was ominous for poor Marian.

The answer decided her doom. It was delivered in a hoarse husky voice: "*Yes – yes – she may go*!"

# Chapter Eight
# A splendid Pension

The treaty of Guadalupe Hidalogo was followed by an extensive *débandement*, which sent many thousands of sabres ringing back into their scabbards – some of them soon after to spring forth in the cause of freedom, calumniously called "filibustering;" others perhaps destined never to be drawn again. Using a figurative expression, not a few were converted into spades; and in this *pacific* fashion, carried to the far shores of the Pacific Ocean – there to delve for Californian gold – while still others were suspended in the counting-house or the studio, to rust in inglorious idleness. A three years' campaign under the sultry skies of Mexico – drawing out the war-fever that had long burned in the bosoms of the American youth – had satisfied the ambition of most. It was only those who arrived late upon the field – too late to pluck a laurel – who would have prolonged the strife.

The narrator of this tale, Edward Warfield —*ci-devant* captain of a corps of "rangers" – was not one of the last mentioned. With myself, as with many others, the great Mexican campaign was but the continuation of the little war —*la petite guerre*– that had long held an intermittent existence upon the borders of Texas, and in which we had borne part; and the provincial laurels

there reaped, when interwoven with the fresher and greener bays gathered upon the battle-fields of Anahuac, constituted a wreath exuberant enough to content us for the time. For my part, notwithstanding the portentous sound of my ancestral patronymic, I was tired of the toils of war, and really desired a "spell" of peace: during which I might indulge in the *dolce far niente*, and obtain for my wearied spirit a respite of repose. My wishes were in similitude with those of the poet, who longed for "a lodge in some vast wilderness – some boundless contiguity of shade;" or perhaps, more akin to those of that other poet of less solitary inclinings, who only desired the "desert as a dwelling-place, with one fair spirit for his minister!" In truth, I felt a strong inclination for the latter description of life; and, in all likelihood, would have made a trial of it, but for the interference of one of those ill-starred contingencies that often embarrass the best intentions. A phrase of common occurrence will explain the circumstance that offered opposition to my will: "want of the wherewith to support a wife."

I had been long enough in the wilderness, to know that even a "dwelling in the desert" cannot be maintained without expense; and that however pure the desert air, the *fairest* "spirit" would require something more substantial to live upon. Under this prudential view of the case, marriage was altogether out of the question. We, the *débandes*, were dismissed without pension: the only reward for our warlike achievements being a piece of "land scrip," good for the number of acres upon the face of it – to

be selected from "government land," wherever the holder might choose to "locate." The scrip was for greater or less amount, according to the term of the receiver's service. Mine represented a "section" of six hundred and forty acres – worth in ordinary times, a dollar and quarter per acre; but just then – on account of the market being flooded by similar paper – reduced to less than half its value. With this magnificent "bounty" was I rewarded for services, that perhaps – some day – might be – never mind! – thank heaven for blessing me with the comforting virtues of humility and contentment! This bit of scrip then – a tried steed that had carried me many a long mile, and through the smoke of more than one red fray – a true rifle, that I had myself carried equally as far – a pair of Colt's pistols – and a steel "Toledo," taken at the storming of Chapultepec – constituted the bulk of my available property. Add to this, a remnant of my last month's pay – in truth, not enough to provide me with that much coveted article, a *civilian's suit*: in proof of which, my old undress-frock, with its yellow spread-eagle buttons, clung to my shoulders like a second shirt of Nessus. The vanity of wearing a uniform, that may have once been felt, was long ago threadbare as the coat itself; and yet I was not wanting in friends, who fancied that it might still exist! How little understood they the real state of the case, and how much did they misconstrue my *involuntary* motives!

It was just to escape from such unpleasant associations, that I held on to my "scrip." Most of my brother-officers had sold

theirs for a "song," and spent the proceeds upon a "supper." In relation to mine, I had other views than parting with it to the greedy speculators. It promised me that very wilderness-home I was in search of; and, having no prospect of procuring a fair spirit for my "minister," I determined to "locate" without one.

I was at the time staying in Tennessee – the guest of a campaigning comrade and still older friend. He was grandson of that gallant leader, who, with a small band of only forty families, ventured three hundred miles through the heart of the "bloody ground" and founded Nashville upon the bold bluffs of an almost unknown river! From the lips of their descendants I had heard so many thrilling tales of adventures, experienced by this pioneer band, that Tennessee had become, in my fancy a region of romance. Other associations had led me to love this hospitable and chivalric state; and I resolved, that, within its boundaries, I should make my home. A visit to the Land-office of Nashville ended in my selection of Section Number 9, Township – , as my future plantation. It was represented to me as a fertile spot – situated in the "Western Reserve" – near the banks of the beautiful Obion, and not far above the confluence of this river with the Mississippi. The official believed there had been some "improvement" made upon the land by a *squatter*; but whether the squatter still lived upon it, he could not tell. "At all events, the fellow will be too poor to exercise the *pre-emption right*, and of course must move off." So spoke the land agent. This would answer admirably. Although my Texan experience

had constituted me a tolerable woodsman, it had not made me a woodcutter; and the clearing of the squatter, however small it might be, would serve as a beginning. I congratulated myself on my good luck; and, without further parley, parted with my scrip – receiving in return the necessary documents, that constituted me the legal owner and lord of the soil of Section 9. The only additional information the agent could afford me was: that my new purchase was all "heavily timbered," with the exception before referred to; that the township in which it was situated was called Swampville; and that the section itself was known as "Holt's Clearing" – from the name, it was supposed, of the squatter who had made the "improvement."

With this intelligence in my head, and the title-deeds in my pocket, I took leave of the friendly official; who, at parting, politely wished me "a pleasant time of it on my new plantation!"

# Chapter Nine
# Friendly Advice

On returning to the house of my friend, I informed him of my purchase; and was pleased to find that he approved of it. "You can't be taken in," said he, "by land upon the Obion. From what I have heard of it, it is one of the most fertile spots in Tennessee. Moreover, as you are fond of hunting, you'll find game in abundance. The black bear, and even the panther – or 'painter,' as our backwoodsmen have it – are still common in the Obion bottom; and indeed, all throughout the forests of the Reserve."

"I'm rejoiced to hear it."

"No doubt," continued my friend, with a smile, "you may shoot deer from your own door; or trap wolves and wild-cats at the entrance to your hen-roost."

"Good!"

"O yes – though I can't promise that you will see anything of *Venus* in the woods, you may enjoy to your heart's content the noble art of *venerie*. The Obion bottom is a very paradise for hunters. It was it that gave birth to the celebrated Crockett."

"On that account it will be all the more interesting to me; and, from what you say, it is just the sort of place I should have chosen to *squat* upon."

"*By* the by," interrupted my friend, looking a little grave as he spoke, "your making use of that familiar phrase, recalls the circumstance you mentioned just now. Did I understand you to say, there was a *squatter* on the land?"

"There *was* one – so the agent has told me; but whether he be still *squatted* there, the official could not say."

"Rather awkward, if he be," rejoined my friend, in a sort of musing soliloquy; while, with his eyes fixed upon the ground, he kept pulling his "goatee" to its full length.

"In what way awkward?" I asked in some surprise. "How can *that* signify?"

"A great deal. These squatters are queer fellows —*ugly* customers to deal with – especially when you come to turn them out of their house and home, as they consider it. It is true, they have the *pre-emption right*– that is, they may purchase, if they please, and send you to seek a location elsewhere; but this is a privilege those gentry rarely please to indulge in – being universally too poor to purchase."

"What then?"

"Their motto is, for 'him to keep who can.' The old adage, 'possession being nine points of the law,' is, in the squatter's code, no dead-letter, I can assure you."

"Do you mean, that the fellow might refuse to turn out?"

"It depends a good deal on what sort of a fellow he is. They are not all alike. If he should chance to be one of the obstinate and pugnacious kind, you are likely enough to have trouble with

him."

"But surely the law – "

"Will aid you in ousting him – that's what you were going to say?"

"I should expect so – in Tennessee, at all events."

"And you would be disappointed. In almost any other part of the state, you *might* rely upon legal assistance; but, I fear, that about Swampville you will find society not very different from that you have encountered on the borders of Texas; and you know how little help the law could afford you *there*, in the enforcement of such a claim?"

"Then I must take the law into my own hands," rejoined I, falling into very old-fashioned phraseology – for I was beginning to feel indignant at the very idea of this prospective difficulty. "No, Warfield," replied my sober friend, "do not take that course; I know you are not the man to be *scared* out of your rights; but, in the present case, prudence is the proper course to follow. – Your squatter, if there be one – it is to be hoped that, like many of our grand cities, he has only an existence on the map – but if there should be a real live animal of this description on the ground, he will be almost certain to have neighbours – some half-dozen of his own kidney – living at greater or less distances around him. They are not usually of a clannish disposition; but, in a matter of this kind, they will be as unanimous in their sympathies, and antipathies too, as they would about the butchering of a bear. Turn one of them out by force – either legal or otherwise – and

it would be like bringing a hornets' nest about your ears. Even were you to succeed in so clearing your land, you would find ever afterwards a set of very unpleasant neighbours to live among. I know some cases in point, that occurred nearer home here. In fact, on some wild lands of my own I had an instance of the kind."

"What, then, am I to do? Can you advise me?"

"Do as others have often done before you; and who have actually been forced to the course of action I shall advise. *Should there be a squatter*, and one likely to prove obstinate, approach him as gently as you can, and state your case frankly. You will find this the best mode of treating with these fellows – many of whom have a dash of honour, as well as honesty in their composition. Speak of the *improvements* he has made, and offer him a recompense."

"Ah! friend Blount," replied I, addressing my kind host by his baptismal name, "it is much easier to listen to your advice than follow it."

"Come, old comrade!" rejoined he, after a momentary pause, "I think I understand you. There need be no concealment between friends, such as we are. Let not that difficulty hinder you from following the course I have recommended. The old general's property is not all gone yet; and, should you stand in need of a hundred or two, to make a *second* purchase of your plantation, send me word, and – "

"Thanks, Blount – thanks! it is just as I should have expected; but I shall not become your debtor for such a purpose. I have been

a frontiersman too long to be bullied by a backwoodsman – "

"There now, Warfield, just your own passionate self! Nay, you must take my advice. Pray, do not go rashly about it, but act as I have counselled you."

"That will depend upon contingencies. Should Master Holt – for I believe that is my predecessor's name – should he prove *amiable*, I may consent to go a little in your debt, and pay him for whatever log-chopping he has done. If otherwise, by the Lady of Guadalupe! – you remember our old Mexican shibboleth – he shall be cleared out of his clearing *sans façon*. Perhaps we have been wasting words upon an ideal existence! Perhaps there is no squatter after all; or that old Holt has long since 'gone under' and only his ghost will be found flitting around the precincts of this disputed territory. Would not that be an interesting companion for my hours of midnight loneliness? A match for the wolves and wild-cats! Ha! ha! ha!"

"Well, old comrade; I trust it may turn out no worse. The ghost of a squatter might prove a less unpleasant neighbour than the squatter himself, dispossessed of his *squatment*. Notwithstanding this badinage, I know you will act with judgment; and you can count upon my help in the matter, if you should require it." I grasped the speaker's hand, to express my gratitude; and the tight pressure returned, told me I was parting with one of the few friends I had in the world.

My *impedimenta* had been already packed. They did not need much stowage. A pair of saddle-bags was sufficient to

contain all my personal property – including the title-deeds of my freehold! My arms I carried upon my person: my sword only being strapped along the saddle. Bidding adieu to my friend, I mounted my noble Arab; and, heading him to the road, commenced journeying towards the *Western Reserve*.

# Chapter Ten
# A Classic Land

Between Nashville and Swampville extends a distance of more than a hundred miles – just three days' travel on horseback. For the first ten miles – to Harpeth River – I found an excellent road, graded and macadamised, running most of the way between fenced plantations. My next point was *Paris*; and forty miles further on, I arrived in *Dresden*! So far as the nomenclature was concerned, I might have fancied myself travelling upon the continent of Europe. By going a little to the right, I might have entered Asia: since I was told of *Smyrna* and *Troy* being at no great distance in that direction; and by proceeding in a south-westerly course, I should have passed through *Denmark*, and landed at *Memphis*– certainly an extensive tour within the short space of three days! Ugh! those ugly names! What hedge-schoolmaster has scattered them so loosely and profusely over this lovely land? Whip the wretch with rattlesnakes! Memphis indeed! – as if Memphis with its monolithic statues needed commemoration on the banks of the Mississippi! A new Osiris – a new Sphinx, "half horse, half alligator, with a sprinkling of the snapping turtle." At every forking of the roads, whenever I inquired my way, in my ears rang those classic homonyms, till my soul was sick of sounds. "Swampville" was euphony, and "Mud

Creek" *soft* music in comparison! Beyond Dresden, the titles became more appropriate and much more rare. There were long stretches having no names at all: for the simple reason, that there were no *places* to bear them. The numerous creeks, however, had been baptised; and evidently by the backwoodsmen themselves, as the titles indicated. "Deer Creek" and "Mud" – "Coon" and "Cat" – "Big" and "Little Forky" – told that the pioneers, who first explored the hydrographic system of the Western Reserve, were not heavily laden with classic lore; and a pity it is that pedantry should be permitted to alter the simple, but expressive and appropriate, appellatives by them bestowed. Unfortunately, the system is followed up to this hour by the Fremonts and other pseudo-explorers of the farthest west. The soft and harmonious sound of Indian and Spanish nomenclature – as well as the more striking titles bestowed by the trappers – are rapidly being obliterated from the maps; their places to be supplied – at the instigation of a fulsome flattery – by the often vulgar names of demagogic leaders, or the influential heads of the employing *bureau*.

"I know the old general will be pleased – perhaps reciprocate the compliment in his next despatch – if I call this beautiful river 'Smith.'"

"How the secretary will smile, when he sees his name immortalised upon my map, by a lake never to be dried up, and which hereafter is to be known by the elegant and appropriate appellation of 'Jones!'" Under just such influence are these

absurd titles bestowed; and the consequence is, that amid the romantic defiles of the Rocky Mountains, we have our ears jarred by a jumble of petty and most inappropriate names – Smiths, Joneses, Jameses, and the like – while, from the sublime peaks of the Cascade range, we have "Adams," "Jackson," "Jefferson," "Madison," and "Washington," overlooking the limitless waters of the Pacific. This last series we could excuse. The possession of high qualities, or the achievement of great deeds, ennobles even a common name; and all these have been stamped with the true patent. In the associated thoughts that cling around them, we take no note of the sound – whether it be harsh or harmonious. But that is another question, and must not hinder us from entering our protest against the nomenclature of Smith, Jones, and Robinson!

Beyond Dresden, my road could no longer be termed a road. It was a mere trace, or lane, cut out in the forest – with here and there a tree "blazed," to indicate the direction. As I neared the point of my destination, I became naturally curious to learn something about it – that is, about Swampville – since it was evident that this was to be the *point d'appui* of my future efforts at colonisation – my depôt and port entry. I should have inquired had I found any one to inquire *from*; but, for ten miles along the road, I encountered not a human creature. Then only a "darkey" with an ox-cart loaded with wood; but, despairing of information from such a source, I declined detaining him. The only intelligence I was able to draw from the negro was that; "da

'city' o' Swampville, massr, he lay 'bout ten mile furrer down da crik." The "ten mile down da crik" proved to be long ones; but throughout the whole distance I saw not a creature, until I had arrived within a mile or so of the "settlement!"

I had been already apprised that Swampville was a new place. Its fame had not yet reached the eastern world; and even in Nashville was it unknown, except, perhaps, to the Land-Office. It was only after entering the Reserve, that I became fully assured of its existence; and there it was known as a "settlement" rather than a "city." For all that, Swampville proved to be not so contemptible a place; and the reason I had encountered so little traffic, while approaching it, was that I had been coming in the *wrong direction*– in other words, I had approached it *from behind*.

Swampville was in reality a *riverine* town. To it the east was a *back* country; and its front face was to the west. In that direction lay its world, and the ways that opened to it. Log-shanties began to line the road – standing thicker as I advanced; while at intervals, appeared a "frame-house" of more pretentious architecture. In front of one of these – the largest of the collection – there stood a tall post; or rather a tree with its top cut off, and divested of its lower branches. On the head of this was a "martin-box"; and underneath the dwelling of the birds, a broad framed board, on which was legible the word "Hotel." A portrait of Jackson, done in "continental uniform," embellished the face of the board. The sign seemed little appropriate: for in

the harsh features of “Old Hickory” there was but slight promise of hospitality. It was no use going farther. The “Jackson Hotel” was evidently the “head inn” of the place; and without pause or parley, I dismounted at its door.

I was too well used to western habits to wait either for welcome or assistance – too careful of my Arab to trust him to hands unskilled – and I did the unsaddling for myself. A half-naked negro gave me some slight help in the “grooming” process – all the while exhibiting his ivories and the whites of his eyes in an expression of ill-concealed astonishment, produced apparently by the presence of my uniform coat – to the “darkey,” no doubt, an uncommon apparition.

# Chapter Eleven
# The "Jackson Hotel."

I found that I had arrived in the very "nick of time:" for just as I returned from the stable, and was entering the verandah of the hotel, I heard the bell calling its guests to supper. There was no ado made about me: neither landlord or waiter met me with a word; and following the stream of "boarders" or travellers who had arrived before me, I took my seat at the common *table-d'hôte*.

Had the scene been new to me, I might have found food for reflection, or observed circumstances to astonish me. But I had been long accustomed to mix in as motley a throng, as that which now surrounded the table of the Swampville hotel. A supper-table, encircled by blanket and "jeans" coats – by buckskin blouses and red-flannel shirts – by men without coats at all – was nothing strange to me; nor was it strange either to find these *bizarre* costumes interspersed among others of fashionable cut and finest cloth. Black broad-cloth frocks, and satin or velvet vests, were quite common. Individuals thus attired formed a majority of the guests – for in young settlements the "hotel" or "tavern" is also a boarding-house, where the spruce "storekeepers" and better class of clerks take their meals – usually sleeping in the office or store.

In glancing around the table, I saw many old "types," though

not one face that I had ever seen before. There was one, however, that soon attracted my attention, and fixed it. It was *not* a lady's face, as you may be imagining; though there were present some of that sex – the landlord's helpmate who presided over the coffee-pot, with some three or four younger specimens of the backwoods fair – her daughters and nieces. All, however, were absolutely without attraction of any sort; and I somewhat bitterly remembered the *mot* of double meaning, with which my friend had entertained me at parting.

Venus was certainly not visible at the Swampville *table-d'hôte*: for the presiding divinity was a perfect Hecate; and her attendant damsels could have found no place in the train of the Cytherean goddess. No – the face that interested me was neither that of a female, nor in any way feminine. It was the face of a *man*; and that in the most emphatic sense of the word. He was a young man – apparently about four or five and twenty – and costumed as a backwoods hunter; that is, he wore a buckskin hunting-shirt, leggings, and mocassins – with bullet-pouch and powder-horn suspended over his shoulder, and hunting-knife sheathed in his belt. The coon-skin cap, hanging against the adjacent wall, was his head-dress: I had seen him place it there, before taking his seat at the supper-table. With the personal appearance of this young man the eye was at once satisfied. A figure of correct contour, features of noble outline, a face expressive of fine mental qualities – were the more salient characteristics that struck me at the first glance. Regarding the portrait more

particularly, other details became manifest: round hazel eyes, with well-developed lashes; brows finely arched; a magnificent shock of nut-brown curling hair; a small, well-formed mouth, with white, regular teeth – all contributed to the creation of what might be termed a type of manly beauty. This beauty appeared in a somewhat neglected garb. Art might have improved it; but it was evident that none had been employed, or even thought of. It was a clear case of "beauty unadorned;" and the possessor of it appeared altogether unconscious of its existence. I need not add that this mental characteristic, on the part of the young man, heightened the grace of his personal charms.

Why this young fellow fixed my attention, I can scarcely tell. His costume was by no means uncommon: though it was the only one of the kind there present. It was not that, however, nor yet his fine personal appearance, that interested me; but rather something I had observed in his bearing and manner. As we were seated opposite each other, near the foot of the long table, I had an excellent opportunity of observing him. Notwithstanding his undoubted good looks – sufficiently striking to have filled the possessor with vanity – his deportment was marked by a modest reserve, that proved him either unaware of his personal advantages, or without any conceit in them. By the glances occasionally cast towards him, from the opposite end of the table, I could perceive that "Miss Alvina" and "Miss Car'line" were not insensible to his attractions. Neither, however, had reason to congratulate herself upon any reciprocity of her favouring

glances. The young man either did not observe, or, at all events, took no notice of them. The melancholy tinge pervading his features remained altogether unaltered. Equally impassible did he appear under the jealous looks of some three or four smart young storekeepers – influenced, no doubt, by tender relations existing between them and the aforementioned damsels, whose sly *espièglerie* of the handsome hunter could not have escaped their observation.

The young man appeared to be be rather *friendless*, than unknown. I could perceive that almost all of the company were acquainted with him; but that most of them – especially the gentlemen in broad-cloth – affected an air of superiority over him. No one talked much to him: for his reserved manner did not invite conversation; but when one of these did address a few words to him, it was in the style usually adopted by the well-to-do citizen, holding converse with his less affluent neighbour. The young fellow was evidently not one to be sneered at or insulted; but, for all that, I could perceive that the broad-cloth gentry did not quite regard him as an equal. Perhaps this may be explained by the hypothesis that he was *poor*, and, indeed, it did not require much penetration to perceive that such was the reality. The hunting-shirt, though once a handsome one, was no longer new. On the contrary, it was considerably "scuffed;" and the green baize wrappers upon his limbs were faded to a greenish brown. Other points proclaimed a light purse – perhaps far lighter than the heart of him who carried it – if I was to judge by the

expression of his countenance.

Notwithstanding all this, the young hunter was evidently an object of interest – whether friendly or hostile – and might have been the *cynosure* of the supper-table, but for my undress-frock and spread-eagle buttons. These, however, claimed some share of the curiosity of Swampville; and I was conscious of being the object of a portion of its surveillance. I knew not what ideas they could have had about me, and cared as little: but, judging from the looks of the men – the broad-cloth gentlemen in particular – I was impressed with a suspicion that I was neither admired nor welcome. In the eyes of your "sovereign citizen," the mere military man is not the hero that he is elsewhere; and he must show something more than a uniform coat, to recommend himself to their suffrages. I was conceited enough to imagine that Miss Alvina, and her *vis-à-vis*, Miss Car'line, did not look altogether unfriendly; but the handsome face and magnificent curls of the young hunter were beside me; and it was no use taking the field against such a rival. I was not jealous of him, however, nor he of me. On the contrary, of all the men present, he appeared most inclined to be courteous to me – as was evinced by his once or twice pushing within my reach those delicate dishes, distributed at *very* long distances over the table. I felt an incipient friendship for this young man, which he appeared to reciprocate. He saw that I was a stranger; and notwithstanding the pretentious fashion of my dress, perhaps he noticed my well-worn coat, and conjectured that I might be as poor and friendless as himself. If

it was to this conjecture I was indebted for his sympathies, his instincts were not far astray.

# Chapter Twelve
# Colonel Kipp

As soon as I had swallowed supper, I hastened to place myself *en rapport* with the landlord of the hostelry – whose name I had ascertained to be "Kipp," or "*Colonel* Kipp," as his guests called him. Though I had no intention of proceeding farther that night, I was desirous of obtaining some information, about the whereabout of my new estate, with such other facts in relation to it, as might be collected in Swampville. The landlord would be the most likely person to give me the desired intelligence. This distinguished individual I encountered soon after in the verandah – seated upon a raw-hide rocking-chair, with his feet elevated some six inches above the level of his nose, and resting across the balustrade of the railing – beyond which his huge horse-skin boots protruded a full half yard into the street. But that I had been already made aware of the fact, I should have had some difficulty in reconciling the portentous title of "colonel" with the exceedingly unmilitary-looking personage before me – a tall lopsided tobacco-chewer, who, at short intervals, of about half a minute each, projected the juice in copious squirts into the street, sending it clean over the toes of his boots!

When I first set eyes upon the colonel, he was in the centre of a circle of tooth-pickers, who had just issued from the supper-

room. These were falling off one by one; and, noticing their defection, I waited for an opportunity to speak to the colonel alone. This, after a short time, offered itself.

The dignified gentleman took not the slightest notice of me as I approached; nor until I had got so near, as to leave no doubt upon his mind that a conversation was intended. Then, edging slightly round, and drawing in the boots, he made a half-face towards me – still, however, keeping fast to his chair.

"The army, sir, I prezoom?" interrogatively began Mr Kipp.

"No," answered I, imitating his laconism of speech. "No!"

"I have been in the service. I have just left it."

"Oh – ah! From Mexico, then, I prezoom?"

"Yes."

"Business in Swampville?"

"Why, yes, Mr Kipp."

"I am usooally called *kurnel* here," interrupted the backwoods *militario*, with a bland smile, as if half deprecating the title, and that it was forced upon him.

"Of course," continued he, "you, sir, bein' a strenger – "

"I beg your pardon, *Colonel* Kipp: I *am* a stranger to your *city*, and of course – "

"Don't signify a dump, sir," interrupted he, rather good-humouredly, in return for the show of deference I had made, as also, perhaps for my politeness in having styled Swampville a city. "Business in Swampville, you say?"

"Yes," I replied; and, seeing it upon his lips to inquire the

nature of my business – which I did not wish to make known just then – I forestalled him by the question: "Do you chance to know such a place as Holt's Clearing?"

"Chance to know such a place as Holt's Clearin'?"

"Yes; Holt's Clearing."

"Wal, there *air* such a place."

"Is it distant?"

"If you mean Hick Holt's Clearin', it's a leetle better'n six miles from here. He squats on Mud Crik."

"There's a squatter upon it, then?"

"On Holt's Clearin'? Wal, I shed rayther say there *air a squatter* on't, an' no mistake."

"His name is Holt is it not?"

"That same individooal."

"Do you think I could procure a guide in Swampville – some one who could show me the way to Holt's Clearing?"

"Do I think so? Possible you might. D'ye see that ar case in the coon-cap?" The speaker looked, rather than pointed, to the young fellow of the buckskin shirt; who, outside the verandah, was now standing by the side of a very sorry-looking steed. I replied in the affirmative. "Wal, I reckon he kin show you the way to Holt's Clearin'. He's another o' them Mud Crik squatters. He's just catchin' up his critter to go that way."

This I hailed as a fortunate circumstance. If the young hunter lived near the clearing I was in search of, perhaps he could give me all the information I required; and his frank

open countenance led me to believe he would not withhold it. It occurred to me, therefore, to make a slight change in my programme. It was yet *early*– for supper in the backwoods is what is elsewhere known as "tea." The sun was still an hour or so above the horizon. My horse had made but a light journey; and nine miles more would be nothing to him. All at once, then, I altered my intention of sleeping at the hotel; and determined, if the young hunter would accept me as a travelling companion, to proceed along with him to Mud Creek. Whether I should find a bed there, never entered into my calculation. I had my great-sleeved cloak strapped upon the cantle of my saddle; and with that for a covering, and the saddle itself for a pillow, I had made shift on many a night, more tempestuous than that promised to be.

I was about turning away to speak to the young man, when I was recalled by an exclamation from the landlord: – "I guess," said he, in a half-bantering way, "you hain't told me your business yet?"

"No," I answered deferentially, "I have not."

"What on airth's takin' you to Holt's Clearin'?"

"That, Mr Kipp – I beg pardon —*Colonel* Kipp – is a private matter."

"Private and particular, eh?"

"Very."

"Oh, then, I guess, you'd better keep it to yourself."

"That is precisely my intention," I rejoined, turning on my

heel, and stepping out of the verandah.

The young hunter was just buckling the girth of his saddle. As I approached him, I saw that he was smiling. He had overheard the concluding part of the conversation; and looked as if pleased at the way in which I had bantered the "colonel," who, as I afterwards learnt from him, was the grand swaggerer of Swampville. A word was sufficient. He at once acceded to my request, frankly, if not in the most elegant phraseology, "I'll be pleased to show ye the way to Holt's Clarin'. My own road goes jest that way, till within a squ'll's jump o't."

"Thank you: I shall not keep you waiting."

I re-entered the hotel to pay for my entertainment, and give orders for the saddling of my horse. It was evident that I had offended the landlord by my brusque behaviour. I ascertained this by the *amount* of my bill, as well as by the fact of being permitted to saddle for myself. Even the naked "nigger," did not make his appearance at the stable. Not much cared I. I had drawn the girth too often, to be disconcerted by such petty annoyance; and, in five minutes after, I was in the saddle and ready for the road. Having joined my companion in the street, we rode off from the inhospitable *caravanserai* of the Jackson Hotel – leaving its warlike landlord to chew his tobacco, and such reflections as my remarks had given rise to.

# Chapter Thirteen
# Through the Forest

As we passed up the street, I was conscious of being the subject of Swampville speculation. Staring faces at the windows, and gaping groups around the doors, proved by their looks and gestures, that I was regarded as a rare spectacle. It could scarcely be my companion who was the object of this universal curiosity. A buckskin hunting-shirt was an everyday sight in Swampville – not so a well-mounted *military* man, armed, uniformed, and equipped. No doubt, my splendid Arab, *caracoling* as if he had not been out of the stable for a week, came in for a large share of the admiration.

We were soon beyond its reach. Five minutes sufficed to carry us out of sight of the Swampvillians: for, in that short space of time, we had cleared the suburbs of the "city," and were riding under the shadows of an unbroken forest. Its cold gloom gave instantaneous relief – shading us at one and the same time from the fiery sun, and the glances of vulgar observation through which we had run the gauntlet. I at least enjoyed the change; and for some minutes we rode silently on, my guide keeping in advance of me.

This mode of progression was not voluntary, but a necessity, arising from the nature of the road – which was a mere "trace" or

bridle-path "*blazed*" across the forest. No wheel had ever made its track in the soft deep mud – into which, at every step, our steeds sank far above the fetlocks – and, as there was not room for two riders abreast, I followed the injunction of my companion by keeping my horse's head "at the tail o' his'n." In this fashion we progressed for a mile or more, through a tract of what is termed "bottom-timber" – a forest of those gigantic water-loving trees – the sycamore and cotton-wood. Their tall grey trunks rose along the path, standing thickly on each side, and sometimes in regular rows, like the columns of a grand temple. I felt a secret satisfaction in gazing upon these colossal forms: for my heart hailed them as the companions of my future solitude. At the same time I could not help the reflection, that, if my new estate was thus heavily encumbered, the clearing of the squatter was not likely to be extended beyond whatever limits the axe of Mr Holt had already assigned to it.

A little further on, the path began to ascend. We had passed out of the bottom-lands, and were crossing a ridge, which forms the *divide* between Mud Creek and the Obion River. The soil was now a dry gravel, with less signs of fertility, and covered with a pine-forest. The trees were of slender growth; and at intervals their trunks stood far apart, giving us an opportunity to ride side by side. This was exactly what I wanted: as I was longing for a conversation with my new acquaintance.

Up to this time, he had observed a profound silence; but for all that, I fancied he was not disinclined to a little *causerie*. His

reserve seemed to spring from a sense of modest delicacy – as if he did not desire to take the initiative. I relieved him from this embarrassment, by opening the dialogue: – "What sort of a gentleman is this Mr Holt?"

"Gentleman!"

"Yes – what sort of *person* is he?"

"Oh, what sort o' person. Well, stranger, he's what we, in these parts, call a rough customer."

"Indeed?"

"Raythe, I shed say."

"Is he what you call a poor man?"

"All that I reckon. He hain't got nothin', as I knows on, 'ceptin' his old critter o' a hoss, an' his clarin' o' a couple o' acres or thereabout; besides, he only *squats* upon that."

"He's only a squatter, then?"

"That's all, stranger; tho' I reckon he considers the clarin' as much his own as I do my bit o' ground, that's been bought an' paid for."

"Indeed?"

"Yes – I shedn't like to be the party that would buy it over his head."

The speaker accompanied these words with a significant glance, which seemed to say, "I wonder if that's *his* business here."

"Has he any family?"

"Thar's one – a young critter o' a girl."

"That all?" I asked – seeing that my companion hesitated, as if he had something more to say, but was backward about declaring it.

"No, stranger – thar war another girl – older than this 'un."

"And she?"

"She – she's gone away."

"Married, I suppose?"

"That's what nobody 'bout here can tell nor whar she's gone, neyther."

The tone in which the young fellow spoke had suddenly altered from gay to grave; and, by a glimpse of the moonlight, I could perceive that his countenance was shadowed and sombre. I could have but little doubt as to the cause of this transformation. It was to be found in the subject of our conversation – the absent daughter of the squatter. From motives of delicacy I refrained from pushing my inquiries farther; but, indeed, I should have been otherwise prevented from doing so: for, just at that moment, the road once more narrowed, and we were forced apart. By the eager urging of his horse into the dark path, I could perceive that the hunter was desirous of terminating a dialogue – to him, in all probability, suggestive of bitter memories.

For another half hour we rode on in silence – my companion apparently buried in a reverie of thought – myself speculating on the chances of an unpleasant encounter: which, from the hints I had just had, was now rather certain than probable. Instead of a welcome from the squatter, and a bed in the corner of his

cabin, I had before my mind the prospect of a wordy war; and, perhaps afterwards, of spending my night in the woods. Once or twice, I was on the point of proclaiming my errand, and asking the young hunter for advice as how I should act; but as I had not yet ascertained whether he was friend or foe of my future hypothetical antagonist, I thought it more prudent to keep my secret to myself.

His voice again fell upon my ear – this time in a more cheerful tone. It was simply to say, that I "might shortly expect a better road – we were approaching a 'gleed;' beyont that the trace war wider, an' we might ride thegither again."

We were just entering the glade, as he finished speaking – an opening in the woods of limited extent. The contrast between it and the dark forest-path we had traversed was striking – as the change itself was pleasant. It was like emerging suddenly from darkness into daylight: for the full moon, now soaring high above the spray of the forest, filled the glade with the ample effulgence of her light. The dew-besprinkled flowers were sparkling like gems; and, even though it was night, their exquisite aroma had reached us afar off in the forest. There was not a breath of air stirring; and the unruffled leaves presented the sheen of shining metal. Under the clear moonlight, I could distinguish the varied hues of the frondage – that of the red maple from the scarlet sumacs and sassafras laurels; and these again, from the dark-green of the Carolina bay-trees, and the silvery foliage of the *Magnolia glauca*.

Even before entering the glade, this magnificent panorama had burst upon my sight – from a little embayment that formed the *debouchure* of the path – and I had drawn bridle, in order for a moment to enjoy its contemplation. The young hunter was still the length of his horse in advance of me; and I was about requesting him to pull up; but before I could give utterance to the words, I saw him make halt of himself. This, however, was done in so awkward and hurried a manner, that I at once turned from gazing upon the scene, and fixed my eyes upon my companion. As if by an involuntary effort, he had drawn his horse almost upon his haunches: and was now stiffly seated in the saddle, with blanched cheeks and eyes sparkling in their sockets – as if some object of terror was before him! I did not ask for an explanation. I knew that the object that so strangely affected him must be visible – though not from the point where I had halted.

A touch of the spur brought my horse alongside his, and gave me a view of the whole surface of the glade. I looked in the direction indicated by the attitude of the hunter: for – apparently paralysed by some terrible surprise – he had neither pointed nor spoken.

A little to the right of the path, I beheld a white object lying along the ground – a dead tree, whose barkless trunk and smooth naked branches gleamed under the moonlight with the whiteness of a blanched skeleton. In front of this, and a pace or two from it, was a dark form, upright and human-like. Favoured by the clear light of the moon, I had no difficulty in distinguishing the form

to be that of a woman.

# Chapter Fourteen
# Su-Wa-Nee

Beyond doubt, the dark form was that of a woman – a young one too, as evinced by her erect bearing, and a light agile movement, made at the moment of our first beholding her. Her attire was odd. It consisted of a brownish-coloured tunic – apparently of doeskin leather – reaching from the neck to the knees; underneath which appeared leggings of like material, ending in mocassins that covered the feet. The arms, neck, and head were entirely bare; and the colour of the skin, as seen in the moonlight, differed from that of the outer garments only in being a shade or two darker! The woman, therefore, was not white, but an *Indian*: as was made further manifest by the sparkling of beads and bangles around her neck, rings in her ears, and metal circlets upon her arms – all reflecting the light of the moon in copious coruscations. As I brought my horse to a halt, I perceived that the figure was advancing towards us, and with rapid step. My steed set his ears, and snorted with affright. The jade of the hunter had already given the example – each, no doubt, acting under the impulse of the rider. Mine was a feeling of simple astonishment. Such an apparition in that place, and at that hour, was sufficient cause for surprise; but a more definite reason was, my observing that a different emotion had been roused in the

breast of the young hunter. His looks betrayed fear, rather than surprise! "Fear of what?" I asked myself, as the figure advanced; and still more emphatically as it came near enough to enable me to make out the face. As far as the moonlight would permit me to judge, there was nothing in that face to fray either man or horse: certainly nothing to create an emotion, such as was depicted in the countenance of my companion.

The complexion was brown, as already observed; but the features, if not of the finest type, were yet comely enough to attract admiration; and they were lit up by a pair of eyes, whose liquid glance rivalled the sheen of the golden pendants sparkling on each side of them. I should have been truly astonished at the behaviour of my guide, but for the natural reflection, that there was some cause for it, yet unknown to me. Evidently, it was not his first interview with the forest maiden: for I could now perceive that the person who approached was not exactly a woman, but rather a well-grown girl on the eve of womanhood. She was of large stature, nevertheless, with bold outline of breast, and arms that gave token of something more than feminine strength. In truth, she appeared possessed of a *physique* sufficiently formidable to inspire a cowardly man with fear – had such been her object – but I could perceive no signs of menace in her manner. Neither could cowardice be an attribute of my travelling-companion. There was an unexplained something, therefore, to account for his present display of emotion.

On arriving within six paces of the heads of our horses, the Indian paused, as if hesitating to advance. Up to this time, she had not spoken a word. Neither had my companion – beyond a phrase or two that had involuntarily escaped him, on first discovering her presence in the glade. "She here? an' at this time o' night!" I had heard him mutter to himself; but nothing more, until the girl had stopped, as described. Then, in a low voice, and with a slightly trembling accent, he pronounced interrogatively, the words "Su-wa-nee?" It was the name of the Indian maiden; but there was no reply.

"Su-wa-nee!" repeated he, in a louder tone, "is it you?"

The answer was also given interrogatively, "Has the White Eagle lost his eyes, by gazing too long on the pale-faced fair ones of Swampville? There is light in the sky, and the face of Su-wa-nee is turned to it. Let him look on it: it is not lovely like that of the *half-blood*, but the White Eagle will never see that face again."

This declaration had a visible effect on the young hunter: the shade of sadness deepened upon his features: and I could hear a sigh, with difficulty suppressed – while, at the same time, he appeared desirous of terminating the interview.

"It's late, girl," rejoined he, after a pause: "what for are ye here?"

"Su-wa-nee is here for a purpose. For hours she has been waiting to see the White Eagle. The soft hands of the pale-faced maidens have held him long."

"Waitin' to see me! What do you want wi' me?"

"Let the White Eagle send the stranger aside. Su-wa-nee must speak to him alone."

"Thar's no need o' that: it's a friend that's wi' me."

"Would the White Eagle have his secrets known? There are some he may not wish even a friend to hear. Su-wa-nee can tell him one that will crimson his cheeks like the flowers of the red maple."

"I have no saycrets, girl – none as I'm afraid o' bein' heerd by anybody."

"What of the half-blood?"

"I don't care to hear o' her."

"The White Eagle speaks falsely! He does care to hear. He longs to know what has become of his lost Marian. Su-wa-nee can tell him."

The last words produced an instantaneous change in the bearing of the young hunter. Instead of the repelling attitude, he had hitherto observed towards the Indian girl, I saw him bend eagerly forward – as if desirous of hearing what she had to say. Seeing that she had drawn his attention, the Indian again pointed to me, and inquired: "Is the pale-faced stranger to know the love-secrets of the White Eagle?"

I saw that my companion no longer desired me to be a listener. Without waiting for his reply, I drew my horse's head in the opposite direction, and was riding away. In the turning, I came face to face with him; and by the moonlight shining full over his

countenance, I fancied I could detect some traces of mistrust still lingering upon it. My fancy was not at fault: for, on brushing close past him, he leaned over towards me, and, in an earnest manner, muttered: "Please, stranger! don't go fur – thar's danger in this girl. She's been arter me before." I nodded assent to his request; and, turning back into the little bay, that formed the embouchure of the path, I pulled up under the shadow of the trees.

At this point I was not ten paces from the hunter, and could see him; but a little clump of white magnolias prevented me from seeing the girl – at the same time that it hid both myself and horse from her sight. The chirrup of the cicadas alone hindered me from hearing all of what was said; but many words reached my ear, and with sufficient distinctness, to give me a clue to the subject of the promised revelation. Delicacy would have prompted me to retire a little farther off; but the singular caution I had received from my companion, prevented me from obeying its impulse.

I could make out that a certain Marian was the subject of the conversation; and then more distinctively, that it was Marian Holt. Just as I expected, the daughter of my squatter: that other and older one, of whom mention had been already made. This part of the revelation was easily understood: since I was already better than half prepared for it. Equally easy of comprehension was the fact, that this Marian was the sweetheart of my travelling companion —*had been*, I should rather say; for, from what followed, I could gather that she was no longer in the

neighbourhood; that some months before she had left it, or been carried away – spirited off in some mysterious manner, leaving no traces of the why or whither she had gone. Nearly all this I had conjectured before: since the young hunter had half revealed it to me by his manner, if not by words. Now, however, a point or two was added to my previous information relating to the fair Marian. *She was married*. Married – and to some odd sort of man, of whom the Indian appeared to speak slightingly. His name I could make out to be Steevens, or Steebins, or something of the sort – not very intelligible by the Indian's mode of pronouncing it – and, furthermore, that he had been a schoolmaster in Swampville.

During the progress of the dialogue, I had my eye fixed on the young hunter. I could perceive that the announcement of the marriage was quite new to him; and its effect was as that of a sudden blow. Of course, equally unknown to him had been the name of the husband; though from the exclamatory phrase that followed, he had no doubt had his conjectures.

"O God!" he exclaimed, "I thort so – the very man to a' done it. Lord ha' mercy on her!" All this was uttered with a voice hoarse with emotion. "Tell me!" continued he, "whar are they gone? Ye say ye know!"

The shrill screech of a tree-cricket, breaking forth at that moment, hindered me from hearing the reply. The more emphatic words only reached me, and these appeared to be "Utah" and "Great Salt Lake." They were enough to fix the whereabouts of Marian Holt and her husband.

"One question more!" said the rejected lover hesitatingly, as if afraid to ask it. "Can ye tell me – whether – she went *willingly*, or whether – thar wan't some force used? – by her father, or some un else? Can ye tell me that, girl?"

I listened eagerly for the response. Its importance can be easily understood by one who has *sued* in vain – one who has *wooed* without *winning*. The silence of the cicada favoured me; but a long interval passed, and there came not a word from the lips of the Indian.

"Answer me, Su-wa-nee!" repeated the young man in a more appealing tone. "Tell me that, and I promise – "

"Will the White Eagle promise to forget his lost love? Will he promise – "

"No, Su-wa-nee; I cannot promise that: I can *niver* forget her."

"The heart can *hate* without forgetting."

"Hate *her*? hate Marian? No! no!"

"Not if she be false?"

"How do I know that she war false? You haven't told me whether she went willin'ly or agin her consent."

"The White Eagle shall know then. His gentle doe went willingly to the covert of the wolf —*willingly*, I repeat. Su-wa-nee can give proof of her words."

This was the most terrible stroke of all. I could see the hunter shrink in his saddle, a death-like pallor over-spreading his cheeks, while his eyes presented the glassy aspect of despair.

"Now!" continued the Indian, as if taking advantage of the

blow she had struck, “will the White Eagle promise to sigh no more after his false mistress? Will he promise to love *one* that can be true?”

There was an earnestness in the tone in which these interrogatories were uttered – an appealing earnestness – evidently prompted by a burning headlong passion. It was now the turn of her who uttered them, to wait with anxiety for a response. It came at length – perhaps to the laceration of that proud heart: for it was a negative to its dearest desire.

“No, no!” exclaimed the hunter confusedly. “Impossible eyther to hate or forget her. She may a been false, an’ no doubt are so; but it’s too late for me: *I can niver love agin*.”

A half-suppressed scream followed this declaration, succeeded by some words that appeared to be uttered in a tone of menace or reproach. But the words were in the Chicasaw tongue, and I could not comprehend their import.

Almost at the same instant, I saw the young hunter hurriedly draw back his horse – as if to get out of the way. I fancied that the crisis had arrived, when my presence might be required. Under this belief, I touched my steed with the spur, and trotted out into the open ground. To my astonishment, I perceived that the hunter was alone. Su-wa-nee had disappeared from the glade!

# Chapter Fifteen
# Making a Clean Breast of it

"Where is she? – gone?" I mechanically asked, in a tone that must have betrayed my surprise.

"Yes – gone! gone! an' wi' a Mormon!"

"A Mormon?"

"Ay, stranger, a Mormon – a man wi' twenty wives! God forgi' her! I'd rather heerd o' her death!"

"Was there a man with her? I saw no one."

"O stranger, excuse my talk – you're thinkin' o' that ere Injun girl. 'Taint her I'm speakin' about."

"Who then?"

The young hunter hesitated: he was not aware that I was already in possession of his secret; but he knew that I had been witness of his emotions, and to declare the name would be to reveal the most sacred thought of his heart. Only for a moment did he appear to reflect; and then, as if relieved from his embarrassment, by some sudden determination, he replied:

"Stranger! I don't see why I shedn't tell ye all about this bisness. I don know the reezun, but you've made me feel a kind o' confidence in you. I know it's a silly sort o' thing to fall in love wi' a handsum girl; but if ye'd only seen *her*!"

"I have no doubt, from what you say, she was a beautiful

creature," – this was scarcely my thought at the moment – "and as for falling in love with a pretty girl, none of us are exempt from that little weakness. The proud Roman conqueror yielded to the seductions of the brown-skinned Egyptian queen; and even Hercules himself was conquered by a woman's charms. There is no particular silliness in that. It is but the common destiny of man."

"Well, stranger, it's been myen; an' I've hed reezun to be sorry for it. But it's no use tryin' to shet up the stable arter the hoss's been stole out o't. She are gone now; an' that's the end o' it. I reckon I'll niver set eyes on her agin."

The sigh that accompanied this last observation, with the melancholy tone in which it was uttered, told me that I was talking to a man who had truly loved.

"No doubt," thought I, "some strapping backwoods wench has been the object of his passion," – for what other idea could I have about the child of a coarse and illiterate squatter? "Love is as blind as a bat; and this red-haired hoyden has appeared a perfect Venus in the eyes of the handsome fellow – as not unfrequently happens. A Venus with evidently a slight admixture of the prudential Juno in her composition. The young backwoodsman is poor; the schoolmaster perhaps a little better off; in all probability not much, but enough to decide the preference of the shrewd Marian."

Such were my reflections at the moment, partly suggested by my own experience.

"But you have not yet told me who this sweetheart was? You say it is not the Indian damsel you've just parted with?"

"No, stranger, nothin' o' the kind: though there are some Injun in *her* too. 'Twar o' her the girl spoke when ye heerd her talk o' a half-blood. She aint just that – she's more white than Injun; her mother only war a half-blood – o' the Chicasaw nation, that used to belong in these parts."

"Her name?"

"It *war* Marian Holt. It are now Stebbins, I s'pose! since I've jest heerd she's married to a fellow o' that name."

"She has certainly not improved her name."

"She are the daughter o' Holt the squatter – the same whar you say you're a-goin'. Thar's another, as I told ye; but she's a younger un. Her name's Lilian."

"A pretty name. The older sister was very beautiful you say?"

"I niver set eyes on the like o' her."

"Does the younger one resemble her?"

"Ain't a bit like her – different as a squ'll from a coon."

"She's more beautiful, then?"

"Well, that depends upon people's ways o' thinkin'. Most people as know 'em liked Lilian the best, an' thort her the handsumest o' the two. That wan't my notion. Besides, Lilly's only a young crittur – not out o' her teens yit."

"But if she be also pretty, why not try to fall in love with her? Down in Mexico, where I've been lately, they have a shrewd saying: *Un clavo saca otro clavo*, meaning that 'one nail drives

out another' – as much as to say, that one love cures another."

"Ah, stranger! that may be all be very well in Mexico, whar I've heerd they ain't partickler about thar way o' lovin': but we've a sayin' here jest the contrairy o' that: 'two bars can't get into the same trap.'"

"Ha, ha, ha! Well your backwoods proverb is perhaps the truer one, as it is the more honest. But you have not yet told me the full particulars of your affair with Marian? You say she has gone away from the neighbourhood?"

"You shall hear it all, stranger. I reckon thar can be no harm in tellin' it to *you*; an' if you've a mind to listen, I'll make a clean breast o' the whole bisness."

The hunter proceeded with his revelation – to him, a painful one – and, although I had already divined most of the particulars, I interrupted him only with an occasional interrogative. The story was as I had anticipated. He had been in love with Marian Holt; and was under the impression that she returned it. She had given him frequent meetings in the forest – in that very glade where we had encountered the Indian girl, and in which we were still lingering. Her father was not aware of these interviews. There had been some coolness between him and the young hunter; and the lovers were apprehensive that he might not approve of their conduct. This was the prologue of the hunter's story. The epilogue I give in his own words: "'Twar a mornin' – jest five months ago – she had promised to meet me here – an' I war seated on yonder log waitin' for her. Jest then some Injuns war comin'

through the gleed. That girl ye saw war one o' 'em. She had a nice bullet-pouch to sell, an' I bought it. The girl would insist on puttin' it on; an' while she war doin' so, I war fool enough to gie her a kiss. Some devil hed put it in my head. Jest at that minnit, who shed come right into the gleed but Marian herself! I meant nothin' by kissin' the Injun; but I s'pose Marian thort I did: she'd already talked to me 'bout this very girl; an' I believe war a leetle bit jealous o' her – for the Injun ain't to say ill-lookin'. I wanted to 'pologise to Marian; but she wouldn't listen to a word; an' went off in a way I niver seed her in before. 'Twar the last time I ever set eyes on her."

"Indeed."

"Ay, stranger, an' it's only this minnit, an' from that same Injun girl, that I've heard she's married, an' gone off to the Mormons. The Injuns had it from some o' her people, that seed Marian a crossin' the parairies."

"That Indian damsel – Su-wa-nee, I think you named her – what of her?"

"Ah! stranger, that's another o' the konsequences o' doin' what aint right. Since the day I gin her that kiss, she'd niver let me alone, but used to bother me every time I met her in the woods; an' would a come arter me to my own cabin, if it hadn't been for the dogs, that wud tar an Injun to pieces. She war afeerd o' them but not o' me, no matter how I thraitened her. I war so angry wi' her, for what had happened – though arter all, 'twar more my fault than hern – but I war so vexed wi' her about the ill-luck, that

I used to keep out o' her way as well as I could, an' didn't speak to her for a long time. She got riled 'bout that, an' thraitened revenge; an' one night, as I war comin' from Swampville, 'bout this time – only 'twar as dark as a pot o' pitch – I war jest ridin' out into this very gleed, when all o' a suddint my ole hoss gin a jump forrard, an I feeled somethin' prick me from behind. 'Twar the stab o' some sort o' a knife, that cut me a leetle above the hip, an' made me bleed like a buck. I know'd who did it; tho' not that night – for it war so dark among the bushes, I couldn't see a steim. But I kim back in the mornin', and seed tracks. They war the tracks o' a mocassin. I know'd 'em to be hern."

"Su-wa-nee's tracks?"

"Sartin. I know'd 'em well enough, as I'd often seed her tracks through the crik bottom."

"Did you take no steps to punish her?"

"Well – no – I didn't."

"How is that? I think it would have been prudent of you to have done something – if only to prevent a recurrence of the danger."

"Well, stranger! to tell truth, I war a leetle ashamed o' the whole bisness. Had it been a man, I'd a punished *him*; but they *do* say the girl's in love wi' me, arter her Injun way; an' I didn't like to be revengeful. Besides it war mostly my own fault: I had no bisness to a fooled wi' her."

"And you think she will not trouble you again?"

"I don know about that, arter what's happened the night. She's gone away thraitnin' agin. I did think she'd gin up the notion o'

revenge: for she know'd I'd found out that 'twar her that stabbed me. I told her so, the next time I seed her; an' she 'peared pleased 'bout my not havin' her ta'en up. She said it war generous of the White Eagle – that's the name her people gies me – for thar's a gang o' them still livin' down the crik. She gin me a sort of promise she wouldn't trouble me agin; but I warn't sure o' her. That's the reezun, stranger, I didn't want ye to go fur away."

"I think it would be prudent in you to keep well on your guard. This redskin appears to be rather an unreflecting damsel; and, from what you have told me, a dangerous one. She certainly has a strange way of showing her affection; but it must be confessed, you gave her some provocation; and as the poet says, 'Hell knows no fury like a woman scorned.'"

"That's true, stranger!"

"Her conduct, however, has been too violent to admit of justification. You appear to have been unfortunate in your sweethearts – with each in an opposite sense. One loves you too much, and the other apparently not enough! But how is it you did not see her again – Marian I mean!"

"Well, you understand, I wan't on the best of tarms wi' old Hick Holt, an' couldn't go to his clarin'. Besides after what had happened. I didn't like to go near Marian anyhow – leastway for a while. I thort it would blow over 's soon's she'd find out that E war only jokin' wi' the Injun."

"So one would have supposed."

"'Twar nigh two weeks afore I heerd anything o' her; then I

larned that she war gone away. Nobody could tell why or whar, for nobody knew, 'ceptin Hick Holt hisself; an' he ain't the sort o' man to tell saycrets. Lord o' mercy! I know *nowt* an' it's worse than I expected. I'd sooner heerd she war dead."

A deep-drawn sigh, from the very bottom of his soul, admonished me that the speaker had finished his painful recital.

I had no desire to prolong the conversation. I saw that, silence would be more agreeable to my companion; and, as if by a mutual and tacit impulse, we turned our horses' heads to the path, and proceeded onward across the glade.

As we were about entering the timber on the other side, my guide reined up his horse; and sat for a moment gazing upon a particular spot – as if something there had attracted his attention.

What? There was no visible object – at least, none that was remarkable – on the ground, or elsewhere!

Another sigh, with the speech that followed, explained the singularity of his behaviour, "Thar!" said he, pointing to the entrance of the forest-path – "thar's the place whar I last looked on Marian!"

# Chapter Sixteen
# A Predicament in Prospect

For half a mile beyond the glade, the trace continued wide enough to admit of our riding abreast; but, notwithstanding this advantage, no word passed between us. My guide had relapsed into his attitude of melancholy – deepened, no doubt, by the intelligence he had just received – and sat loosely in his saddle, his head drooping forward over his breast. Bitter thoughts within rendered him unconscious of what was passing without; and I felt that any effort I might make to soften the acerbity of his reflections would be idle.

There are moments when words of consolation may be spoken in vain – when, instead of soothing a sorrow, they add poison to its sting. I made no attempt, therefore, to rouse my companion from his reverie; but rode on by his side, silent as he. Indeed, there was sufficient unpleasantness in my own reflections to give me occupation. Though troubled by no heart-canker of the past, I had a future before me that was neither brilliant nor attractive. The foreknowledge I had now gained of squatter Holt, had imbued me with a keen presentiment, that I was treading upon the edge of a not very distant dilemma. Once, or twice, was I on the point of communicating my business to my travelling companion; and why not? With the openness of an honest heart,

had he confided to me the most important, as well as the most painful, secret of his life. Why should I withhold my confidence from him on a subject of comparatively little importance? My reason for not making a confidant of him sooner has been already given. It no longer existed. So far from finding in him an ally of my yet hypothetical enemy, in all likelihood I should have him on my die. At all events, I felt certain that I might count upon his advice; and, with his knowledge of the *situation*, that might be worth having.

I was on the eve of declaring the object of my errand, and soliciting his counsel thereon, when I saw him suddenly rein in, and turn towards me. In the former movement, I imitated his example.

"The road forks here," said he. "The path on the left goes straight down to Holt's Clarin' – the other's the way to my bit o' a shanty."

"I shall have to thank you for the very kind service you have rendered me, and say 'Good-night.'"

"No – not yet. I ain't a-goin' to leave ye, till I've put you 'ithin sight o' Holt's cabin, tho' I can't go wi' ye to the house. As I told ye, he an' I ain't on the best o' tarms."

"I cannot think of your coming out of your way – especially at this late hour. I'm some little of a tracker myself; and, perhaps, I can make out the path."

"No, stranger! Thar's places whar the trace is a'most blind, and you mout get out o' it. Thar'll be no moon on it. It runs through a

thick timbered bottom, an' thar's an ugly bit o' swamp. As for the lateness, I'm not very reg'lar in my hours; an' thar's a sort o' road up the crik by which I can get home. 'Twan't to bid you good-night, that I stopped here."

"What, then?" thought I, endeavouring to conjecture his purpose, while he was pausing in his speech.

"Stranger!" continued he in an altered tone, "I hope you won't take offence if I ask you a question?"

"Not much fear of that, I fancy. Ask it freely."

"Are ye sure o' a bed at Holt's?"

"Well, upon my word, to say the truth, I am by no means sure of one. It don't signify, however. I have my old cloak and my saddle; and it wouldn't be the first time, by hundreds, I've slept in the open air."

"My reezuns for askin' you air, that if you ain't sure o' one, an' don't mind stretching' yourself on a bar-skin, thar's such a thing in my shanty entirely at your sarvice."

"It is very kind of you. Perhaps I may have occasion to avail myself of your offer. In truth, I am not very confident of meeting with a friendly reception at the hands of your neighbour Holt – much less being asked to partake of his hospitality."

"D'ye say so?"

"Indeed, yes. From what I have heard, I have reason to anticipate rather a cold welcome."

"I'deed? But," – My companion hesitated his his speech – as if meditating some observation which he felt a delicacy about

making. “I’m a’most ashamed,” continued he, at length, “to put another question, that war on the top o’ my tongue.”

“I shall take pleasure in answering any question you may think proper to ask me.”

“I shedn’t ask it, if it wa’n’t for what you’ve jest now said: for I heerd the same question put to you this night afore, an’ I heerd your answer to it. But I reckon ’twar the *way* in which it war asked that offended you; an’ on that account your answer war jest as it should a been.”

“To what question to you refer?”

“To your bisness out here wi’ Hick Holt. I don’t want to know it, out o’ any curiosity o’ my own – that’s sartin, stranger.”

“You are welcome to know all about it. Indeed, it was my intention to have told you before we parted – at the same time to ask you for some advice about the matter.”

Without further parley, I communicated the object of my visit to Mud Creek – concealing nothing that I deemed necessary for the elucidation of the subject. Without a word of interruption, the young hunter heard my story to the end. From the play of his features, as I revealed the more salient points, I could perceive that my chances of an amicable adjustment of my claim were far from being brilliant.

“Well – do you know,” said he, when I had finished speaking, “I had a suspeecion that that might be your bisness? I don know why I shed a thort so; but maybe ’twar because thar’s been some others come here to settle o’ late, an’ found squatters on thar

groun – jest the same as Holt's on yourn. That's why ye heerd me say, a while ago, that I shedn't like to buy over *his* head."

"And why not?" I awaited the answer to this question, not without a certain degree of nervous anxiety. I was beginning to comprehend the counsel of my Nashville friend on the ticklish point of *pre-emption*.

"Why, you see, stranger – as I told you, Hick Holt's a rough customer; an' I reckon he'll be an *ugly* one to deal wi', on a bisness o' that kind."

"Of course, being in possession, he may purchase the land? He has the right of pre-emption?"

"'Taint for that. *He* ain't a-goin' to *pre-empt*, nor buy neyther; an' for the best o' reezuns. He hain't got a red cent in the world, an' souldn't buy as much land as would make him a mellyun patch – not he."

"How does he get his living, then?"

"Oh, as for that, jest some'at like myself. Thar's gobs o' game in the woods – both bar an' deer: an' the clarin' grows him corn. Thar's squ'lls, an' 'possum, an' turkeys too; an' lots o' fish in the crik – if one gets tired o' the bar an' deer-meat, which I shed niver do."

"But how about clothing, and other necessaries that are not found in the woods?"

"As for our clothin' *it* ain't hard to find. We can get that in Swampville by swopping skins for it, or now an' then some deer-meat. O' anythin' else, thar ain't much needed 'bout here –

powder, an' lead, an' a leetle coffee, an' tobacco. Once in a while, if ye like it, a taste o' *old corn*."

"Corn! I thought the squatter raised that for himself?"

"So he do raise corn; but I see, stranger, you don't understand our odd names. Thar's two kinds o' corn in these parts – that as has been to the *still*, and that as hain't. It's the first o' these sorts that Hick Holt likes best."

"Oh! I perceive your meaning. He's fond of a little corn-whisky, I presume?"

"I reckon he are – that same squatter – fonder o't than milk. But surely," continued the hunter, changing the subject, as well as the tone of his speech – "surely, stranger, you ain't a-goin' on your bisness the night?"

"I've just begun to think, that it *is* rather an odd hour to enter upon an estate. The idea didn't occur to me before."

"Besides," added he, "thar's another reezun. If Hick Holt's what he used to be, he ain't likely to be very *nice* about this time o' night. I hain't seen much o' him lately; but, I reckon, he's as fond o' drink as ever he war; an' 'tain't often he goes to *his* bed 'ithout a skinful. Thar's ten chances agin one, o' your findin' him wi' brick in his hat."

"That would be awkward."

"Don't think o' goin' to-night," continued the young hunter in a persuasive tone. "Come along wi' me; an' you can ride down to Holt's in the mornin'. You'll then find him more reezonable to deal wi'. I can't offer you no great show o' entertainment; but

thar's a piece o' deer-meat in the house, an' I reckon I can raise a cup o' coffee, an' a pone or two o' bread. As for your shore, the ole corn-crib ain't quite empty yet."

"Thanks thanks!" said I, grasping the hunter's hand in the warmth of my gratitude. "I accept your invitation."

"This way, then, stranger!"

We struck into a path that led to the right; and, after riding about two miles further, arrived at the solitary home of the hunter – a log-cabin surrounded by a clearing. I soon found he was its sole occupant – as he was its owner – some half-dozen large dogs being the only living creatures that were present to bid us welcome. A rude horse-shed was at hand – a "loose box," it might be termed, as it was only intended to accommodate one – and this was placed at the disposal of my Arab. The "critter" of my host had, for that night, to take to the woods, and choose his stall among the trees – but to that sort of treatment he had been well inured. A close-chinked cabin for a lodging; a bear-skin for a bed; cold venison, corn-bread, and coffee for supper; with a pipe to follow: all these, garnished with the cheer of a hearty welcome, constitute an entertainment not to be despised by an old campaigner; and such was the treatment I met with, under the hospitable *clapboard* roof of the young backwoodsman – Frank Wingrove.

# Chapter Seventeen
# The Indian Summer

Look forth on the forest ere autumn wind scatters
Its frondage of scarlet, and purple, and gold:
That forest, through which the great “Father of Waters”
For thousands of years his broad current has rolled!
Gaze over that forest of opaline hue,
With a heaven above it of glorious blue,
And say is there scene, in this beautiful world,
Where Nature more gaily her flag has unfurled?
Or think’st thou, that e’en in the regions of bliss,
There’s a landscape more truly Elysian than this?

Behold the dark sumac in crimson arrayed,
Whose veins with the deadliest poison are rife!
And, side by her side, on the edge of the glade,
The sassafras laurel, restorer of life!
Behold the tall maples turned red in their hue,
And the muscadine vine, with its clusters of blue;
And the lotus, whose leaves have scarce time to unfold,
Ere they drop, to discover its berries of gold;
And the bay-tree, perfumed, never changing its sheen,
And for ever enrobed in its mantle of green!

And list to the music borne over the trees!

It falls on the ear, giving pleasure ecstatic —
The song of the birds and the hum of the bees
Commingling their tones with the ripples erratic.
Hark! hear you the red-crested cardinal's call
From the groves of annona? – from tulip-tree tall
The mock-bird responding? – below, in the glade,
The dove softly cooing in mellower shade —
While the oriole answers in accents of mirth?
Oh, where is there melody sweeter on earth?

In infamy now the bold slanderer slumbers,
Who falsely declared 'twas a land without song!
Had he listened, as I, to those musical numbers
That liven its woods through the summer-day long —
Had he slept in the shade of its blossoming trees,
Or inhaled their sweet balm ever loading the breeze,
He would scarcely have ventured on statement so wrong —
"Her plants without perfume, her birds without song."
Ah! closet-philosopher, sure, in that hour,
You had never beheld the magnolia's flower?

Surely here the Hesperian gardens were found —
For how could such land to the gods be unknown?
And where is there spot upon African ground
So like to a garden a goddess would own?
And the dragon so carelessly guarding the tree,
Which the hero, whose guide was a god of the sea,
Destroyed before plucking the apples of gold —
Was nought but that monster – the mammoth of old.

If earth ever owned spot so divinely caressed,
Sure that region of eld was the Land of the West!

The memory of that scene attunes my soul to song, awaking any muse from the silence in which she has long slumbered. But the voice of the coy maiden is less melodious than of yore: she shies *me* for my neglect: and despite the gentlest courting, refusing to breathe her divine spirit over a scene worthy of a sweeter strain. And this scene lay not upon the classic shores of the Hellespont – not in the famed valleys of Alp and Apennine – not by the romantic borders of the Rhine, but upon the banks of *Mud Creek* in the state of Tennessee! In truth, it was a lovely landscape, or rather a succession of landscapes, through which I rode, after leaving the cabin of my hospitable host. It was the season of "Indian summer" – that singular phenomenon of the occidental clime, when the sun, as if rueing his southern declension, appears to return along the line of the zodiac. He loves better the "Virgin" than "Aquarius;" and lingering to take a fond look on that fair land he has fertilised by his beams, dispels for a time his intruding antagonist, the hoary Boreas. But his last kiss kills: there is too much passion in his parting glance. The forest is fired by its fervour; and many of its fairest forms the rival trod of the north may never clasp in his cold embrace. In suttee-like devotion, they scorn to shun the flame; but, with outstretched arms inviting it; offer themselves as a holocaust to him who, through the long summer-day, has smiled upon their

trembling existence.

At this season of the year, too, the virgin forest is often the victim of another despoiler – the *hurricane*. Sweeping them with spiteful breath, this rude destroyer strikes down the trees like fragile reeds – prostrating at once the noblest and humblest forms. Not one is left standing on the soil: for the clearing of the hurricane is a complete work; and neither stalk, sapling, nor stump may be seen, where it has passed. Even the giants of the forest yield to its strength, as though smitten by the hand of a destroying angel! Uprooted, they lie along the earth side by side – the soil still clinging to the clavicles of their roots, and their leafy tops turned to the lee – in this prostrate alignment slowly to wither and decay! A forest, thus fallen, presents for a time a picture of melancholy aspect. It suggests the idea of some grand battle-field, where the serried hosts, by a terrible discharge of "grape and canister," have been struck down on the instant: not one being left to look to the bodies of the slain – neither to bury nor remove them. Like the battle-field, too, it becomes the haunt of wolves and other wild beasts; who find among the fallen trunks, if not food, a fastness securing them from the pursuit both of hound and hunter. Here in hollow log the black she-bear gives birth to her loutish cubs, training them to climb over the decaying trunks; here the lynx and red couguar choose their cunning convert; here the racoon rambles over his beaten track; the sly opossum crawls warily along the log, or goes to sleep among the tangle of dry rhizomes; while the gaunt brown wolf

may be often heard howling amidst the ruin, or in hoarse bark baying the midnight moon.

In a few years, however, this sombre scene assumes a more cheerful aspect. An under-growth springs up, that soon conceals the skeletons of the dead trees: plants and shrubs appear – often of different genera and species from those that hitherto usurped the soil – and the ruin is no longer apparent. The mournful picture gives place to one of luxuriant sweetness: the more brilliant sheen of the young trees and shrubs, now covering the ground, and contrasting agreeably with the sombre hues of the surrounding forest. No longer reigns that melancholy silence that, for a while, held dominion over the scene. If, at intervals, be heard the wild scream of the couguar, or the distant howling of wolves, these scarcely interrupt the music falling endlessly upon the ear – the red cardinals, the orioles, the warbling *fringillidae*, and the polyglot thrushes – who meet here, as if by agreement, to make this lovely sylvan spot the scene of their forest concerts.

Shortly after leaving the cabin of this young backwoodsman, my path, hitherto passing under the gloomy shadows of the forest, debouched upon just such a scene. I had been warned of its proximity. My host, at parting, had given me directions as to how I should find my way across the *herrikin*– through which ran the trace that conducted to the clearing of the squatter, some two miles further down the creek. I was prepared to behold a tract of timber laid prostrate by the storm – the trees all lying in one direction, and exhibiting the usual scathed and dreary aspect.

Instead of this, on emerging from the dark forest, I was agreeably surprised by a glorious landscape that burst upon my view.

It was, as already stated, that season of the year when the American woods array themselves in their most attractive robes – when the very leaves appear as if they were flowers, so varied and brilliant are their hues – when the foliage of the young beeches becomes a pale yellow, and glimmers translucent against the sun – when the maples are dying off of a deep red, and the sumac and sassafras turning respectively crimson and scarlet – when the large drupes of the Osage orange, the purple clusters of the fox-grape, and the golden berries of the persimmon or Virginian lotus, hang temptingly from the tree: just at that season when the benignant earth has perfected, and is about to yield up, her annual bounty; and all nature is gratefully rejoicing at the gift. No wonder I was agreeably impressed by the gorgeous landscape – no wonder I reigned up, and permitted my eyes to dwell upon it; while my heart responded to the glad chorus, that, from bird and bee, was rising up to heaven around me! I, too felt joyous under the reflection that, amid such lovely scenes, I had chosen my future home.

# Chapter Eighteen
# A Backwoods Venus

After indulging for some time in a sort of dreamy contemplation I once more gave the bridle to my horse, and rode onward. I was prepared for a tortuous path: my host had forewarned me of this. The *herrikin*, he said, was only three hundred yards in breadth; but I should have to ride nearly twice that distance in crossing it. His statement proved literally true. The old trace, passing down the creek bottom, had run at right angles to the direction of the storm; and, of course, the trees had fallen perpendicularly across the path – where they still lay, thick as hurdles set for a donkey-race. Some of them could be stepped over by a horse, and a few might be "jumped," but there were others that rose breast high; and a flying-leap over a five-barred gate would have been an easy exploit, compared with clearing one of these monstrous barriers. I might add, also, from experience, that leaping a log is a feat of considerable danger. There is no room for "topping;" and should the iron hoof strike, there is nothing that will yield. On the other side, the rider has the pleasant prospect of a broken neck – either for himself or his horse. Not being in any particular hurry, I took the matter quietly; and wound my way through a labyrinth worthy of being the maze of Fair Rosamond.

I could not help remarking the singular effect which the *herrikin* had produced. To the right and left, as far as my view could range, extended an opening, like some vast avenue that had been cleared for the passage of giants, and by giants made! On each side appeared the unbroken forest – the trunks standing like columns, with shadowy aisles between: their outward or edge-row trending in a straight line, as if so planted. These showed not a sign that the fierce tornado had passed so near them; though others, whose limbs almost interlocked with theirs, had been mowed down without mercy by the ruthless storm.

I had arrived within fifty yards of the opposite side, and the dark forest was again before my face; but even at that short distance, the eye vainly endeavoured to pierce its sombre depths. I was congratulating myself, that I had passed the numerous logs that lay across the path, when yet one more appeared between me and the standing trees. It had been one of the tallest victims of the tornado; and now lay transversely to the line of the track, which cut it about midway. On nearing this obstacle, I saw that the trace forked into two – one going around the tops of the decaying branches, while the other took the direction of the roots; which, with the soil still adhering to them, formed a rounded buttress-like wall of full ten feet in diameter. The trunk itself was not over five – that being about the thickness of the tree. It was a matter of choice which of the two paths should be followed: since both appeared to come together again on the opposite side of the tree; but I had made up my mind to take neither. One of my

motives, in seeking this forest-home, had been a desire to indulge in the exciting exercise of the chase; and the sooner I should bring my horse into practice, the sooner I might take the field with a prospect of success. Log-leaping was new to my Arab; and he might stand in need of a little training to it. The log before me had open ground on both sides; and afforded a very good opportunity for giving him his first lesson. Thus prompted by Saint Hubert, I was about spurring forward to the run; when a hoof-stroke falling upon my ear, summoned me to desist from my intention.

The sound proceeded from the forest before my face; and, peering into its darkness, I could perceive that some one, also on horseback, was coming along the path. This caused me to change my design, or rather to pause until the person should pass. Had I continued in my determination to leap the log, I should, in all likelihood, have dashed my horse at full gallop against that of the approaching traveller; since our courses lay directly head to head.

While waiting till he should ride out of the way, I became aware that I had committed an error – only in regard to the *sex* of the person who was approaching. It was not a *he*! On the contrary, something so very different that, as soon as I had succeeded in shading the sun-glare out of my eyes; and obtained a fair view of the equestrian traveller, my indifference was at an end: I beheld one of the loveliest apparitions ever made manifest in female form, or I need scarcely add, in any other. It was a young girl – certainly not over sixteen years of age – but with a contour close verging upon womanhood. Her beauty was of

that character which cannot be set forth by a detailed description in words. In true loveliness there is a harmony of the features that will not suffer them to be considered apart; nor does the eye take note of any one, to regard it as unique or characteristic. It is satisfied with the *coup d'oeil* of the whole – if I may be permitted the expression. Real beauty needs not to be considered; it is acknowledged at a glance: eye and heart, impressed with it at the same instant, search not to study its details.

The impression made upon me by the first sight of this young girl, was that of something soft and strikingly beautiful, of a glorious golden hue – the reflection of bright amber-coloured hair on a blonde skin, tinged with a hue of vermilion – something that imparted a sort of luminous radiance divinely feminine. Even under the shadow of the trees, this luminous radiance was apparent – as if the face had a *halo* around it! The reader may smile at such exalted ideas, and deem them the offspring of a romantic fancy; but had he looked, as I, into the liquid depths of those large eyes, with their blue irides and darker pupils; had he gazed upon that cheek tinted as with cochineal – those lips shaming the hue of the rose – that throat of ivory white – those golden tresses translucent in the sunlight – he would have felt as I, that something *shone* before his eyes – a face such as the Athenian fancy has elaborated into an almost living reality, in the goddess Cytherea. In short, it was the Venus of my fancy – the very ideal I had imbibed from gazing upon many a picture of the Grecian goddess. The prognostication of my friend had

proved emphatically false. If it was not *Venus* I saw before me, it appeared her *counterpart* in human form!

And this fair creature was costumed in the simplest manner – almost coarsely clad. A sleeved dress of homespun with a yellowish stripe, loosely worn, and open at the breast. A cotton "sun-bonnet" was the only covering for her head – her bright amber-coloured hair the only shawl upon her shoulders, over which it fell in ample luxuriance. A string of pearls around her neck – false ones I could see – was the sole effort that vanity seemed to have made: for there was no other article of adornment. Even shoes and stockings were wanting; but the most costly *chaussure* could not have added to the elegance of those *mignon* feet, that, daintily protruding below the skirt of her dress, rested along the flank of the horse.

More commonplace even than her homespun frock was the steed that carried her – a sorry-looking animal, that resembled the skeleton of a horse with the skin left on! There was no saddle – scarce the semblance of one. A piece of bear-skin, strapped over the back with a rough thong, did service for a saddle; and the little feet hung loosely down without step or stirrup. The girl kept her seat, partly by balancing, but as much by holding on to the high bony withers of the horse, that rose above his shoulders like the hump of a dromedary. The scant mane, wound around her tiny fingers scarcely covered them; while with the other hand she clasped the black reins of an old dilapidated bridle. The want of saddle and stirrup did not hinder her from poising herself

gracefully upon the piece of bear-skin; but hers was a figure that, could not be ungraceful in any attitude; and, as the old horse hobbled along, the rude movement all the more palpably displayed the magnificent moulding of her body and limbs.

The contrast between horse and rider – the old *critter* and the young *creature*– was ridiculously striking: the former appearing a burlesque on the most beautiful of quadrupeds, while the latter was the very impersonation of the loveliest of biped forms.

It is scarcely probable that the Cyprian goddess could ever have been brought into such a ludicrous juxtaposition – a shame upon Mercury if she was! In classic lore we find mention of no such sorry steed; and, for his counterpart in story, we must seek in more modern times – fixing upon the famed charger of Calatrava's knight. But here the analogy must end. The charms of the dark-haired Dulcinea can be brought into no comparison with those of the golden-haired wood-nymph of the Obion Bottom.

# Chapter Nineteen
# A Series of Contre-Temps

At sight of this charming equestrian, all thoughts of leaping the log were driven out of my mind; and I rode quietly forward, with the intention of going round it. It might be that I timed the pace of my horse —*mechanically*, no doubt – but however that may have been, I arrived at the prostrate tree, just as the young girl reached it from the opposite side. We were thus brought face to face, the log-barrier between us. I would have spoken; but, for the life of me, I could not think of something graceful to say; and to have used the hackneyed phraseology of "Fine morning, miss!" would, in those beautiful blue eyes that glistened under the shadow of the sun-bonnet, have rendered me as commonplace as the remark. I felt certain it would; and therefore said nothing.

Some acknowledgement, however, was necessary; and, lifting the forage-cap from my forehead, I bowed slightly – as such a salutation required – but with all the *verve* that politeness would permit. My salutation was acknowledged by a nod, and, as I fancied, a smile. Either was grace enough for me to expect; but, whether the smile was the offspring of a feeling in my favour, or at my expense, I was unable at the moment to determine. I should have an opportunity of repeating the bow, as we met again in going round the tree. Then I should certainly speak to, her; and,

as I turned my horse's head to the path, I set about thinking of something to say.

I had taken the path leading to the right – that which passed round the root of the tree. Of the two ways this appeared to be the shorter and the more used. What was my chagrin, when, in glancing over my arm, I perceived that I had made a most grievous mistake: the girl was going in the opposite direction! Yes – she had chosen to ride round the branching tops of the dead-wood – by all the gods, a much wider circuit! Was it accident, or design? It had the appearance of the latter. I fancied so, and fell many degrees in my own estimation. Her choosing what was evidently the "round-about" direction, argued unwillingness that we should meet again: since the *mazy* movement we were now performing precluded all chance of a second encounter, except with the great log still between us. Even then we should be no longer *vis-à-vis* as before, but *dos-à-dos*, almost on the instant of our approaching! To insure even this poor privilege, I rode rapidly round the great buttress of roots, that for a moment concealed the fair equestrian from my sight. I did this with the intention of getting forward in time. So rapidly did I pass, and so absorbed was I in the idea of another sweet salutation, that I saw not the fearful creature that lay basking upon the log – on the sunny side of the upheaved mass of earth.

Once on the other side, I discovered that I had made a third mistake – equally as provoking as the second – I had arrived *too soon*! Golden-hair was away up among the tangle of the tree-tops.

I could see her bright face gleaming through the branches – now and then hidden by the broad leaves of the bignonias that laced them together. To make me still more miserable, I fancied that she was moving with a *studied slowness*! I had already reached that point, where the path parted from the log. I dared not pause: there was no excuse for it. Not the shadow of one could I think of; and, with a lingering towards that glittering attraction, I reluctantly headed my horse to the forest. A last glance over my shoulder disclosed no improvement in my situation: she was still behind the trellised leaf-work of the bignonias, where she had stayed perhaps to pluck a flower.

"Happier far if I had never seen her!" was the reflection that occurred to me, as I entered the gloomy shadow of the trees – less gloomy than my own thoughts.

With one circumstance I now reproached myself: why had I been so shy with this forest damsel? The very way to secure her indifference. Why had I not *spoken* to her, if only in commonplace? Even "Good-day" would have promised me a response; and the result could not have been more unfavourable. Why the deuce had I not bidden her "Good-day"? I should have heard her voice – no doubt an additional charm – for I never yet saw a beautiful woman with a harsh voice; and I fear the inverse proposition is equally true. Why passed I without speaking? No doubt, she deems me a *yokel*! Perhaps it was my very shyness she was smiling at? S'death! what a simpleton – Ho! what do I hear? A woman's voice – a cry? – of terror? There again! – a scream!

the words, “Help, oh! help!” Is it she who is calling? Yes – yes it is she! By such strange sounds were my reflections interrupted. Turning my horse with a wrench, I urged him back along the path. I was yet scarcely a dozen lengths from the log – for the reflections above detailed were but the thoughts of a moment. Half-a-dozen bounds of my steed brought me back to the edge of a standing timber – where I pulled up, to ascertain the purport of this singular summons that had reached me.

I made no inquiry – no explanation was needed. The scene explained itself: for, at the moment of my emerging from the shadowy path, I had a tableau under my eyes, expressive as it was terrifying. The girl was upon the other side of the log, and near the point where she should have turned off from it; but, instead of advancing, I saw that she had come to a halt – her attitude expressing the wildest terror, as if some fearful object was before her! The jade, too, showed affright, by snorting loudly – his head raised high in the air, and his long ears pointing forward. The young girl was dragging mechanically on the bridle – as if to head him away from the spot. But this was impossible: another log, overlapping the first, formed an avenue, so narrow as to leave not the slightest chance of a horse being able to turn in it. Into this the animal had backed. There was no way of his getting from between the two trunks, but by going straight forward or backward. Forward he *dared not go*; and backward he was moving, as fast as the nature of the place would permit: now halting with his hips against one of the logs; then with a

quick rush backing against the other, that, but for the support thus obtained, would have brought him upon his haunches! The retrograde movement on the part of the horse was evidently the result of terror, at the sight of some object in front. It was aided also by the half-mechanical action of the rider: who, pulling continuously on the bridle, and repeating her cries for help, appeared equally to suffer from affright! My astonishment was of short duration. Effect and cause came under my eye almost at the same instant. The latter I saw upon the log in hideous form – the form of a *couguar*!

Slowly advancing along the dead-wood – not by bounds or paces, but with the stealthy tread of a cat – his long red body stretched out to its full extent – the beast more resembled a gigantic caterpillar than a quadruped. I could scarcely detect the movement of his limbs, so closely did the monster crawl; but his great tail, tapering three feet behind him, was seen vibrating from side to side, or at intervals moving with quick jerks – expressive of the enjoyment he was receiving in the contemplation of his prey – for such he deemed the helpless maiden before him.

I saw not the couguar's face – hideous sight at such a moment – nor yet his eyes. Both were turned from me, and fixed steadfastly upon his intended victim. The fierce beast did not perceive my approach – perhaps a fortunate circumstance. Once or twice I saw him pause, as if crouching for a spring. Luckily, the old horse, making a fresh retrogression, caused the couguar again to advance along the log, in the same creeping attitude as before.

With a glance, I had comprehended the situation: indeed, at the first glance I understood it perfectly. My delay in acting only arose from the necessity of preparing for action; and that did not take long.

It was habitual with me to carry my rifle over my shoulder, or rested across the pommel of my saddle: in either case, always in hand. It was but the work of a moment to get the piece ready. The pressure of the muzzle against my horse's ear, was a signal well understood; and at once rendered him as immobile as if made of bronze. Many years of practice – during which I had often aimed at higher game – had steeled my nerves and straightened my sight. Both proved sufficiently true for the destruction of the couguar. Quick after the crack, I saw his red body roll back from the log; and, when the smoke thinned off, I could see the animal writhing upon the ground. Why the couguar had fallen to my side, I could not tell: for he was fairly on the ridge of the dead-wood when I fired. Perhaps, on receiving the shot, he had fancied that it came from the only enemy visible to him; and, by an instinct impelling him to escape, had tumbled off in the opposite direction. I perceived that he was not yet dead. He was still wriggling about among the branches; but it was clear that the piece of lead had taken the "spring" out of him. The bullet had passed through his spine, crashing the column in twain. After playing upon him with my revolving pistol, until I had emptied three or four of its chambers, I had the satisfaction of seeing him give his last spasmodic "kick."

What followed, I leave to the imagination of my reader. Suffice it to say, that the incident proved my friend. The ice of indifference was broken; and I was rewarded for my sleight-of-hand prowess by something more than smiles – by words of praise that rang melodiously in my ear – words of gratitude spoken with the free innocent naïvété of childhood – revealing, on the part of her who gave utterance to them, a truly grateful heart.

I rode back with my fair protégée across the track of fallen timber – I could have gone with her to the end of the world! The tortuous path hindered me from holding much converse with her: only, now and then, was there opportunity for a word. I remember little of what was said – on my side, no doubt, much that was commonplace; but even *her* observations I can recall but confusedly. The power of love was upon me, alike absorbing both soul and sense – engrossing every thought in the contemplation of the divine creature by my side I cared not to talk – enough for me to look and listen.

I did not think of questioning her as to whence she had come. Even her name was neither asked nor ascertained! Whither she was going was revealed only by the accident of conversation. She was on her way to visit some one who lived on the other side of the creek – some friend of her father. Would that I could have claimed to be her father's friend – his relative – his son!

We reached a ford: it was the crossing-place. The house, for which her visit was designed, stood not far off, on the other side;

and I must needs leave her. Emboldened by what had passed, I caught hold of that little hand. It was a rare liberty; but I was no longer master of myself. There was no resistance; but I could perceive that the tiny fingers trembled at my touch.

The old horse, with provoking impatience, plunged into the stream; and we were parted. I watched her while crossing the creek. The crystal drops sparkled like pearls upon her naked feet. Some of them, dashed higher by the hoofs of the horse, were sprinkled upon her cheek, and clung to the carmined skin as if kissing it! I envied those diamond drops!

Lingering upon the bank, I gazed upon her receding form – with my eyes, followed it through the forest aisle; and then, saw it only at intervals – moving like some bright meteor among the trees – until by a sudden turning in the path, it was taken from my sight.

# Chapter Twenty
# Sweet and Bitter

Slowly and reluctantly, I turned back from the stream, and once more entered amid the wreck of the hurricane. Along the sunny path, the flowers appeared to sparkle with a fresher brilliancy – imbuing the air with sweet odours, wafted from many a perfumed chalice. The birds sang with clearer melody; and the hum of the honey-bee rang through the glades more harmoniously than ever. The "*coo-coo-oo*" of the doves blending with the love-call of the squirrel, betokened that both were inspired by the tenderest of passions. "Pensando de amor," as the Spanish phrase finely expresses it; for at that moment, the beautiful words of the southern poet were in my thoughts, and upon my lips:

> Aunque las fieras
> En sus guaridas
> Enternecidas
> Pensan de amor!

Even the fierce beasts in their forest lairs become gentle under the influence of this all-pervading passion!

I rode on slowly and in silence – my whole soul absorbed in the contemplation of that fair being, whose image seemed still before

my eyes – palpable as if present. My heart quivered under the influence of a gentle joy. The past appeared bright; the present, happiness itself; the future, full of hope. I had found the very "wilderness-home" of my longings; the fair spirit that should be my minister! No doubt rose before my mind to dim the brilliant prospect before me – no shadow hung over the horizon of my hopes. The prospect before me appeared bright and sunny as the sky above my head. Within and without the world was smiling – all nature seemed tinted with the hue of the rose! This delightful reverie lasted for a time – alas! too short a time – only while I was traversing the track, that, but the moment before, I had passed over in such pleasant companionship.

On arriving at the scene of my late adventure, a turn was given to my thoughts. It had been a scene of triumph, and deserved commemoration. The body of the panther lay across the path. His shining skin was a trophy not to be despised; and, dismounting on the spot, with my hunting-knife I secured it. I could point to it with pride – as the first spoil obtained in my new hunting-field; but I should prize it still more, as the memento of a far sweeter sentiment. In a few minutes, it was folded up, and strapped over the cantle of my saddle; and, with this odd addition to my equipage, I once more plunged into the forest-path.

For the next mile, the trace led through heavy bottom-timber, such as we had traversed, after leaving the settlement of Swampville. The black earth, of alluvial origin, was covered deeply with decayed vegetation; and the track of horses and cattle

had converted the path into mud. At intervals, it was intersected by embayments of wet morass – the projecting arms of a great swamp, that appeared to run parallel with the creek. Through these, my horse, unused to such footing, passed with difficulty – often floundering up to his flanks in the mud. Though it was but the hour of noon, it more resembled night, or the late gloaming of twilight – so dark were the shadows under this umbrageous wood. As if to strengthen the illusion, I could hear the cry of the bittern, and the screech of the owl, echoing through the aisles of the forest – sounds elsewhere suggestive of night and darkness. Now and then, light shone upon the path – the light that indicates an opening in the forest; but it was not that of a friendly clearing. Only the break caused by some dismal lagoon, amidst whose dank stagnant waters even the cypress cannot grow – the habitat of black water-snakes and mud-turtles – of cranes, herons, and *Qua-birds*. Hundreds of these I saw perched upon the rotting half-submerged trunks – upon the cypress "knees" that rose like brown obelisks around the edge of the water; or winged their slow flight through the murky gloom, and filling the air with their deafening screams. On both sides of the trace towered gigantic trees, flanked at their bases with huge projections, that appeared like the battlements of a fortress, these singular protuberances rose far above the height of my horse – radiating from the trunks on every side, and often causing the path to take a circuitous direction. In the deep gloom, the track would have been difficult to follow, but for an occasional blaze appearing upon the smooth

bark of the sycamores.

The scene was by no means suggestive of pleasant reflections – the less so, since I had ascertained, from my host of yesternight, that the greater portion of Section Number 9 was of just such a character; and that there was scarcely a spot upon it fit for a "homestead," except the one already occupied! "Such an 'encumbrance' on my estate," reflected I, "is worse than the *heaviest mortgage*;" and I should have been willing at that moment to part with the timber at a very "low valuation." But I well knew the value of such a commodity. On the Thames or the Mersey, a mine of wealth – on Mud Creek, it would not have been taken as a gift! My spirits fell as I rode forward – partly influenced by the sombre scenes through which I was passing – partly by the natural reaction which ever follows the hour of sweet enjoyment – and partly, no doubt, from some unpleasant presentiments that were once more shaping themselves in my mind.

Up to this time, I had scarcely given thought to my errand, or its object. First the gay hues of the morning, and then the romantic incidents of the hour, had occupied my thoughts, and hindered me from dwelling on future plans or purposes. Now, however, that I was coming close to the clearing of the squatter, I began to feel, that I was also *approaching a crisis*.

# Chapter Twenty One
# A Rude Response

An opening of about two acres in extent, of irregular semi-circular shape, with the creek for its chord, and a worm-fence zig-zagging around its arc – scarcely a clearing: since trees bleached and barkless stand thickly over it; a log shanty, with clapboard roof, in the centre of the concavity, flanked on one side by a rude horse-shed, on the other, by a corn-crib of split rails; all three – shed, shanty, and crib – like the tower of Pisa, threatening to tumble down; near the shanty, a wood-pile, with an old axe lying upon the chop-block; by the shed and crib, a litter of white "shucks" and "cobs;" in front, among the stumps and girdled trees, a thin straggle of withered corn-stalks, shorn of their leafy tops – some standing, some trampled down: such was the picture before my eyes, as, with my horse, breast up against the fence, I looked into the clearing of Squatter Holt!

"It must be the place – my place? there is no other clearing within a mile? My directions have been given with exact minuteness of detail. I have followed them to the letter: I cannot be mistaken: I have reached Holt's Clearing at last."

I had ridden quite up to the fence, but could see no gate. A set of bars, however, between two roughly mortised uprights, indicated an entrance to the enclosure. The top bar was out. Not

feeling inclined to dismount, I sprang my horse *over* the others; and then trotted forward in front of the shanty. The door stood wide open. I had hopes that the sound of my horse's hoof-stroke would have brought some one into it; but no one came! Was there nobody within? I waited for a minute or two, listening for some sign of life in the interior of the cabin. No voice reached me – no sound of any one stirring! Perhaps the cabin was empty! Not untenanted: since I could perceive the signs of occupation, in some articles of rude furniture visible inside the doorway. Perhaps the inmates had gone out for a moment, and might be in the woods, near at hand?

I looked around the clearing, and over the fence into the forest beyond. No one to be seen no one to be heard! Without the cabin, as within, reigned a profound silence. Not a living thing in sight – save the black vultures – a score of which, perched on the dead-woods overhead, and fetid as their food, were infecting the air with their carrion odour. Although within easy range of my rifle, the foul birds took no heed of my movements; but sat still, indolently extending their broad wings to the sun – now and then one coming, one going, in slow silent flight – their very shadows seeming to flit lazily among the withered maize-plants that covered the ground.

I had no desire to appear rude. I already regretted having leaped my horse over the bars. Even that might be regarded as rather a brusque method of approach to a private dwelling; but I was in hopes it would not be noticed: since there appeared to be

no one who had witnessed it. I coughed and made other noises, with like unfruitful result. My demonstrations were either not heard, or if heard, unheeded.

"Certainly," thought I, "if there be any one in the house, they must not only hear, but *see me*:" for although there was no window, I could perceive that the logs were but poorly "chinked;" and from within the house, the whole clearing must have been in sight. Nay, more, the interior itself was visible from without – at least the greater part of it – and, while making this observation, I fancied I could trace the outlines of a human figure through the interstices of the logs! I became convinced it was a human figure; and furthermore, the figure of a man. It was odd he had not heard me! Was he asleep? No: that could not be – from the attitude in which he was. He appeared to be seated in a chair, but with his body erect, and his head held aloft. In such position, he could scarcely be asleep? After making this reflection, I coughed again – louder than before; but to no better purpose! I thought the figure moved. I was sure it moved; but as if with no intention of stirring from the seat! "Cool indifference!" thought I – "what can the fellow mean?" I grew impatient; and, feeling a little provoked by the inexplicable somnolency of the owner of the cabin, I determined to try whether my voice might not rouse him. "Ho! house, there!" I shouted, though not loudly; "ho! – holloa! – any one within?" Again the figure moved – but still stirred not from the seat! I repeated both my summons and query – this time in still a louder and more commanding tone; and this time

I obtained a response.

"Who the hell *air* you?" came a voice through the interstices of the logs – a voice that more resembled the growl of a bear, than the articulation of a human throat. "Who the hell air you?" repeated the voice, while at the same time, I could perceive the figure rising from the chair.

I made no answer to the rough query. I saw that my last summons had been sufficient. I could hear the hewn floor-planks cracking under a heavy boot; and knew from this, that my questioner was passing towards the door. In another instant he stood in the doorway – his body filling it from side to side – from head to stoop. A fearful-looking man was before me. A man of gigantic stature, with a beard reaching to the second button of his coat; and above it a face, not to be looked upon without a sensation of terror: a countenance expressive of determined courage, but, at the same time, of ferocity, untempered by any trace of a softer emotion. A shaggy sand-coloured beard, slightly grizzled; eyebrows like a *chevaux-de-frise* of hogs' bristles; eyes of a greenish-grey, with a broad livid scar across the left cheek, were component parts in producing this expression; while a red cotton kerchief, wound, turban-like, around the head, and, pulled low down in front, rendered it more palpable and pronounced. A loose coat of thick green blanket, somewhat faded and worn, added to the colossal appearance of the man; while a red-flannel shirt served him also for a vest. His large limbs were inserted in pantaloons of blue Kentucky *jeans* cloth; but these were scarcely

visible, hidden by the skirt of the ample blanket-coat that draped down below the tops of a pair of rough horse-skin boots reaching above the knee, and into which the trousers had been tucked. The face of the man was a singular picture; the colossal stature rendered it more striking; the costume corresponded; and all were in keeping with the rude manner of my reception.

It was idle to ask the question. From the description given me by the young backwoodsman, I knew the man before me to be Hickman Holt the squatter.

# Chapter Twenty Two
# A Rough Reception

For fashion's sake, I was about to utter the usual formula, "Mr Holt, I presume?" but the opportunity was not allowed me. No sooner had the squatter appeared in his doorway, than he followed up his blasphemous interrogatory with a series of others, couched in language equally rude.

"What's all this muss about? Durn yur stinkin' imperence, who air ye? an' what air ye arter?"

"I wish to see Mr Holt," I replied, struggling hard to keep my temper.

"Ye wish to see Mister Holt? Thur's no *Mister* Holt 'bout hyur."

"No?"

"No! damnation, no! Didn't ye hear me!"

"Do I understand you to say, that Hickman Holt does not live here?"

"You understan' me to say no sich thing. Eft's Hick Holt ye mean, he diz live hyur."

"Hick Holt – yes that is the name."

"Wall what o't, ef't is?"

"I wish to see him."

"Lookee hyur, stranger!" and the words were accompanied by

a significant look; "ef yur the shariff, Hick Holt ain't at home – ye understand me? *he ain't at home*."

The last phrase was rendered more emphatic, by the speaker, as he uttered it, raising the flap of his blanket-coat, and exhibiting a huge bowie-knife stuck through the waistband of his trousers. I understood the hint perfectly.

"I am not the sheriff," I answered in an assuring tone. I was in hopes of gaining favour by the declaration: for I had already fancied that my bizarre reception might be owing to some error of this kind.

"I am *not* the sheriff," I repeated, impressively.

"Yur not the shariff? One o' his constables, then, I s'pose?"

"Neither one nor other," I replied, pocketing the affront.

"An' who air ye, anyhow – wi' yur dam glitterin' buttons, an' yur waist drawd in, like a skewered skunk?"

This was intolerable; but remembering the advice of my Nashville friend – with some additional counsel I had received over-night – I strove hard to keep down my rising choler.

"My name," said I —

"Durn yur name!" exclaimed the giant, interrupting me; "I don't care a dog-gone for yur name: tell me yur bizness – that's what I wanter know."

"I have already told you my business: I wish to see Mr Holt – Hick Holt, if you like."

"To *see* Hick Holt? Wal, ef that's all yur bizness, you've *seed* him; an' now ye kin go."

This was rather a literal interpretation of my demand; but, without permitting myself to be *nonplussed* by it, or paying any heed to the abrupt words of dismissal, I replied, half interrogatively: "You, then, are he? You are Hick Holt, I suppose?"

"Who said I ain't – durn your imperence? Now, then, what d'ye want wi' me?"

The filthy language, the insulting tone in which it was uttered, the bullying manner of the man – evidently relying upon his giant strength, and formidable aspect – were rapidly producing their effect upon me; but in a manner quite contrary to that anticipated by Master Holt. It was no doubt his design to awe me; but he little knew the man he had to deal with. Whether it might be called courage or not, I was just as reckless of life as he. I had exposed my person too often, both in single combat and on the battle-field, to be cowed by a bully – such as I fancied this fellow to be – and the spirit of resistance was fast rising within me. His dictatorial style was unendurable; and discarding all further prudential considerations, I resolved to submit to it no longer. I did not give way to idle recrimination. Perhaps, thought I, a firm tone may suit my purpose better; and, in my reply, I adopted it. Before I could answer his question, however, he had repeated it in a still more peevish and impatient manner – with an additional epithet of insult. "Wal, Mister Jaybird," said he, "be quick 'bout it! What d'ye want wi' *me*?"

"In the first place Mr Hickman Holt, I want civil treatment

from you; and secondly – ”

I was not permitted to finish my speech. I was interrupted by an exclamation – a horrid oath – that came fiercely hissing from the lips of the squatter.

“Damnation!” cried he; “you be damned! Civil treetmint i’deed! You’re a putty fellur to talk o’ civil treetmint, arter jumpin’ yur hoss over a man’s fence, an’ ridin’ slap-jam inter his door, ’ithout bein’ asked! Let me tell yer, Mister Gilt Buttons, I don’t ’low any man – white, black, or Injun – to enter my clarin’ ’ithout fust knowin’ his reezun. Ye hear that, d’ye?”

“*Your* clearing! Are you sure it is *yours*?”

The squatter turned red upon the instant. Rage may have been the passion that brought the colour to his cheeks; but I could perceive that my words had produced another emotion in his mind, which added to the hideousness of the cast at that moment given to his features.

“Not my clarin’!” he thundered, with the embellishment of another imprecation – “not my clarin’! Shew me the man, who says it’s not! – shew’m to me! *By* the Almighty Etarnal he won’t say’t twice.”

“Have you *purchased* it?”

“Neer a mind for that, mister; I’ve *made* it: that’s my style o’ purchase, an’, by God! it’ll stan’ good, I reck’n. Consarn yur skin! what hev you got to do wi’t anyhow?”

“This,” I replied, still struggling to keep calm, at the same time taking the title-deeds from my saddle-bags – “this only, Mr

Holt. That your house stands upon Section Number 9; that I have bought that section from the United States government; and must therefore demand of you, either to use your *pre-emption, right*, or deliver the land over to me. Here is the government grant – you may examine it, if you feel so inclined."

An angry oath was the response, or rather a volley of oaths.

"I thort that wur yur bisness," continued the swearer. "I thort so; but jest this time you've kim upon a fool's errand. Durn the government grant! durn your pre-emption right! an' durn yur title-papers too! I don't valley them more'n them thur corn-shucks – I don't. I've got my pre-emption dokyment inside hyur. I'll jest shew ye that, mister; an' see how ye'll like it."

The speaker turned back into his cabin, and for a moment I lost sight of him.

"Pre-emption document!" he said. Was it possible he had purchased the place, and was gone to fetch his title-deeds?

If so —

My reflection was cut short. In another moment he re-appeared in the doorway; not with any papers in his hand – but, instead, a long rifle, that with its butt resting on the door-stoop, stood almost as high as himself?

"Now, Mister Turn-me-out?" said he, speaking in a satirical triumphant tone, and raising the piece in front of him, "thur's my title – my pre-emption right's the right o' the rifle. *It's* clur enuf: ye'll acknowledge that, won't ye?"

"No," I replied in a firm voice.

"Ye won't? The hell, ye won't? Look hyur, stranger! I'm in airnest. Look in my eye, an' see if I ain't! I gi' ye warnin' then, that ef ye're not out o' this clarin' in six jumps o' a squ'll, you'll niver go out o' it a livin' man. You see that ere stump? Its shadder's jest a creepin' up to the house: the minnit that shadder touches the wall, I'll shoot you down, as sure's my name's Hick Holt. Mind, I've gin ye warnin'!"

"And I give you warning, Mr Holt, that I am prepared to defend myself; and if you miss – "

"Miss!" ejaculated he with a contemptuous toss of the head – "miss, ye fool! thur's no fear o' that."

"If you miss," continued I, without heeding the interruption, "I shall show you no mercy. If you are going to take the cowardly advantage of having the the first shot, I have my advantage too. In self-defence, I shall be justified in killing you; and if you fire at me, I shall certainly do so. Be warned! I never spare a coward."

"Coward!" exclaimed the colossus, with an imprecation that was horrible to hear. "An' how ef I don't miss?" continued he, apparently calming his rage, and speaking with a significant sneer – intended to awe me, by insinuating the certainty of his aim. "How ef I don't miss, Mister Popgun?"

"You may, for all that. Don't be too sure of hitting – I've been shot at before now."

"You'll niver be shot at *arter* now, 'ceptin' ye leave this clarin'. One crack from my gun'll be enuf for ye, I reck'n."

"I'll take my chance. If it should go against me, *you* won't gain

by it. Remember, my good man, it's not a duel we're fighting! You have chosen to attack me; and if I should fall in the affair, I've faith enough in the law to believe it will avenge me."

I fancied that my speech produced some effect upon the fellow; and, seeing that he remained silent, I followed up it by words of similar import: "If it be my fate to fall, I leave behind me friends who will inquire into my death. Trust me, they will do so! If I kill *you*, it will be but justifiable homicide, and will be so adjudged; while your killing me will be regarded in a different light: it will be pronounced *murder*!" I gave full emphasis to the last word.

On hearing it my antagonist showed signs of emotion. I fancied I saw him tremble, and turn slightly pale! With an unsteady voice he replied:

"Murder? No, no; I've gin ye warnin' to go. Ye've time enuf yet to save yerself. Git out o' the clarin', an' thur'll be no harm done ye!"

"I shall not go out of the clearing, until you've acknowledged my claim."

"Then you'll niver go out o' it alive – I swar by God! niver!"

"You are determined, then, to be my *murderer*?"

I again pronounced the word in the most emphatic tone. I saw that it affected him in some singular way; whether through a fear of consequences; or that there still lingered in his heart some spark of humanity; or, perhaps – but least possible of all he was beginning to be ashamed of his foul play. By which of of these

three motives, or by what other inspired, I could not guess; but he seemed to cower under the imputation.

"Murderer!" echoed he, after a moment of apparent reflection. "No, no; it's bad enuf to hev the blame o' that, 'ithout bein' guilty o't. I ain't agwine to *murder* ye; but I ain't agwine neyther to let ye go. I mout a did so a minnit agone, but ye've lost yur chance. Ye've called *me* a *coward*; an' by the Etarnal! no man 'll say that word o' Hick Holt, an' live to boast o't. No, mister! ye've got to die; an' ye may get yurself ready for't, 's soon's ye like. Coward indeed!"

"I repeat it – your act is cowardly."

"What act?"

"Your unprovoked attack upon me – especially since it gives you the first shot. What if I were to shoot you down now? With the pistol you see in my holster here, I could send six bullets through your body, before you could bring your rifle to your shoulder. What would you call that? Sheer cowardice, would it not be; and murder too?"

# Chapter Twenty Three
# A Duel without Seconds

While I was speaking, I saw a change pass over the countenance of my gigantic antagonist – as if some new resolve was forming in his mind, that affected the programme he had already traced out. Was it possible I had touched him on a point of honour? It was this purpose I desired to effect; and, though hopeless it might appear, I continued the only kind of appeal that, with such a spirit, seemed to promise any chance of success.

"You *dare* not play fair in this game?" I said, banteringly. "You *are* a coward; and would murder me. You want the first shot: you know you do?"

"It's a lie!" cried the colossus, raising himself to his full height, and assuming an air of chivalric grandeur I could not have deemed him capable of – "it's a lie! I don't wish to murder ye; an' I don't want the the first shot neyther."

"How?"

"I hain't so little confidence in my shootin' as to care for you an' yur jim-crack gun! Nor is Hick Holt in such consate wi' his life eyther, that he's afeerd to risk it. Tho' ye air a stuck-up critter, I won't gi' ye the opportunity to 'kuse me o' foul play. Thur's grit in ye, I reck'n; and seein' that's made me change my mind."

"What!" I exclaimed, taken by surprise at the speech, and

fancying it promised an end to our altercation – "you have changed your mind? you mean to act justly then?"

"I mean, it shall be a *fair stan'-up fight* atween us."

"Oh! a duel?"

"Duel, or whatever else ye may call it, mister."

"I agree to that. But how about seconds?"

"D'ye think two men can't fight fair 'ithout seconds? Ye see yander stump standin' nigh the bars?"

"Yes – I see it."

"Wal, mister, thur you'll take yur stand – ahine or afront o' it, whichsomever ye like best. Hyur's this other un, clost by the crib – thur'll be my place. Thur's twenty yurds atween 'em, I reck'n. Is that yur distance?"

"It will do as well as any other," I replied mechanically – still under the influence of surprise, not unmingled with a sentiment of admiration.

"Dismount, then! Take your pouch an' flask along wi' ye – ye see I've got myen? One shot at ye's all *I'll* want, I reck'n. But ef thur shed be a miss, look out for quick loadin'! an' mind, mister! thur's one o' us'll niver leave this clarin' alive."

"About the first shot? Who is to give the signal?"

"I've thort o' that a'ready. It'll be all right, promise ye."

"In what way can you arrange it?"

"This way. Thur's a hunk o' deer-meat in the house: I mean to fetch that out, and chuck it over thur, into the middle o' the clarin'. Ye see them buzzarts up thur on the dead-woods?" I

nodded in the affirmative. "Wal – it won't be long afore one or other o' them flops down to the meat; an' *the first o' 'em that touches ground, that'll be the signal*. That's fair enuf, I reck'n?"

"Perfectly fair," I replied, still speaking mechanically – for the very justness of the proposal rendered my astonishment continuous.

I was something more than astonished at the altered demeanour of the man. He was fast disarming me. His unexpected behaviour had subdued my ire; and, all consideration of consequences apart, I now felt a complete disinclination for the combat! Was it too late to stay our idle strife? Such was my reflection the moment after; and, with an effort conquering my pride, I gave words to the thought.

"Yur too late, mister! 'twon't do now," was the reply to my pacific speech.

"And why not?" I continued to urge; though to my chagrin, I began to perceive that it *was* an idle effort.

"Yuv riz my dander; an', by God! yuv got to fight for it!"

"But surely – "

"Stop yur palaver! By the tarnal airthquake, I'll 'gin to think *you* air a coward! I thort ye'd show, the white feather afore 'twur all over!"

"Enough!" cried I, stung by the taunt; "I am ready for you one way or the other. Go on."

The squatter once more entered his cabin, and soon came out again, bringing forth the piece of venison. "Now!" cried he, "to

yur stand! an' remember! neyther fires *till a bird lights on the grown*! Arter that, ye may go it like blazes!"

"Stay!" said I; "there is something yet to be done. You are acting honourably in this affair – which I acknowledge is more than I was led to expect. You deserve one chance for your life; and if I should fall it will be in danger. You would be regarded as a murderer: that must not be."

"What is't you mean?" hurriedly interrogated my antagonist, evidently not comprehending my words. Without answering to the interrogatory, I drew out my pocket-book; and, turning to a blank leaf of the memorandum, wrote upon it: "*I have fallen in fair fight.*" I appended the date; signed my name; and, tearing out the leaf, handed it to my adversary. He looked at it for a moment, as if puzzled to make out what was meant. He soon saw the intention, however, as I could tell by his grim smile.

"You're right thur!" said he, in a drawling tone, and after a pause. "I hedn't thunk o' that. I guess this dockyment 'll be nothin' the wuss o' my name too? What's sauce for the goose, air likewise sauce for the gander. Yur pencil, ef ye please? I ain't much o' a scholart; but I reck'n I kin write my name. Hyur goes!" Spreading out the paper on the top of a stump, he slowly scribbled his name below mine; and then, holding the leaf before my eyes, pointed to the signature – but without saying a word. This done, he replaced the document on the stump; and drawing his knife, stuck the blade through the paper, and left the weapon quivering in the wood! All these manoeuvres were gone through with as cool

composure, as if they were only the prelude to some ordinary purpose!

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.