

pleased that unpleasantness had come so quickly to an end.

That Fan would soon listen willingly to his suit he had no longer any fear, and he loved her all the more for the fidelity and tenderness that created her first difficulty. He was resolved to keep his word as to helping her in the search for her early friends, but comforted himself with the reflection that very little of Kevin, when found, would amply satisfy the cravings of her heart. Out of his pocket he would make the people comfortable for the rest of their days, and thus win her lasting gratitude after the tears of her disappointment had been shed.

As for Fan, she saw everything undone again that last night had seemed finished and put away. She was quick enough to perceive that Lord Wilderspin was favoring his nephew's suit, and it did not surprise her so much as it ought to have done, because she was so accustomed to receive everything good from his hand. She was unusually grave and silent, and her lover respected her mood. He divined clearly enough that the force of circumstances was telling upon her imagination, and in time would tell upon her heart. She did not love him yet; but he would rather wait for her love than see her willing to marry him for the sake of mere worldly advantage. She should have her own time and her own way. It was enough for him at present to watch tenderly the sorrowful awakening from her dream of Kevin, and to have the privilege of soothing away the pain, replacing it gradually with a reality of happiness.

In the changed expression of her eyes he read that the visionary Kevin was no longer discernible, and the coarse reality, as presented by him, now constantly filled them instead. She was remembering all the circumstantial evidence against the friend of her youth. Her letters had never been answered; in all her wanderings she had not met him searching for her. The seven years (which at Fanchea's age are a lifetime) had changed him so that he was contented without her on the mountain, and was patiently supporting his wife and children by the labor of his spade. The utmost good that he could require of her now was probably a little bounty, such as Captain Rupert could give, to make him and his family more comfortable. The loss of her dream pressed heavily on her heart, and changed her from a gleeful girl into a thoughtful woman. But Captain Rupert was right in judging that the way was opening that might lead her to become the Lady of Wilderspin.

They had ridden a long way, when the sky became dark, and it was evident a thunderstorm was following their steps. They saw it rolling towards them from the sea across the valley, and to turn would have been to meet it in the teeth. Captain Rupert remembered a farmhouse a mile in advance on the road, and they pressed on their horses to reach its shelter. In spite of fast riding, floods of rain and flashes of lightning overtook them; Fan's skirts were drenched, and the wind buffeted her little hat and tugged at her hair till it streamed in fluttering ringlets round her wet and rose-red face.

The haven was reached at last—a neat farmhouse with a gable overgrown with climbing flowers. Captain Rupert sprang from his horse and threw the reins upon a rail of the gate, then hurried up the walk and knocked at the door. It was the same door at which Kevin had knocked when on his weary tramp so many years ago; and one of Rachel Webb's handmaidens opened to him.

The distressed wayfarers were kindly invited in: Fan was lifted off her horse and hurried under shelter; and a fair, placid woman in grey garments and a white muslin cap met her in the hall with a welcome.

"Let me step into your kitchen," said Fan, smiling and rosy; "my dripping skirts will do less harm there than anywhere else."

As she stepped into the kitchen, and stood full in the light, she made a picture, with her clinging draperies, her blooming cheeks, and the wet tangle of her ruffled hair curling about her pretty head and neck.

Rachel Webb looked at her attentively; and then said:—

"Young friend, I have met thee before!"

CHAPTER XXV.—UNEXPECTED NEWS.

"Young friend, I have met thee before."

Fanchea returned the good Quaker's long, steadfast look with a glance of surprise, never doubting that she was mistaken for some other person.

"I do not remember," she said, "and yet—I have not seen many people."

"It is many years I met thee," said Rachel, "but thou hast still the same face. Thou wert singing and dancing among gipsies."

"Many people saw me then. What a good memory you must have!"

"The time is not so long for me as for thee," answered Rachel, smiling. "At my age seven or eight years pass quickly. But let me remove thy wet clothing. Afterwards I shall have something to say that perhaps may concern thee."

When, still pondering these words, Fan emerged from the bedroom to which she had been led, she was dressed in a print gown fresh from the ironing-table at which the maids were at work. Her riding habit was hung at the fire, and she was assured it would not dry for an hour; besides, the storm showed no signs of abating. In the parlor she found Mrs. Webb and Captain Rupert awaiting her reappearance; and tea was spread on a table in the pleasant old-fashioned sitting room where the sober drabs and greys of the furniture enhanced the rich color of the flowers that adorned it. A large china bowl of fresh-gathered roses perfumed the tea table; such lights as the storm permitted came into the room laden with a cool green tinge from filtering through overhanging leaves that clustered over the windows. Pleasant to Fan's eyes was the whole scene, including Rachel's white muslin cap, placid face, and the white plump hand that moved among the tea cups. A swift, strange feeling of having been in the place and the circumstances before seized upon her. This woman belonged to her past, would have a hand in her fate. What was it that she was going to tell her?

Thrilling with expectation, Fan did not notice the look of admiration which Captain Rupert bestowed upon her, as after the fashion of lovers he reflected that nothing he had ever seen her wear was half so becoming to her as the impromptu raiment from the ironing-table. She fixed her eyes on Rachel, eager for her next words, yet finding it impossible to hurry her or disturb her in her little hospitable courtesies.

"Drink thy tea first, my dear," said the good lady; "it will rest thee and do thee good; and then I will say what I have to say to thee."

Fan swallowed her tea, and then sat silently waiting. "It will be nothing after all," she thought, checking her impatience. "Only some foolish story about the gipsies."

"Madam," she said at last, "you need not be afraid of frightening me. I am no longer afraid of the gipsies."

"She is in safe keeping now, I assure you," said Captain Wilderspin, smiling on her.

Mrs. Webb looked from one to the other. "I am glad to know it," she said, "yet I have something to tell thee that does not concern those people. Didst thou know that someone else was seeking thee besides the gipsies?"

Fan rose suddenly to her feet. "Yes, I have always known it, have always believed it. What have you got to tell me?"

"It is seven years since he came here on his way to London looking for thee, and I have not seen him since. I suppose you know of whom I am speaking."

"Kevin!" said Fanchea, trembling.

"That was his name. It was so new to me that I could not forget it. He was a simple, noble creature, and his anxiety about thee was great. I told him I had seen thee, and I put him on the track of the gipsies; but when he found them, thou wert gone."

"Which way did he go?" said Fan, looking as if