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THE FOREST MAIDEN.

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It was a low-roofed, humble log house in the heart of the Western wilderness. At its rude doorway stood two beings gazing out upon the wild but magnificent scenery—the proud giant trees with their tall branches rising toward the blue skies; their glossy leaves trembling in the Summer breeze and forming a curtain through which the bright sunbeams poured over the rich sward at their feet—the wild flowers peeping out from the dark shadows of their huge trunks, and the scarcely trodden footpaths winding over the velvet turf from the narrow clearing about the cottage. A low, thrilling carol, from a fluttering bird now and then broke the stillness, and far away down the shady ravine, was faintly heard the soft murmur of a rippling stream.

The eyes of the young maiden at the door wandered delightedly over the quiet scene, and there was a light in their blue depths and a dimpling smile about the rosy mouth which gave indescribable charm to her sweet face. One little hand clasped the strings of the straw bonnet which hung by her side, and the other was raised to her white forehead, half shading the laughing orbs beneath it from the bright sun-light, while the whispering winds lightly touched her pure neck, lifting the wavy brown tresses from her shoulders. She was very young and beautiful, and every glance of her bright eyes told that her soul was full of love and purity. The lady by her side was many years her senior, and there was the slightest shade of care upon her smooth brow, and a subdued and patient look upon her mild face, which told that her life had not been without its changes and trials. The glance which she cast upon the young girl was full of fondness and maternal affection; and when she looked into the deepening shadows of the surrounding forest or up to the azure skies, the soft light of her dark eyes told of hope and contentment, if not of enthusiasm. All at once the little hand dropped from the forehead and a low ringing laugh came from the lips of the young girl.

'They are coming, mother! See, there is father holding Anna and little Eddy upon my black pony, and Oscar in the rear mounted upon Charley. Oh, we shall have such a nice ride through these old roads and down by the bank of that quiet river.'

And with a joyous bound she started forward to meet the approaching band, the merry voices of the delighted little ones mingling with joyous shouts.

'Oh, sister Ether!' cried little Anna. 'We have had such a grand time; Eddy and I riding round through the forest with father to lead your dear little pony; and he is so clever and steps so carefully over the green sward and pretty flowers. Oh, I wish we had not got home this whole hour yet!'

But the chubby prattler was lifted from her coveted seat and stood dancing at the feet of her mother, while the baby boy clapped his tiny hands and sent out his infant carol from the arms of his smiling sire. Ether had tied her straw cottage over her curls and sprang gracefully to the back of her favourite; and now he pawed the rich turf impatiently, and shook his glossy mane, as if quite conscious of the lovely weight he bore, and longing to dart away down the mossy patch and through the dim shades of the thick grove.

Her brother, a tall, noble-looking youth of twenty, soon smilingly joined the company, and after kissing her gloved hand to the dear group, they galloped away down the foot-path and were lost to view. After riding a mile or two beneath the drooping boughs of the old trees, they suddenly came to the steep bank of a river of considerable size, and turning to the right had a full view of the open country for many miles around. No obstruction was offered to their progress, and they rode gayly on over a surface of downy moss and yielding sward besprinkled with wild flowers of every hue and variety. Far to the left and on the opposite shore the forest was deep and unbroken, and the steep grassy declivity which rose from the river's pure waters was now and then broken by a chain of massive rocks extending far out into the stream, and losing their dark tops amid the shrubbery and spreading boughs. The cheek of Ether Dunham glowed and bright smiles deepened the dimples about her small mouth, while her brother's eloquent dark eyes beamed with intense light as they rode onward, the musical tones of the one blending with the deep mellow voice of the other in earnest conversation. At last the horses slackened their pace, walking almost noiselessly along over the flowery ground, as if like their riders subdued to pleasant thoughts by surrounding influences. Just as they came to a clump of trees, which bent over the stream, and threw their dark shadow far out into the sleeping waters, a low warbling murmur, not exactly like the carol of a bird—but quite as sweet and full of melody—fell on their ears; and instantly checking the tired horses, they bent breathlessly over their saddles and peered down through the thick leaves; for the sound seemed to proceed from their midst.

A low faint cry of wonder half burst from Ether's lips; but her brother's hand smothered the sound, while he pushed his way nearer to the edge of the bark that he might have a

more distinct view of the strange wild creature thus thrust upon their vision. She had grasped with one small brown hand a pliant branch of one of the trees that overhung the dark waters and swung herself from the slight foothold beneath, while with the other reaching far up amid the clustering, clambering vines that wound themselves around every limb, she was trying to grasp a bunch of purple grapes which swung to and fro, constantly eluding the clasp of her slender fingers. Her large wild brown eyes with their thick silken lashes were fixed eagerly upon the capricious treasure, and her full red lips half opened in their impatience, while the long jetty ringlets of her hair in their lavish abundance fell back from her dark high forehead and hung trembling over the deep waters. The same exquisite music now came again from her full heart for the extreme peril of her situation seemed unable to restrain its out-gushings of gladness; and the golden bird which had just lighted upon a bough over her head seemed to hesitate before pluming his wings for flight.

She was strangely beautiful; and as she hung there with only that frail limb for a support, and the notes of joy upon her lip, Oscar Dunham and his sister turned pale with terror. She had just reached the purple fruit and torn the rich cluster from its vine, when the bended bough broke with a sudden crash, and with one faint cry the daring girl sank beneath the dark surface below. She rose again almost instantly, and the next moment the strong arms of the bold youth had borne her up to the grassy bank where he gently laid her with her head in Ether's lap. The little hand still grasped the luscious fruit, but the bright drops dripped from the stem, and the smile had hardly left the pale lip and cheek. Arthur bent anxiously over the marble face and rubbed the cold hands with his trembling fingers, while Ether kissed the lovely brow and put back the wet hair, calling on her to awake. At last a faint color came to the lips, the long lashes trembled upon the cheek, and then the brown eyes looked up with a bewildered gaze; but when they fell upon the eloquent pale face of the stranger youth she sprang to her feet, while a crimson glow flushed the cheek and brow, and a cry of fear trembled on her tongue. It was only momentary; for when she turned her sweet eyes to the beautiful face of Ether Dunham, a smile full of satisfaction and loveliness broke over her features, and she knelt down by her side, clasped her hands in both hers, and gazed fondly into her fair face.

'Was it you who took me from those dark waters?' she said. 'Was it you who saved the Young Fawn to her mother's arms?'

'Not me, dear one—but he—my brother,' replied the smiling girl. 'We were passing this way and saw your danger. It was Oscar who brought you to my arms.'

'Then he has my gratitude, and I know my dear mother would bless him, for I am her all.' And she extended her hand timidly to the admiring youth, blushing and hanging her head in embarrassment. It was quickly withdrawn; not however till he had raised it to his lips, and reverently kissed the trembling prisoner. 'I know I was careless,' she continued, turning to Ether, 'but I wanted the grapes so much, and besides I have often gathered them in the same way before without injury or accident. But I shall be more wise in future, for my sweet mother's sake as well as my own.'

'And where do you live?' asked her listener looking about her. 'For I see no signs of cultivation, no house any where in this region.'

'Oh, no, you cannot see it here,' replied the smiling girl, 'we live in the dim, deep forest, yonder over the stream, and our cottage is just behind that ledge of rocks. My mother and I dwell in those woods alone; but we are very happy—at least I am, only sometimes when I hear my mother sigh or see a tear in her eye. She is very good, and oh, I love her very much. I wish you could see her, you would love her too.'

'And is your father dead?' inquired Ether, gazing delightedly over her animated face and still holding the little hand which had been given her. 'Oh, yes—my father was a great chief—a mighty king of a powerful tribe; but he was long ago slain in battle, and since then my mother and I have lived alone, though she often sighs for the dear friends of her childhood, who she says are far away, or perhaps dwell in the spirit-land.' A look of sadness crossed the eloquent young face, and she brushed a tear from her cheek; but it was quickly followed by a smile as she added:—'My father used to call me the Young Fawn, but my mother prefers the name of Nora, because she says it has been in her heart from childhood, though she cannot remember whence it came.'

'Nora,' whispered Ether to her brother, 'our mother's name.'

'If it were not asking too much of you,' continued the Young Fawn, 'I would take you to our humble home and show you this sweet mother of mine. She is as fair as you, for I take not this dark brow and these jetty tresses from her.'

'We will go,' said Oscar, quickly: 'It will not take long, and we can tie our horses to one of the trees. The sun is still high in the heavens, and if we should be out after nightfall, we shall have the full moon to light us on our way.'

The horses were accordingly fastened to a tree near by and left to nibble the fresh grass, while the dark maiden and her companions proceeded to the little skiff which was moored beneath the bank, and were soon floating over the smooth surface of the stream. They landed just where a huge dark rock threw its shadow over the rich velvety turf, which stretched back from the river's brink, and stepping forth from

the fairy barque the graceful girl bounded around the projecting cliff followed by the young strangers. The scene was lovely, as they emerged from the heavy shade and looked around. Giant trees that had for centuries pointed with their intertwining boughs to Heaven threw their clustering foliage protectively over the waving grass and nestling flowerets; and strange beautiful birds with golden wing and lute-like voices every where looking out from the thick leaves, while away through the brown trunks, its humble roof bending beneath the weight of a clambering woodbine, peeped forth the solitary cabin of the Young Fawn. A winding footpath with its soft carpet of green led to the door, and down in a little shady glen near by came sparkling and dimpling the pure limpid waters of a tiny rivulet, creeping like a beam of silver light through the fragrant blossoms which covered its mossy banks.

'Dear mother!' cried the wild-sweet maiden, as she bounded through the open door, and threw her arms about the bending neck of a pale, interesting looking woman, who had arisen from her seat at the first sound of her foot-fall. 'Dear mother, I am here though sadly wet, and here are some friends who saved me from drowning; for I carelessly climbed on the tree for a bunch of grapes and fell into the dark waters. This young gentleman generously brought me to shore, and his sweet sister kissed me back to life, for I believe I was insensible till her soft breath passed over my cheek, and I thought her gentle voice, as she called on me to awake, was the whisper of the kind angels who you say watch over us.'

And she drew the smiling Ether toward her trembling mother, looking from the pale anxious face of the one into the tender eyes of the other till her heart gushed out in love and gratitude, and she laughed that soft, musical laugh again till the shade passed from the white brow of her parent and her usual calmness returned. She bowed gracefully to the manly youth and returned his friendly grasp, and passing her arm kindly about the waist of Ether, drew her to her bosom and looked into her fair face, put back the hair from her cheeks and kissed the pure forehead. Her voice trembled slightly as she spoke, but it was low and musical.

'You are welcome, sweet girl, to our humble home, and I feel that I never can repay you and your noble brother for the kindness you have shown us. If the gratitude of a full heart affords you any compensation, it is yours. Nora is all I have to love, and if she were to leave me, life would be cheerless indeed.' Tears sparkled in her sad blue eye, and she looked tenderly upon the beautiful child who approached them from the little bedroom, where she had exchanged her dripping garments for dry ones in a twinkling. A soft blush stole over her face, when she chanced to meet the dark eyes of Oscar Dunham and a strange thrill passed through her frame, when his mellow voice sounded in her ear; but to Ether she clung with extravagant fondness, twined the soft brown ringlets about her slender fingers and kissed the little white hands. She told her of the pleasant haunts about her wild-wood home, of her daily sails upon the river, and her occasional walks to the distant settlement. And in return Ether told her of the bright home she had lately left, of the many friends she had bidden adieu, and how with her dear father and mother, her brothers and little sister she dwelt in the bosom of the forest but a few miles distant. The wild creature clasped her hands for joy and danced about the little room, till the voices of her visitors mingled with her own merry laugh and a smile of gladness dimpled the pale cheek of her pensive mother. She was rejoiced that a companion so gentle and kind had been found for her idol child; for since her young heart first throbbled with its gushing tenderness she had none but her mother to love, though her yearning pure spirit went out toward all that was bright and glad in nature.

The birds were her friends, and she had listened hours together to their merry carols till her own tones had caught the echo, and she sang so gayly as they. She loved too to listen to the rustling of the forest leaves when the evening winds whispered among them, and they breathed forth their pensive sounds; and then a strange sadness would creep into her spirit and she would gaze with her large earnest eyes up into the starry heavens, and wonder what the sparkling tiny gems could be scattered so lavishly over the blue expanse. It was at such times, that the low tones of her gentle mother had fallen soothingly upon her heart, as she told of the Spirit-land and of the angel guardians who hover about the pathway of mortals, to guide them in the way to Heaven.

An hour had passed by. The strangers had partaken of the simple meal spread by the hands of their new friends and the sun was nearing the distant horizon: but still they lingered. The wild light of Nora's dark eyes had softened to an expression of calm and tranquil enjoyment, and her voice was low and tremulous; but a deeper feeling seemed to pervade the gentle bosom of her mother. Strange pleasant thoughts had taken possession of her soul; and as she gazed into the sweet face of Ether Dunham and listened to her voice, the dreams of early childhood seemed haunting her again; and a dim, shadowy picture of happiness and misery flitted before her. She had said but little, and her eyes rarely left the fascinating face of her visitor; and sometimes when her low, mellow laugh mingled with the glad strains from Nora's full bosom, she would start to her feet and look about her, then a rush of tumultuous emotions almost still'd the heavy beating of her heart, and she would bury her face in her hands and try to collect the dim

fancies which wandered through her brain and joined the broken chain of memory.

It was evening and the sun was quite down though his golden light flooded the deep recesses of the surrounding forest, when Oscar Dunham arose and turned from the soft glance of Nora's eyes. He walked to the door, looked a moment abroad, then returning said reluctantly: 'Come Ether we must start, for it will be very late now before we reach home, and mother will be so anxious. You know she is always thinking of lurking red men and fears that you may yet be taken captive.'

'Yes, brother,' replied the fair girl, turning from the entwining arms of her friend, but you know the reason of mother's anxiety on that ground. She can never forget the dear little sister they tore from her side long ago, but I am sure we need not fear now, and I do want to stay longer with Nora.'

None noticed the deadly pallor which overspread the features of the silent woman; for the dimness of twilight was in the little room; but when a stifled sob broke from her bosom as she grasped Ether's arm and bent wildly over her, they all looked up in wonder.

Nora screamed in terror and clung about her form, but she heeded her not. The white lips at first moved without a sound and the eyes glanced wildly into the face of the terrified girl but the unearthly expression passed away, a beautiful smile beamed forth in its stead, and she whispered, as she bent her head down to the shoulder of the sweet child and put her arms about her:—

'Did you say the Indians tore her away—that the young sister of your blessed mother was borne from her side a captive? I have been dreaming ever since I first looked upon your dear face—aye, for many long years I have dreamed and slumbered on; but I am awake now, I see it all—remember all. We were down in that charming valley at play—she had twined a wreath of wild roses amid the curls of her hair, and as she left me to go around by the shore of the running stream for a white lily, they came and took me away.'

'You!' exclaimed Oscar and Ether, at a breath; 'You! and are you indeed the dear sister of our mother and is Nora our own cousin? Oh, how glad, how happy!'

It was indeed a happy moment. Tears were in the eyes of all, and Nora sobbed like an infant upon her mother's bosom. The glad woman sat down in the rude doorway and brushed the moisture from her smiling eyes; and as the little group gathered about her and raised their happy faces, and the heart of each seemed to fail for utterance, she bowed her head again to her hands and the big, bright drops, fresh from her spirit's shrine, trickled through them, while her whole frame shook with the weight of pleasant and bitter thoughts that came gushing up from memory's disturbed fountain.

She found words at last to tell them all—how she dwelt from the time of her captivity beneath the roof of the great chief—how he loved her as his own child and how the young chief smiled upon her. She told them of the bitter tears she shed when thinking of the dear friends she had left, of her sleepless nights and cheerless days, and how as years rolled on she learned to love the old chief who was ever kind and good, and to regard the young prince as a brother.

Then she spoke of her unwilling marriage, and told how tears had drenched her bridal garb, how they bore her insensible from her husband's arms and took the crushed jewel from her hair; of weeks and months of wretchedness and pining for her early home, and then of returning calmness after the last glimmering of hope had died away in her heart. Years rolled on and her husband, the powerful king of a warlike and bold tribe, was killed in battle, his men taken captives and their vast possessions fell into the hands of the white men; but she and the young Fawn—her darling Nora—had never been molested; they had lived in their wild home alone and almost unknown, though she had never ceased to mourn for the friends of early life, nor to remember the low sweet tones that fell upon her ear, and the gentle loving glance, that had so often met her gaze. True these remembrances had the shadowy dimness of a half forgotten dream; but still their light had ever been with her, brightening her pathway through life and filling her lone heart with sad and delicious emotions. Not till that day when the sweet face of Ether came up before her, had her fond imaginations taken to themselves a form and distinctness, with the vividness of reality; but the fond tones of the dear child and the glance of her deep eyes, had touched a string in her inmost soul, which vibrated like the chords of a long neglected harp, and sent forth pleasant melody.

It was late that evening, when Oscar Dunham rode up to the door of his father's house, and he was alone. He found anxious, fearful hearts and tearful faces awaiting, and when his mother looked in vain for the form of her darling, a smothered cry escaped her lips; but her wild eyes fell upon the smiling, happy face of her son, and wonder and astonishment kept her silent. It was not long before they knew all and were weeping for joy at the grateful intelligence. Morning dawned fair and beautiful and ere the sun reached his meridian height, the lone widow of the Indian chieftain and her lovely girl had pressed to their throbbing bosoms the forms of those about whom they had dreamed and communed with painful interest though long years of loneliness and suspense. It was a happy group that assembled that day beneath the low log cabin in that deep wilderness; and the very birds that lingered amid the thick leaves of the blossoming honeysuckles seemed oppressed