

or no Frank? Come, you have kept your secret long enough." Blanche's reply is non-committal, though I shall probably be informed. "Don't ask me, cousin, Minnie knows;" and the next sound I hear is my favorite "Don Pasquale," with a new and brilliant after-piece, something she has brought from Glen-Clunie.

Minnie whispers that R——, our prospective cousin, intends visiting us soon, and as he is one of us already, he will be welcome as ever to this our country home. How doubly happy Blanche will be!

## VIII.

LEANING over the pool whose full bosom nurses the sportive rapids, there is a massive rock, from the crevices of which, dense cedars spring and mingle, forming an arbor almost impervious to the wind or sun. It is a favorite resort of mine, and sitting there in the breezy afternoons of June, I while away many an hour in enticing the silver trout from their cool nooks below, by means of worm or fly too tempting for their epicurean taste to resign.

It was on one of these occasions that I won the acquaintance of La Solitaire's child. He had been searching the woods for the goats, and attracted by the wild flowers which grow in such profusion along the margin of the stream, unconsciously drew near to where I was sitting.

The cast of my line upon the water first apprised him of my presence. Unaccustomed to strangers, he started back half affrighted, but a kind word or two and the proffer of a live fish in his hand, brought him to my side and we were soon friends. The remarkable beauty of the boy somewhat surprised me; it seemed so inconsistent with the humble and secluded

life in which he was nurtured. Not that there is less of loveliness to be found amid the by-ways than the highways of the world, but there was a light in his dark eye and an expression about his lip which spoke of a spirit that, when cognizant of its strength and fitness, would demand a far wider sphere for the exercise of its powers.

Amused and made wiser by his childish prattle, the twilight was deepening before we started homeward, but a walk of a few minutes brought us into the glen. The goats which had found their way homeward were already enclosed for the night, as descending the hillside we looked down upon the cabin; and there in the door-way sat the child's mother watching for him, and wondering, no doubt, the cause of his delay. Coming as we did from an opposite, or rather angular direction to that in which she was looking, we were not seen till nearly at the house. Though my first near meeting with the woman, who had been to me an enigma, I was not wholly a stranger to her, for she had seen me frequently pass her dwelling in my strolls through the valley. First offering me a seat, she gently chided the boy for his long absence, but for which I apologized, as being perhaps the cause of it. No one could mistake the parentage of the child on seeing his mother; his were the same dark eyes and hair, the same glowing complexion, in everything alike except

form and accent. It needed no very skilful ear to discover that she was of foreign birth or parentage; I fancied her an Italian from the flowing softness of her accent, and her physical peculiarities; and my impressions were strengthened when I surveyed the apartment in which I sat. It was small and scantily furnished, but scrupulously neat and clean. A plaster statuette of the Virgin and child stood upon the mantel-shelf, and over it hung a highly colored but coarse picture of Guido's *Magdalen delle radici*, whose original I had seen in the Sciarra palace at Rome. These objects bespoke her religion, and they may be her comfort too, if her faith in them is sincere. As I rose to depart, my eyes were momentarily attracted by what appeared to be a picture shrouded in black muslin and hanging in a sort of cupboard or recess beside the chimney. It stimulated my curiosity, but appearing not to notice it, I took my leave only to await with feverish anxiety another interview.

It was evident to my mind that she was no ordinary woman; that whatever she might be now, however humble her lot or employments, she had or should have adorned a different station in life; and so the little insight I had accidentally gained of our mysterious neighbor, furnished food for musing on my lonesome walk homeward. I strived to divine what accident or vagary had brought this woman from her

native land and placed her here in comparative solitude. Was it some deep wrong, or disgrace, or poverty, or a misanthropic spirit? I should judge from my observation it was neither of these. It might be then some deep heart-sorrow; for grief seeks solitude and looks for solace often "from Nature up to Nature's God." Better that it were so than otherwise, and it might be said of her as of another, when seeking the comfort and sympathy man could not give—

"She found it on the breast  
Of nature kindly ever; there she leaned  
Sick, worn with long unrest,  
And gladly learned she was her child unweaned."

So Petrarch found healing for a wounded spirit amidst the shadows of Vaucluse.

Another hour, and sitting on the knoll which overlooks the river, we three, the congenial spirits of our household, enjoy pleasant converse. It is one of those moon-lit, delicious eves which so often bless our American June; when it seems a happiness merely to live and breathe the balmy Southern airs, laden as they are for us with the breath of roses from our carefully tended garden. We talk of old Brindle and argue if her pretty calf had better be weaned and put in order for the butcher. I decide in the affirmative, but Blanche objects on account of its beauty, though she

knows we require more cream now, as strawberries are ripening, and city friends are to help us eat them. But utility finally carries the point, and Brindle's nursling is sentenced; so on the morrow Teddy will have orders accordingly.

And then we wonder if the meadow by the creek will yield hay enough this season to keep old Charley and Brindle and Birdie's pony through the winter, not forgetting the two South-down cossets we keep tethered on the lawn; but the decision on this question is deferred till after the change of the moon, which the almanac presages will bring dry weather.

A little distance down the road that skirts the river bank, there is a low red house in which old Jimmy Pike, the fisherman, lives. He has a daughter wasting away with consumption, and the doctor says she cannot last long. We see a light glimmering from her chamber window, and now and then discern the form of her old mother, bowed by grief and years, moving about the room, busied in tending the child who should have been the staff of her age. We often send trifling delicacies to the sick girl; but our sympathies are freshly awakened, and thinking what a treat a bowl of strawberries would be to the fevered invalid, our tender-hearted cousin promises to pick them early in the morning, fresh and cool, and take them to her with some new cream.

As the evening wears on into the early night, we hear far away amidst the river hills the faint echoes of revolving paddles, heralding the approach of boats going northward from the city; and soon we see their colored lights emerging from between the mountains, as they speed their way like spirits of the night.

What a varied and priceless freight they bear! Youth and age—rich and poor; hearts, gay and bounding with hope—heavy with grief and despair; forms, fair and graceful—bowed by disease and years; some, seeking pleasure and change—others searching for a home and rest. But they have passed like a dream, and all is still again but the measured ripple of the tide, the breeze whispering amid the tree-tops, and, above all, the dash of falling waters away in the depths of Hermit's Dell.

We think and speak of Frank, and wonder if we shall hear from him again, and in what "haunts of old romance" his feet may wander now. He may be amid the Doric ruins of Greece, or within the shadows of the Pyramids; but wherever he is, our thoughts are with him.

So we sit and talk musingly till the moon sinks behind the western hills, and then loiter houseward to close our eyes within that dreamy realm, whose *far niente* is more perfect than that of Parthenope.

## IX.

FRANK is here at last, and our first intimation of his arrival was his well-known shout under our chamber window at sun-rise this morning. I was up and half dressed, for it is my custom in summer to be out of doors early; yet I was startled and surprised, and Minnie none the less so. In a minute I was at the door. "Harry!" "Frank! why, my dear fellow how are you?" was our mutual exclamation.

"Why, Frank, what brought you here at this time of day? How did you get here?"

The story was soon told; he had taken the night boat from the city, and consequently reaching our landing at a late hour, was obliged to remain at the miserable tavern there till daylight.

"Well, how are Blanche and Minnie and Birdie?"

But before I can reply they are in the room, and Blanche in her brother's arms, laughing and crying at a great rate.

"Why, brother, we never expected you so soon," says Blanche, "though you have been among the Turks, too; just look at his beard!"

Sure enough, Blanche might think so, for Frank's beard and moustache would be the pride of a Mussulman; it looked like a six month's growth.

We were all so excited and had so many questions to ask, all at once, breakfast was served before Frank thought of his toilet. This was soon attended to, and we gathered round the table—four as congenial spirits as might be found under one roof.

"Oh! how often I have thought of you all," said Frank; "how much I have dreamed of you! and Blanche; I was so afraid you would play truant, and run away before I got home. How much longer could I have trusted you?"

"Now, Frank, we will talk about that some other time; you know I am always guided by you."

"Yes, but we are told love laughs at bolts and wards; how is it, Harry?"

"It is so sometimes, Frank, but Blanche has been very reasonable; a little melancholy once in a while; but it is all over now, is it not, Blanche?"

"Yes, cousin, that verse you wrote in my *index rerum* cured me; I shall never forget it; and Frank must see it too."

After breakfast, Blanche monopolized her brother for an hour or two, whilst I attended to my various engagements about the place. There are dead fruit trees to be rooted up, at which Teddy is busy; and

the long shoots of the grape vines want guiding aright; always something to be done or thought of even on our limited possessions.

There is an unsightly heap of rock, too, which impedes somewhat of a view southward from the house, which must be quarried out, and converted into a wall to divide the pasture lot. The surrounding ground must be graded into a lawn, which will be enlarged in consequence; and so one improvement suggests another.

But Blanche has finished her private confab and gone into the house, leaving Frank to stroll about with me till dinner-time.

We go to the barn-yard and descant upon the merits of Brindle junior, whom the butcher is to take away to-morrow; then to the stable where Charley and Shag are domiciled, and so away to the pasture lot, of which Brindle is sole possessor. Its extremity is bounded by the belt of woods, through which the white farm-house of our neighbor Mead is plainly discernible, and in the adjoining field, the industrious old man himself, ploughing his corn. He is a perfect pattern of a farmer—never idle—and it is to be regretted that his only son, who is an erratic genius, does not possess the enterprise of his father.

We sit down under the spreading chestnut, my favorite seat here, and enjoy the fair landscape before

and around us. Memories of past days throng our spirits, and we talk over our wanderings together, the joys of the present and the hopes of the future, with all the license of long-trying friendship. I reveal to him my interview with the divinity of Hermit's Dell, and the discoveries I had made in her lowly cabin, not spoken of before to Minnie or Blanche, for some good reason of my own. As we walk homeward, I take him to a point whence he can look down into the glen, and catch a glimpse of the cascade's foam through the dense foliage, and the lofty branches of the elm which overhang the dwelling of La Solitaire.

It is a fair sight; and he wonders not that I have made it so frequent a theme in my letters; he must visit its recesses to-morrow.

"Yes, Frank, you shall go; we will all go, and strive to unveil the mystery which shrouds the lonely dweller there."

Dinner is ready when we reach home, and Frank tastes for the first time his Florentine oil, which like the finest Neapolitan maccaroni, is seldom found on Italian tables; the best is sent abroad.

"It is the way of the world, Frank, even a prophet is not without honor, save in his own country."

During the afternoon, Frank and I drive to the landing after his choicest trunk, which he had ordered to be sent after him, and in whose contents, both

Minnie and Blanche have considerable interest. We return in due time, bringing the repository of treasures, and it is opened in the presence of many witnesses.

Snugly packed away amidst layers of clothing, are numerous little packets, marked with the names of the recipients—to be.

Blanche has several and Minnie her share also, whilst mine comes from the bottom, an elegant morocco case, enclosing a splendidly mounted hunting-knife.

"Many thanks, my brother Nimrod, for this reminder of our deer-hunts away on the Beaverkill, it may do us service yet; but no, it is too handsome for use." Minnie has unrolled her parcel, and displays a dress for Birdie of real "McGregor" plaid, marvellously fine. Frank says, he had to laugh when he read my letter conveying to him our various commissions, Minnie's was so very modest. But that is not all belonging to her; another wrapper contains a choice cameo from Rome, and a set of corals for Birdie.

Blanche is also well supplied; she has her lava ornaments, her embroidered slippers redolent with genuine attar of rose from the gardens of Stamboul; and in addition, some spider-web laces from Mechlin.

"How *apropos!* brother, you are very kind and thoughtful, and all in such good taste," says Blanche.

We all acknowledge our thanks to Frank for his

gifts and his judicious selection of them; but there are some other parcels for Glen-Clunie, which he unseals for our inspection, evincing no less taste and judgment.

There are some things of his own too, in the custom-house, which we shall see at some future time. A choice copy of "the Cenci," and Carlo Dolce's Magdalen, and some others, which all travellers love to remember, with alabasters and bronzes and other "knick-knacks," as he calls them

Evening again, and Frank is with us! We sit in the vine-shaded arbor on the knoll, and remember that it is almost eight months since he was last with us, just previous to his sailing.

We cannot realize it, neither can he, when he recounts to us the many spots of interest, and the various countries he has visited during the time.

From England to Italy and Turkey, through the intermediate central and southern countries of Europe, he has travelled, and returned to us full of information, not ephemeral and superficial, but lasting and solid. With all his enthusiastic love for the beautiful, not only in Nature, but in Art, it has been to him a tour of highest profit and pleasure; few would enjoy it more.

The evening wanes, and night comes. Minnie and

Blanche have left us, yet we linger on the porch, fragrant with the smoke from our choice cheroots: some Frank brought from the East.

We speak softly of Blanche's approaching marriage, and of arrangements connected therewith; of his future prospects and hopes, none the less interesting; of a country-seat not far from us that he has heard may be purchased, and of many other matters important to none but ourselves.

As Frank speaks of a country-seat for sale, I mention Briar Cliff, and wonder if it may not be the identical property of which he has heard. We will soon see, and if so, how very pleasant for us both, should it fall into my friend's hands. He has roamed and roved enough now, and longs to settle down in some quiet nook like ours, yet near enough to the city for occasional visits.

"I am tired of single-blessedness too, Harry, but you must not betray my prospects on this score yet; it is all *sub rosa*."

"No, Frank, but do not put the day off any longer than necessary; believe me, you will never think it came too soon, afterward. Profit by a friend's advice and experience. Be a bachelor no longer."

Stopping in the library before we retire, a cold supper, nicely spread, greets our eyes, and over the spiced anchovies, crisp salad, sweet bread and butter, and

iced sauterne, we sit till the small hours commence, and Minnie raps on the floor overhead.

"To Hermit's Dell to-morrow, Frank, with the ladies!"

"Yes, and to Briar Cliff before I go to the city. Good-night!"

## X.

SAUNTERING laughingly along, Frank and Minnie, Blanche and I, went our way downward toward the Dell. We take with us our rods and baskets, ostensibly, for fishing, but that is not our chief object.

Frank is to see the cascade, the rustic bridge, the "big rock," and last, but not least, La Solitaire, if it may so happen.

Reaching the bridge, we stand a while leaning over its side to watch the swift waters beneath it, and for Frank to obtain the best view of the cascade. He marvels at its beauty, and asks me if it does not remind me of something I have seen elsewhere.

"Yes, Frank, one of the cascates which form the great Falls of the Reichenbach; I remember it well."

"It reminds me more," says Frank, "of Tivoli."

"How proud we should be of our sweet little waterfall!" exclaim Minnie and Blanche.

We climb the steep bank by a winding path amidst the dense cedars and hemlocks, and emerge by the great rock which overhangs the pool. Rude steps of nature's chiselling lead to the platform on its summit,