QUEEN LOG.

Ours was a purely petticoat party, that summer, at Crab Falls. Now and then a husband turned up to spend Sunday; but to the eight of us who had no husbands, these arrivals imported nothing, and for the rest of the time the composition of the household was exclusively feminine, except for sundry babies in knickerbockers, who did not count. Do not, however, think of us as miserable. A stray man or two would have been welcomed, but since they came not, we amused ourselves very well without them. Our resources were various. Some of the girls sketched; one or two painted. Carpathia May had a hobby for botany, and pursued it in such a pretty fresh flower way, that we all more or less, followed her lead. Alice Wier and Marion Berkeley professed trout fishing. They went off by themselves for whole days, and were real experts, bringing home baskets of the speckled darlings which would have done credit to experienced anglers. Then there was dear little Annie Tinkham, who read aloud in a voice like a trained brooklet, and was never weary of reading. Altogether there was no lack of occupations, in spite of an occasional malcontent sigh at thought of what might have been had fate been a little kinder.

"We are all nice, you know," remarked Esther White, in an exasperated moment—"very nice, indeed; but after all, it's all one taste. One does like something different at times. It is astonishing what a very little ham it takes to flavor whole mountains of bread and butter."

'Oh, Essie! Shocking!" But some of us privately agreed with her.

One brilliant morning in late August we, the unattached eight, agreed to lay aside all private pursuits, and combine for a picnic. How well I remember it all—the hot climb up hill, and the delightful spice smell of the pine woods as we passed into their shadow! It seemed a different zone, all coolness and fragrance, with winds making vibrant murmurs overhead, and underfoot melodious rustlings, unlike other wood rustlings; echoes, perhaps, of that secret, half revealed and half withheld, which pine woods hold, and which to impressionable people, is such perpetual fascination. It was infinitely refreshing after the outside heat and glare, and we flung ourselves on the cushiony needles with sighs of pleasure and relief.

"What a dear place this is!" said Alice. I am never tired of it."

"Why don't we come here oftener,—every day?" asked Rosa May, gushingly.

"Well, I can hardly say. There are other things to be considered. Duties, sketching, for example. There is nothing to sketch here, you know."

"And trout," put in one of the trouting girls, "there's nothing to catch here, you know."

"I'm not so sure of that," retorted Alice. "Piny Brook is pretty swift, and tumbles a good deal, I confess; but there are pools below which might hold trout. I'm going to take a look at them by and by."

"It must take a trout of stout constitution to swim in Piny brook," observed Carpathia. "I should think he'd be bruised black and blue in five minutes."

"So he would in the rapids; but below it is not so bad. I never heard of any there, to be sure, but there may be."

"'Much hangeth on a maybe,'" quoted Sarah Stanley.

Here I lost the thread of the conversation. The pine needles were elastic, and soft as a mattrass. I was weary with the walk and the heat, the light fanning wind lulled me unconsciously, and I fell asleep. Certain soft touches aroused me, and a tickling in my ear. I sleepily turned and half sat up, but a hand pressed me down, and a laughing voice said:

"Oh, lie still a little longer. We've made you into a log—such a lovely log! Do keep still. You'll spoil all if you move."

"But what is this in my ear?"

"Oh, nothing but a toad stool. There, I've moved it, and I'll litt this lichen off your eye, so that you can take a look at yourself. You can't think how beautiful you are."

The witches had covered me all over with a dust-covered shawl, and had covered that with sods and mosses and strips of bark to simulate a half-decayed trunk, scattering pine needles over all, and sticking into the interstices, ferns, lichens and fungi, till, as Amy said, it did look precisely like a log. Lastly they threw down a shawl in careless folds, set a lunch basket on my chest, and stood off to see the effect, which they declared to be "wonderful."

"No human being would guess," said Esther. "You'd impose on Leather-Stocking himself. Oh, girls do call Alice and Marian. They must be satisfied before this about those wretched trout. Don't breathe a word, but just ask them to sit down on the log and make themselves comfortable."

"Oh me! Thank you," said I, speaking as well as I could through a mouthful of lichens.

"Oh, they shan't really sit down. Lie still—quite still, dear Dolly. Don't move an inch, please don't; promise that you won't. It will be such fun to cheat Alice."

"Very well. I won't. But be quick. I'm comfortable enough now, but all this blanket shawl and bark may grow unpleasantly warm. I never realized before just how Daphne felt in the laurel."

"Good-by Daphne. Good-by Queen Log. We'll be back soon." With ringing laughter off went the girls, Esther lingering to give a touch to the lichen over my left eye. I smiled at myself in this odd position, but even as I smiled I dropped to sleep again. The day was irresistably drowsy and there was something delightful in this wood slumber, which even in deepest unconsciousness I never lost hold of. The last thing I saw, as my eyelids fell, was a broad ray of sun striking a half-open parcel of forks and spoons which lay in the grass.—Mrs. Pendexter's property these, and careless enough of the girls to leave them thus. But what did it signify? No spot on earth could be safer than these summer woods under the shadow of the New Hampshire hills.

Those were my thoughts as I fell asleep. I was roused by sound of voices, which even my locked senses recognized as unfamiliar. I opened my eyes. Two men were sitting on the ground close to me, but half turned away. They were shabbily clad; one in a velveteen coat and rough corduroy trousers; the other, whose clothes were dark, had a red handkerchief tied round his neck. This man had a thick beard, and wild, long hair veiling a pair of savage gypsy eyes. But it was the other face that frightened me most. It was a smug shaven face, but with an evil, cruel, furtive look, which I do not know how to describe. Faint with sudden fear, I lay quite still. It seemed the only thing to do. But, oh, where were the girls? I thought; what would happen if they came back?

"Give us that there basket off the log!" were the first words heard. It was the velveteen man who spoke and the other reached out his hand and lifted the basket from its place close to my chin. I trembled lest its removal had made me visible; but the girls had arranged too artistically for that, and the men seemed to suspect nothing. It took only a moment to empty the basket which kind Mrs. Pendexter had taken so much time to fill. "Not a bad find," said the smug man turning over the cold mutton and hard eggs, and speaking with his mouth full. "Vittle up, partner. Mayn't have another chance Lord knows when."

"Partner" accepted the invitation cordially. Our luncheon disappeared down his throat in large morsels.

"Hallo! here is a go!" cried the smug man, making a sudden dive at the parcel of spoons and forks. He bit one of the spoons with his teeth, rapidly counted and dropped them into his pocket, the other man looking on. "Real?" asked he of the red neck-cloth.

"No mistake. Eight of each. That's twenty apiece. Stow away fast or some one'll be a-coming." I hadn't supposed that even a wolf could "stow" faster, but at this warning the motion of the jaw was accelerated. As the men ate, they talked. Their voices were smothered but I caught now and then a sentence.

"Dog? Darn the dog! Easy silence him."

"Yes, but——" Then I lost the context.

"You're sure as to the blunt?"

"Saw it handed over—seventeen hundred and odd in bills. Took it home with him? Why, of course, you fool. These farmer fellows don't hang to banks. I tell you he wants it handy to lift his mortgage, next week. Sure to be called for. Them Elkinses is always on time. Werry sharp gentlemen, Elkinses are."

"Stash your gab," said the gypsy. "Folks coming. Off's the word."

The men jumped to their feet, listened a second. One of them snatched up the shawl which lay over the supposed log, the other crammed the fragments of the feast into his pocket, and they were gone, the gypsy's foot just grazing my head as he went. I heard the girls voices drawing nearer, but the long tension of fear had left me so faint and powerless that I could not stir, not even when the girls came in sight and stood close beside me.

"My! isn't it warm?" cried Esther.

"Alice, you look half baked. Sit down and rest. Here is a convenient old log.

She caught sight of an empty basket the men had flung aside, and stopped short, with her mouth open.

"Yes," said Alice innocently. "I fancy we are all ready for luncheon. But where is the luncheon? And where is Dolly?"

At this moment I saw Marian making preparations to sit down on me. Self preservation gave me strength to stir, to roll over. The bark and ferns flew in all directions. Marian shrieked; but her arrangements for seating herself had gone too far to be affected by this sudden phenomenon. She came down heavily, and she and I and the shawls and the ferns, fungi and mosses became complicated into a confused and undistinguishable heap.

This the girls considered the best joke possible. With shouts of laughter they disentangled and picked us up. But at sight of my face there were exclamations:

"Why, Queen Log, what is the matter? Are you hurt? You are as pale as a sheet. You look as if you had seen a ghost. Don't stare so Dolly. Do speak. What is it?"

I tried to speak, but, instead, burst into a fit or nervous crying. The girls, frightened and perplexed, thronged about me. In the midst of their rapid questions an awe-struck voice was heard saying: "Where are the spoons? I put them just here. I am sure I did. And here is the very napkin they were in."

"Oh," I sobbed, "those men took them away."

"Men! What men?"

Then it all came out, and the circle of pale faces and wide open eyes which attended my somewhat incoherent explanation struck me as so funny that I went to the other extreme of feeling, and, before I knew it, was laughing as hard as I cried. "And you lay still and never moved?" gasped Rosa. "How brave! I never could have done that. I should have given one scream, and then fainted away."

"That would have been truly judicious," remarked Esther, dryly; "but the question now is, what shall we do?"

"Do?" wailed Rosa; "why get out of these dreadful woods as fast as we can, to be sure. Robbers and murderers! I never heard anything so awful. Why did we come? Oh, how horrid it is not to have any man to take care of you!"

Her alarm infected the boldest of us, and I regret to say our progress homeward partook of the nature of a stampede. Mrs. Pendexter, whowas rolling out tea-biscuit in the buttery, was taken all aback by our sudden appearance. "Sakes alive! I want to know! This does beat all!" were her remarks during our recital. "Such a thing wasn't never heard of in this country before. Elkins! that's the squire. And the man with the seventeen hundred dollars must be young Mr. Dennett on the Brush hill road. He's a sort of stranger, you know. Mr. Pendexter was a saying that he'd sold out all his hay at a good price to pay off his mortgage."

"Where is Mr. Pendexter?" said Esther promptly. "He must go over and give this Mr. Dennett warning at once."

"Ts, ts, ts," clucked Mrs. Pendexter. "He's off in the medder lot, two miles away, and so's all the rest.—There ain't a man about the place, Miss Esther."

"There never is," put in Rosa despairingly. "I never saw anything like it! Oh, how horrid, horrid it must be in the land of the Amazons! I can't think why Joquin Miller should write a poem about them."

"How far is it to Mr. Dennett's?" said Esther.

"It's a good three miles, but a straight road all the way. Right through the woods. You can't miss it."

Through the wood! we all shivered; but Esther went on bravely.

"Very well. Amanda can harness the old gray, can't she? Please tell her to, and I'll drive over to Mr. Dennett's. Girls, which of you will go with me?"

Nobody answered.

"Dolly?"

"Yes," I said with a sinking heart, "I'll go."

The girls wept and wailed, but in vain.

"Don't be silly," said Esther. "Of course somebody must go."

"Well, I do admire your courage," said Mrs. Pendexter, "and there's this about it; there ain't no real danger. They're always scared at daylight"—speaking of the genus burglar as of a wolf. "You won't see your men again, Miss Dolly, I promise you. If I wasn't sure of that, I wouldn't let you go nohow."

Fortified with this we set off, concealing our inward tremors as best we might. The road seemed long, but at last we came to a pretty brown cottage, with a little lawn, flower beds and an air of taste and refinement new to us in that region. A handsome sunburned young man, who was cutting grass with a hand mowing machine, came forward to meet us and raised his straw hat with the unmistakable air of a gentleman. Esther explained our errand, Mr. Dennett listening intently, never taking his eyes off her face as she spoke.

"I am probably the person meant," he said. "At least I have the sum alluded to in my house to pay a debt which falls due next week." He paused and thought for a moment silently.

"I wonder you were not afraid to drive over to this lonely place," he said, smiling.

"We were a little bit, perhaps," faltered I.

"Yet you came. How very good of you! You must let me drive you back."

"Oh, pray don't leave your house unguarded! Those men may come, you know."

"Oh, there is no danger now.—Fore-warned is fore-armed."

He called a man, gave some orders, went into the house a moment, and we were off. Dear me, how safe we felt all at once! The dark nooks had lost their terrors, and the return drive was delightful. Next day Mr. Dennet came to tell us that the thieves had been caught redhanded, and were safely lodged in the county jail. He had recovered Mrs. Pendexter's silver also; and altogether there was so much to hear and to discuss, that nobody wondered at his coming yet another day, and finally every day. It was surprising to see how much more interesting life seemed to several of us. I was more than once reminded of Esther's simile of the ham and the bread-and-butter.—Before long, however it became evident to whom belonged the chief share of the sandwich, and just before we all broke up in early October, Esther, rosy and flushed, stole into my room and held before my eyes a finger on which glistened a new ring set with a small diamond.

"So," I said, "you really have! and do you really like him?"

"Like him! I should think so."

"And you don't dislike the idea of living in the backwoods all your life?"

"No, not very much. Besides, we shan't stay in the woods always.—Now and then we mean to run away."

"And you're not afraid?"

"Afraid, with Will to take care of me! I should think not! Oh, Dolly, give me another kiss! Only think, if you hadn't been a log that day, I should never have seen him. How strangely things turn out! There, that's for Queen Log. Bless her always! How droll it was! *Vive la reine!*"

Call for a Meeting of Republican State Central Committee.

The members of the Republican State Central Committee are hereby called to meet at the Commercial hotel in Lincoln, on Wednesday, the 26th day of July, 1876, at 2 o'clock p. m. for the purpose of completing the organization of the Committee, and transacting such other business as may properly come before it.

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