

"PERSEVERANCE."

Just at the instant of sunset the light broke through the leaden masses of cloud like a belt of brass, red, threatening, yet most welcome.

And Mr. Creston, who had been wandering hopelessly among the marshes for some time, with a lively sense of the inconsequence of getting lost in those saline deserts, stood and stared at it as if it were a will-o'-the-wisp.

"I'm sure it couldn't have been there five minutes ago," he pondered within himself.

"Evening, stranger!" said old Zadoc Peck. "Been a shootin', eh?"

"I've lost my way," said Creston, plunging through the tall reeds, until at last he gained a secure footing by the cabin door.

"Well, I thought likely," commented Zadoc. "Ain't many folks come here a purpose."

"Could I obtain a night's lodging and some supper?" hinted our weary sportsman.

"I guess so," serenely answered Mr. Peck. "If you don't mind sleepin' up garret. As for supper, Perseverance has gone out to dig clams for us. Like baked clams, eh?"

"His son" thought the major. "What a quaint couple they must be!"

But he sat down in the red light and looked at the morning-glory vines trained to the window, the busy fingers of the old man, the murmuring wilderness of reeds and rushes beyond.

"That's right," said Zadoc; set down and take it easy. Perseverance will be back pretty quick with the clams, and then you'll get some good, hot supper. Perseverance is a master hand to cook."

"Perseverance" came presently; but, to Major Creston's infinite surprise, she was no lubberly boy, nor half-civilized young man, but a tall, blooming maiden of sixteen with jetty hair floating down her back—large, dark eyes, long lashed and almond shaped—and cheeks like roses. Her sherry, gypsy-like skirts revealed shapely brown ankles and pretty feet, yet bearing the impress of the wet sands where she had waded out to dig clams, and on one arm she carried a basket of clams, whose weight would have been no trifle even to the stalwart muscles of this major of cavalry.

"She was not at all embarrassed by the presence of a stranger, but came frankly up to him, setting down her basket to examine the contents of his game bag.

"You've had poor luck, stranger, haven't you?" she said, pityingly. "I could have done better myself, on them marshes at this time of year."

"Perseverance is a first rate shot," chuckled the old man. "Go now, girl, and cook us some supper."

The reast clams, coffee and corn bread were most palatable; and after supper, Major Creston gave Perseverance a newspaper from his pocket.

"It is this morning's," said he. "Would you like to see it?"

But she motioned it away.

"I can't read," said she indifferently.

"You can not read!" echoed the amazed major. "Why, how could you?"

"Sixteen," Perseverance answered, reddening.

"My sister Kate is only sixteen," said Major Creston, speaking without due reflection, "and she reads and writes four different languages, plays the piano and guitar, draws and paints, and—"

"Pshaw!" said Perseverance, arching her slender neck. "Can she shoot black duck and curlews?"

"That is hardly one of the accomplishments prescribed for young ladies," said the major, smiling.

"Can she swim?"

"No, but—"

"Can she clip a blue heron on the wing? or get in a haul of blue fish when the tide is strong and the wind due east? or fight a shark hand to hand, with only a marlin-spike for a weapon?"

And once again Major Creston was compelled to answer in the negative.

"Well," said Perseverance, complacently, "I can!"

And she rose and went out of the room, and Major Creston saw no more of her that night.

"She isn't offended, is she?" he asked of old Zadoc Peck, who was smoking a pipe and staring hard at the fire all the while.

"Offended? Our Perseverance offended?" echoed the old man. "You don't know her, stranger."

"But, really," hazarded Creston, "it is scarcely right to bring up a girl like that in such total ignorance, now is it?"

"Well, we haven't no schools nor academies hereabouts," said the old man. "And if we had, Perseverance wouldn't go to 'em. I don't see but what she gets along first-rate."

And Major Creston wasted no more time in argument.

He slept well and soundly that night under the sloping roof of the little garret, through whose shrunk boards the quiet stars peeped down at him, and at daybreak he went down upon the shore.

The reeds were with a rush and a roar, and an occasional flying shower of spray. The fresh wind took off his hat, and whirled it into the water. He made an involuntary plunge after it, lost his footing on the slippery sands, and the next instant he was struggling for dear life with the surf, dragged constantly down, and still farther out to sea by the treacherous undertow.

In a last effort to regain himself, he struck his head against a jagged point of stone and knew nothing more.

"You needn't thank me, stranger," said old Zadoc Peck, as he stood over the recuperating patient, with hot towels and brandy flask.

"I didn't know a thing about it till she ran up, as white and breathless as a snow-flurry, to get me to help you in. She had swum out to sea, and dragged you back to land herself! She's a brave girl, is Perseverance, and there's nothing she can't do if once she sets herself about it."

Major Creston thanked his young rescuer earnestly; but nothing would induce her to take the gold he offered her.

"It must be a poor creature that wants reward for saving a man's life," said she, with a short laugh.

And Creston desisted.

"The girl is too pretty," he said to himself. "No one but the hero of a third-class romance ever marries a half-civilized young savage, because she has dark eyes and hair growing low on her forehead. I must get away from this place—and I must keep away!"

Physically, this was an easy thing to do; but mentally—what is there but the wild winds of heaven so uncontrollable as a man's thoughts?

At the end of a year he came back from Switzerland, and went straight to the Long Island Marshes.

"I must see her," he said to himself. "I must tell her that I love her. I must ask her hand."

"You are old Zadoc Peck's son," said she, looking at him, holding up her hand.

"But the truth is, I'm not your son, and I'm not your father's son either."

"And you," he answered, "are Perseverance Peck?"

She smiled and nodded. How beautiful she had grown!

"I was going out to the old house," he said.

"I do not live there any more," said Perseverance. "Father's died, and I'm being educated. You see," she added, "that your words, hard and cruel, as I then thought them, were not without their effect. I am staying with some friends, and I share the advantage of their governess. And Mr. Russell thinks I am not a stupid scholar."

"Russell!"

The name was very familiar to him.

"At Castle Point, a little way down the island," explained Perseverance. "They know you very well. Hugh Russell and I often talk about you."

Hugh Russell! A dagger thrust of jealousy went through Major Creston's heart. Hugh Russell, whom he remembered as a handsome, dashing young fellow! Was he, then, too late in his decision? Had some other hand gathered this exquisite wild flower?

And then, with the innocent hypocrisy of lovehood, he vowed that he had intended all along to visit the Russells, and accompanied Perseverance thither at once.

"Yes," said placid Mrs. Russell. "Is she not beautiful? She used to come to my Sunday school class, last summer, at the little Sandy Point chapel, and when her poor father died I took her to stay with me. And we are all so attached to her, and she is so lovely and winning. Quite like my own daughter."

Late that evening Major Creston went out on the stone-paved terrace, where Perseverance was sitting on the rail, looking up at the million golden stars which spanned the violet sky. She welcomed him with her quiet, self-possessed smile.

"Perseverance," he said, "you are seventeen years old, now?"

"Yes," she assented, "I am seventeen years old."

"Almost a woman," said he.

"Quite a woman," she responded. "Oh, it seems as if I had grown so many, many years older since poor father died, and—"

"Has any one spoken to you of—love?" he asked, abruptly.

"No," she answered, with gravity.

"But they will, sometime?"

"My friend that cannot be," for the people never shave there.

"That's another one of your infernal lies; they're as clean as shaven set of people as that is in the world. You're a nice man to be giving the town a bad name after you have left it. If it weren't for the word in the fashion to hit a parson, I'd knock your head off for you for your lies," cried the miner, getting madder every minute.

"My dear friend," said the minister imploringly, and evidently much disturbed for his safety, "there certainly must be some mistake. You do not mean to say that you were a barber in the Kingdom of Siam, where the people never shave?"

"Oh! I thought you were talking about Cheyenne," said the miner, as he fell back into his chair disgusted.

I was the only man who seemed to enjoy this amusing incident, and even I found it good policy to show as little disposition to laugh as possible. The stage rolled on for miles after it occurred.

The miner looked more intently than ever out of the window, and yet there was not an expression on his stolid face to indicate what his thoughts were. The preacher looked as intently out from the opposite side of the stage, and I spent my time watching the miner, looking at the strange region through which we were passing.—Correspondence Philadelphia Times.

"Will you promise me, Perseverance?" he gently reiterated.

"Yes," she answered.

And that was the way in which Major Creston, whose heart had been so long regarded by his lady friends as an invulnerable fortress, won the beautiful young wife who was as unlike the other belles of society as is the tropical blossom of the scarlet pomegranate to the commonplace red roses of the garden border.

And that was a strange meeting, a still stranger wedding, but a most happy marriage; and perhaps this is the most satisfactory record that any love affair can leave.

But I love you now, Perseverance—sweet, precious treasure of my soul! he went in, reading some dim encouragement in the downcast eyes, the red, quivering mouth. "I will not let you go until you promise to be my wife. You have saved my life once, and it is in your power to save it from further shipwreck now."

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leaped among them, and off they flew in a great fright. The same thing was repeated several times.

Finally, they flew up and lighted upon a piece of clothes-line, which had been left for that purpose for them, and, putting their heads together, they chattered several minutes, then down they flew again upon the steps by the pieces of crackers.

After a few moments, in leaped the squirrel. To his surprise, however, the birds, instead of flying away as usual set upon him, picking and beating him with their wings. The squirrel beat a hasty retreat, and never returned to annoy them afterwards.

"Well, I have got some very interesting subjects I could write about," he continued, as the stage jolted along over the rough road, making it a little hard to distinguish what he was saying. "For five years I was a missionary at Siam and saw many strange and even startling things."

"What are these scenes you refer to?" I asked.

"Well, the punishment of criminals was exceedingly strange and is worthy of description. When a person is convicted of crime there he taken out to the public square for execution. His neck is bared well down upon the shoulders, and the executioner dips his finger in mud and with it makes a mark upon the neck of the doomed man."

"What kind of mud?" I shouted, the miner in a voice like a thunder-clap, while he glared at the parson savagely. I noticed that, although he kept peering out of the window, he had followed our conversation for some time.

"A sort of yellowish mud," replied the preacher, evidently disturbed by the miner's look and manner. But he continued.

"The executioner then takes his heavy sword and with one quick and decisive blow severs the victim's head from his body."

"It's a d—die," yelled the miner, in tones that might have been heard four miles. "The boys do occasionally hang a horse-thief there, and the town has a pretty bad name, but they never cut people's heads off. There ain't only the sword in the whole place, and that belongs to a militia captain and wouldn't cut the head off a turnip."

"But I was missionary there for five years," meekly interposed the minister.

"And I was a barber there for seven years, and I never shaved you, neither."

"My friend that cannot be," for the people never shave there.

"That's another one of your infernal lies; they're as clean as shaven set of people as that is in the world. You're a nice man to be giving the town a bad name after you have left it. If it weren't for the word in the fashion to hit a parson, I'd knock your head off for you for your lies," cried the miner, getting madder every minute.

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