

their chief, they had learned to respect the female character, and where she had expected the grossest violence, she had met only with kindness.

By the aid of her new friends, Isabella was enabled to lay aside the humble garment which had been provided for her by the mistress of the cottage, and appear in robes more suited to the daughter of a noble house; she now also often wandered with them amid the wild scenery of the mountain, and gathered the wild flowers that bloomed in rich luxuriance on its rugged sides. Despite her anxiety respecting the future, she enjoyed more of happiness than she had known since she was torn from her home, or than she had thought she could know until home with its sweet delights again had smiled upon her. Several weeks passed away;—St. Maury, though slowly recovering was still too feeble to leave his bed, but sorrow had departed from the heart of his sisters and the cloud of care no longer rested upon the dark brows of the band. Long they had remained inactive, and they now looked forward with joy, to the time when their gallant chief, again would lead them to new adventures.

It was a lovely evening.—Isabella and Blanche had just returned from a long ramble, and were twining a wreath of wild flowers amid their flowing ringlets, when Annette entered the apartment. She playfully assisted them; and when the simple arrangement was completed, she drew the arm of Isabella through her own, and, followed by Blanche, led her from the apartment. They passed along the subterranean gallery for a short distance, and then entered a large and noble apartment. Isabella started back, for by the dim shadowy light of one small lamp, she discovered that she was in the presence of the robber chief, but Annette led her gently onward until they reached the side of the couch on which he reclined, and then, in a few words, informed him, who was her companion. St. Maury extended his hand, and in a feeble voice, bade her welcome to his mountain home.

The eyes of Isabella were fixed on the face of the sufferer; wasted as he was by suffering, his countenance yet exhibited traces of much youthful beauty, and, with feelings of mingled pity and dread, she took his offered hand. He made some inquiries respecting the means by which she became the inmate of his home, by which she was convinced that he had been kept in ignorance of her being there. She briefly answered his inquiries, spoke of the kindness which she had experienced, not only from his sisters, but from the men, and expressed her hope that his generosity would restore her to her home.

"And do you think that willingly I would resign so fair a prize?" he asked, as he fixed his dark eyes upon her, until she shrank from their piercing glance; "but leave me now, for I am ill, and feel fatigue fast stealing o'er me!"

Isabella and Blanche retired, leaving Annette to administer to the wants of her suffering brother. They reached the apartment of the former, and Isabella, pale with emotion, threw herself on her couch, and burst into tears. The words of St. Maury seemed to her the death-knell of her only hope, so long had she been the victim of hope deferred, and now it seemed to her that her doom was sealed. Blanche flew to her side and passing her arm gently around her, inquired the cause of her grief, and strove to soothe it.

"Dearest Blanche," cried Isabella, "Must I then resign all hopes of ever leaving this dreadful place! of ever again beholding my own loved home, my parents and the brothers who love me well! Oh! can I, must I resign the cherished hope of beholding them once more!"

"And why, dear lady, do you thus despair! how has your meeting with my brother thus distressed you? Believe me, he is generous and humane, and from him you have naught to fear!"

"But when I named to him my wish to return to my home, did he not refuse to grant it?"

"Nay, he said he 'would not willingly resign so fair a prize!'

"And what man that ever beheld the beautiful lady Isabella, would not say that? but I repeat it, from his generosity you have much to hope, and both my sister and myself, much as we should regret your loss, would join to plead your cause, and from St. Maury we have never asked a boon in vain!"

Isabella pressed her cheeks to the lips of her companion, in token of the gratitude she could not speak, and the bright vision of hope again regained its empire in her heart.

Several days passed by, and Isabella saw no more of St. Maury, but from his sisters she learned that he was slowly regaining his health; and she looked forward to the time with hope and fear, when she again might throw herself upon his mercy, and solicit his aid in being restored to her home. At length the dreaded, hoped-for hour arrived. Annette entered her chamber, and in tones of affection and kindness, informed her that St. Maury desired her presence. Isabella arose to accompany her, but overcome by her emotion, she sunk again to her seat. The crisis had arrived on which her future all depended, and her fortitude for a moment gave way, and she felt unable to meet it. With many words of kind endearment,