

anxious for the safety of his charge. His fears increased as the sky darkened and the wind rose.

Casting off from the wharf, Leighton hurried away in search of his friends. He hadn't been gone many minutes, when, to his horror, he observed the boat, with the ladies alone in it, scudding out from the inlet under a flying jib, and with the rudder apparently fouled by a submerged sail. As the wind was now blowing a gale from the north, the little boat, with its panic-stricken inmates, when it emerged from the inlet darted down the lake with the speed of the Furies. Leighton hoisted every inch of canvas his yacht could safely carry, and bore hotly down in pursuit. As he gained upon the fugitives, he shouted to them some words of encouragement, which they sadly needed, for, to add to their fright, night came on and the rain began to pour.

By the time Leighton overtook the ladies, their boat had been driven miles down the lake; and the rescuer saw that, as they had passed the up-going steamer, which he had vainly tried to intercept, the only thing now to be done was to seek shelter, as well as safety, in some accessible cove. Drawing alongside, he transferred the ladies to his own boat, took theirs in tow, and steered for what seemed a safe place to land. As the storm increased there was no time to look for house or hut, in which, could they find such, they might take shelter; and of course it was out of the question to beat up to Maplehurst in the face of the wind. Whatever anxiety might be felt at the hotel about the fugitives, the report of those on the steamer, who saw the rescue, Leighton concluded, would allay fears. It was thus, at any rate, that the young artist reasoned. Though the ladies were not only fearful of spending a night by the now gloomy shore, but were apprehensive of the effects of the drenching which all had received, they gratefully, however, put themselves under the charge of their gallant and considerate rescuer.

Ere long Leighton was lucky in striking a suitable inlet. Coasting along its wind-sheltered shore, he was fortunate to find an old camping ground, with a shelving rock approach from the water, and a rudely extemporized wharf. He quickly steered alongside, tied up his boat, got the ladies out, and, with a rather dim lantern light groped his way to a comparatively commodious shanty which he had descried from the landing. Though deserted, the shanty was fairly clean, and fortunately the roof was weatherproof.

After housing the ladies and securing the place as much as possible from the violence of the storm, Leighton returned to the boat to get from its locker a bundle of shawls and rugs, which, in view of the morrow's expedition had been stowed there that afternoon. The locker also contained the afternoon's purchases at the village—a supply of coffee, biscuits and canned provisions. Returning with these to the shanty, and being a man of resource, he set about making a fire, which was now possible, as the wind had fallen and the dark rain-clouds had blown over the lake. He had lights and a hatchet, and going a little way into the dense woods he got sufficient dry twigs to start a fire, and there was plenty of drift timber on the beach to keep it going. Putting a kettle of water on the blazing logs he made another excursion into the woods for dry branches, as a night's bedding for the ladies, and cut material for a rudely constructed couch.

In the meanwhile the ladies had divested each other of their wet outer-garments and were now warming themselves by the camp fire, wrapped in the dry shawls which Leighton's happy forethought had provided. Both ladies had by this time recovered from their fright, and with more complacency than could have been imagined they resigned themselves to a night's lodging in the woods. If they had the least fear, Leighton assured them, he would act as sentinel by their hut, and he playfully added, that if they had any appetite they wouldn't go supperless to bed. To their credit be it said, they were less anxious about their supper than concerned as to how Leighton was to spend the night. Of this, the young artist's disinterestedness, not to speak of his gallantry, gave him no concern. At any personal sacrifice he was only too happy in serving the now idol of his heart.

What thoughts of Leighton the while were coursing through the brain of the idol herself, we can but dimly conjecture. Naturally enough, on her lips she had nothing but thankfulness for her own and her companion's deliverer. In her heart was there any feeling for him deeper than gratitude? Time, aided by a chance discovery on the morrow, was ere long to disclose.

In the meantime supper had been partaken, they had got themselves cheerily warmed by the fire, the storm had blown past, and the scene was brightened by the advent of a full moon. Long the three sat by the blazing logs, Leighton enlivening the evening by telling them, by request, the story of his life, and recounting a number of adventures he at various times had met with in the woods. In the recital of the events in his own history, both ladies, and, need we say it? the Lady Mercedes especially, manifested a lively interest. That Leighton had in the beautiful widow a rapt listener, the sweet pensive face beside him, on which the moon and the blazing pile shone, and the occasional interruptions of her sympathetic voice, were gratifying proof. Like Othello, when relating to Desdemona the chapter of his woes, he had the felicity of receiving Lady Mercedes' compassionate interest.

The night was far advanced ere the little group by the camp-fire broke up, and Leighton at last urged the ladies to seek rest. Up to the present he had not been in a hurry to see them retire for the night, for with the passing

of the storm, and the advent of the clear full moon, he had not abandoned the hope of getting back to the hotel with his charge. To this project the rough water in the lake was the only obstacle, coupled with the timidity of the ladies to undertake what to their mind was a hazardous trip. The idea was therefore abandoned, and with a cordial good-night to the artist, which expressed no little gratitude for their preservation and comparative comfort, the ladies retired to their cabin. Their protector renewed the logs on the camp-fire, donned a big tarpaulin over his great-coat, and set his companions the example of composedly wooing, on a bed of pine twigs, sweet repose for the night.

CHAPTER III.

LEIGHTON was early abroad the next morning, not only to renew the camp-fire, but to look abroad for the deficiencies of his boat's larder, as material for breakfast. After hooking and preparing for the frying-pan, a good-sized trout, he set out in the row-boat to explore the cove in which they had found shelter for the night, and to procure, at a settler's farm he espied near by, fresh milk and rolls for breakfast. Securing these and a few other dainties to tempt the matutinal appetite, he returned to the landing in time to have all prepared ere the ladies were abroad and had completed their camp toilet. When the *al fresco* meal was ready, his interesting charges appeared on the scene, shouting a gay morning accost, and profuse in their assurances that they had enjoyed a most comfortable and undisturbed rest. They commended Leighton for his thoughtfulness in foraging so successfully for their morning meal, and playfully complimented him on his attainments as a maid-in-waiting and cook. Leighton rejoined by telling them that his proficiency in the culinary arts would be best gauged by the extent of the meal the ladies made and their honest enjoyment of it. He had not long to wait for the practical evidences that their appetites were unimpaired and that the breakfast was appreciated.

The day opened auspiciously, though the lake was still rough; and after breakfast they all concluded that they would be in no hurry to return to Maplehurst. The woods were inviting to walk in, and round their side of the cove there was a beautiful shingly beach. Here Leighton took a stroll, first with Lady Mercedes, who was in the gayest of spirits, and later on with the equally bright and vivacious Mrs. Kinglake. The latter spoke gaily of the novel experience they had had over night, in what she called "the wilds of Canada," and took occasion to say to Leighton how much both she and Lady Mercedes were indebted to him for his more than brotherly solicitude and many acts of kindness. The last night's adventure seemed to create a bond, which had not hitherto existed, between this lady and the artist; and in proof of this she confided to his hungry ear not only some facts about her widowed companion's early life, but gave him some hints in explanation of the Lady Mercedes' ill-disguised interest in himself.

The Lady Mercedes, she told him, was the only daughter of an old and once wealthy member of the British Peerage, who wished to improve his fortunes by his daughter's allying herself in marriage with a wealthy neighbour, who had become possessed of some of the family estates and agreed to surrender them as the price of the Lady Mercedes' hand. This neighbouring magnate was an object of loathing to her friend, on account not only of a stain on his moral character but because he was slightly deformed. Another reason for her antipathy to the proposed suitor lay in the fact that she had already lost her heart to a young Scottish artist, named Wilton, whom she had met on the continent, and with whom, to escape the hunchback-lover forced upon her by her father, she eloped and married. Unhappily, continued Mrs. Kinglake, her conjugal life, in consequence of a heart-rending occurrence, did not extend beyond the brief honeymoon. The loving couple, after the clandestine marriage, had gone from Scotland direct to Switzerland, where they had first met, and where the happy groom wished to make some sketches, to be added to in the Tyrol, and afterwards worked up for the Academy.

The Wiltons soon proceeded to Innsbruck; there after a brief halt, they set out for a village at the foot of the mountains. Here they wandered over the Alps, sometimes with a guide, and sometimes without, both enjoying the magnificent spectacle daily before their eyes, and the young husband securing a portfolio of sketches of some of the finest art-bits in the vicinity. One day, in the fourth week of the honeymoon, the two young people, as usual, started off for the artist-husband's sketching-ground, but first turned aside to witness a mountaineer's wedding, at a chapel at the foot of an ascent in the Alps which the Wiltons intended making later on in the day. Young Wilton made some studies of the picturesque group round the altar in the chapel, his lovely bride—her husband being himself of the Roman faith—joining devoutly in the service. Before the ceremony was over, the artist came and knelt by the side of his wife. Alas! it was the last act of 'worship the loving and hitherto inseparable couple were together to take part in.

After leaving the chapel the Wiltons proceeded with their design, to ascend to a new region in the mountains, accompanied by the officiating priest of the district, who was going to a monastery beyond the Gleichen Pass, and who undertook to show the Wiltons over part of the road. Hand-in-hand the two young people climbed the steep ascent, the artist-lover turning every now and then to the good father to ask information as to the means of reach-

ing points in the mountains, where, in subsequent excursions, he might set up his easel. At last they came to the pass which was to detach the priest from the party, and here, on a jutting crag overlooking a deep gorge, through which dashed a raging torrent, the Wiltons determined to rest for a while, and now said farewell to their father-guide. Before the priest had gone half a mile on his way, the artist, seeking a point from which to sketch the defile at his feet, daringly ventured to plant his sketching-stool on an insecure footing in advance of where he had left his wife; and, while the latter was calling to him to retrace his steps the jutting ledge suddenly gave way and the lover-husband fell with the dislodged mass of rock to the bottom.

The piercing cry of the terror-stricken wife, as she saw what had happened, reached the ear of the priest and hastily recalled him to her side. His first care was for the unhappy wife. She had fallen to the ground in a swoon, and it was sometime before the good father could recall her to consciousness. With great nerve she realized that she must brace herself to return to the village, and there get help to undertake the search for her husband. In this she was greatly assisted by the compassionate priest, whose heart was wrung by the agonized look of the poor bereft creature whom he conducted back to the village.

"I can tell you nothing more connectedly," said Leighton's companion, as she walked the beach by his side; "the whole subsequent story, she added, is so pitiful. Mercedes' husband's remains were never found, and it is supposed that they were swept away by the torrent at the foot of the gorge into which he was so cruelly precipitated. For weeks the poor desolate wife haunted the place refusing to be removed and piteously refusing to be comforted. I and my husband," said Mrs. Kinglake, "who loved Mercedes almost as much as we loved each other, tardily heard of what had happened, and, hastening from England to the Tyrol, insisted on taking the disconsolate widow from the scene of her brooding trouble. For six months afterwards we travelled about with her, to endeavour to divert her mind, but at first we only partly succeeded. We then all returned to England, and Mercedes has since lived with us, with the occasional visit to a rich aunt, as a dearly loved sister. After what I have told you," confidently remarked Mrs. Kinglake to her sympathetic auditor, "you will understand, I daresay, the interest Mercedes feels in the artist profession, and how strangely she was affected by the first sight of you in the chapel at Quebec. Mercedes indeed told me that the meeting with you reminded her much of the wedding scene which she and her husband had witnessed at the foot of the Tyrol mountains within a few hours of his dreadful death."

"I spoke just now," resumed Mrs. Kinglake, "of poor Wilton's death; but I must tell you of a rather odd circumstance in the unhappy story, to help to unravel which has partially brought Mercedes out with us to Canada. She has a curious idea that her husband is still alive, but that he received such injuries in his fall from the cliff as prevented him from letting his wife know of his escape from death, and that those injuries so preyed upon his mind, always sensitive to physical deformity, that he imposed silence upon his rescuers rather than be taken back, a bedridden hunchback, to his beautiful and queenly wife. This idea poor Mercedes has entertained for years; and it found a deeper lodgment in her mind, curiously enough," continued Mrs. Kinglake, "after reading an account in an English magazine of a similar incident, happening in Central America, and the details of which, woven into a story, were contributed to the magazine by a lady, resident, I believe, in your Canadian North-West."

"Why," interrupted Leighton, "that story was not by a lady; it was written by me. Was it not in *Belgravia* Lady Mercedes read it, and the signed name of the author was Francis Leighton?"

"What; do you really say so?" interposed Mrs. Kinglake. "But the author's Christian name was a woman's. It was Frances."

"Yes, you are quite right," rejoined Leighton, "but the printer made a mistake of a letter—an 'e' for an 'i,' and I didn't rectify the error, thinking that it would be an advantage to leave the publishers under the impression that their Canadian contributor was a lady."

"Well! well! this is a surprise indeed," said Mrs. Kinglake, "and so you are the author of the story. I must run and tell Mercedes."

At this juncture, as Mrs. Kinglake hurried off to find her companion, a boat-full of people from Maplehurst pulled into the bay in search of the storm-bound fugitives. In the boat were the man and the boy who were in charge of the ladies on the previous afternoon, and who, before the storm so suddenly swept down upon the lake, had gone ashore in Morgan's Bay to pick a few wild raspberries, leaving the ladies in the boat, which was lightly tied to a log at the landing. They had been witness to the scene which occurred, of a gust of wind snapping the worn rope which moored the boat, and the speedy drifting out to the lake of the small craft, with its half-frenzied occupants. Their own dismay was allayed, they informed Leighton, when they saw his boat scudding past the entrance to the bay, bearing the artist to the rescue; and they were further relieved in their minds when, after a long tramp through the woods back to the hotel, they heard that the steamer in its up bound trip had reported