

discovered. One of those wretched negroes has betrayed us, and now we shall all be put to death. Oh! that it should have come to this, such a beautiful plot as it was! It put me in mind of the *Conjuration de Cinna* at Theatre Français. The traitor! the black monster! the wretch! . . . Madame d'Auban, you are like a statue, like a stone; you feel nothing."

"For God's sake, be silent; give me time to think," said Mina's mother, pressing her hands to her brow. She remained motionless awhile, and when she lifted up her eyes Ontara was standing before her. He was speaking in a low, rapid manner, with various gesticulations, to Mina.

"What does he say?" asked her mother, who did not well understand the Natches' language.

"He says that at midnight all the white women and children will be taken to the square in the middle of the village, and each tied there to a stake, and at sunrise they will burn them to death. He asked the Sun, his father, not to kill me, because I was his little sister, and that he loves me, but the Sun will not listen to him, and says the white-skins must all die. And I do not want to live, if they kill you, mother." She threw herself into her arms, and sobbed on her bosom. "But, oh! what will my father do?"

Again Ontara spoke urgently to the weeping child.

"What does he say? What does he say?" asked the distracted mother.

"He says if I will creep out of the hut through that hole to-night, before they carry us away to the square, that he will wait for me outside, and take me to his boat and across the river to the land of the Choktaws."

Madame d'Auban raised her heart to Heaven for help and for guidance. It was a dreadful moment. The agony of that decision was almost unbearable. She fixed her eyes with a wild, imploring expression on the young Indian's face. He seemed to understand the mute question, the imploring appeal. Quickly he drew the crucifix from his breast, made the gesture which according to Indian custom signifies an oath, and laid his hand on Mina's head.

Madame d'Auban knew that this meant a solemn promise of protection. She had seen that the boy had a good heart and a noble spirit. She instinctively found words in which to express, in a way he partly understood, that she would trust him; and Mina clung to her, and said, "Mother, do not be afraid; Ontara is good, and I will bring back my father in time to save you."

The shades of evening had fallen; the deepest silence reigned in the hut, where the captives and the Indian companions were reposing. Repose—strange word for such an hour of mortal agony as one of those human beings was enduring, as she lay motionless on the mat with her child by her side! She clasped her hand in her own, as if to make sure she was not gone; but go she must, for the words which Ontara had spoken were true, and the doom of the captives had been pronounced. A reckless woman's fatal imprudence had done its work, and the whole tribe of the Natches had risen in wild fury. They would have slain their victims at once,

had it not been that they rejoiced in the anticipation of their protracted sufferings. Already the European and negro slaves were being dragged from the huts of their masters, and led to the centre of the village, where the sachems were assembled. The Indians were brandishing their tomahawks, erecting stakes, and carrying ropes wherewith to bind their victims. The tramp of their feet, the sounds of wailing from the women, and the cries of children, were heard in the portion of the palace where Madame d'Auban was confined. She felt there was no time to lose. Her lips were pressed close to Mina's ear. "My child," she whispered, "the time is come when I must trust you to God and to your guardian angel. Remember, my daughter, your mother's last words. Do not cry, my own: the least sob might be heard. Be always good, Mina, and the Blessed Virgin will be thy mother. God bless thee, dearest! Now, creep away; God bless thee; God guide thee!" One long, silent, ardent, passionate embrace, and then by the light of the moon shining through the planks of the hut, the mother watched the child gliding out through the narrow opening in the wall.

She was gone. Gone whither? gone with whom?—a young savage for her guide. Had she been mad, to part with her thus? Her heart almost ceased to beat. She stretched herself on the ground near the opening through which the child had passed, and gazed on the meadow illuminated by the brilliant moonlight. Distinctly she discerned Mina's figure, bounding over the dewy grass with the swiftness of a young antelope, and keeping pace with the Indian, who had joined her. The two forms on which her strained eyes were gazing, disappeared from her sight. They plunged into the thickets which led to the river. She turned round and hid her face in a heap of dried leaves on which the child's head had rested a moment before to stifle the least sound from passing her lips, to still, by a strong effort, the agony which was convulsing her frame.

It was almost a relief when they came to fetch her away from the hut. No great search was made for Mina. The woman who was set to guard the captives said a few words to the messengers, which apparently accounted for her absence. She made a show of zeal, however, by showering reproaches on Madame d'Auban, and dragging her roughly to the door of the hut. To the mother's heart ill-usage was welcome; the sight of the stakes to which women and children were being bound, the cruelty of the Indians, their savage glee, a strange sort of consolation. Had her own life been spared, the thought that she had sent her child unguarded save by her Indian playmate, into the wilderness would have maddened her. Now that she herself was about to die, she felt she could commit her without reserve to God's protection; now she could murmur with intense gratitude, "She is gone;" and her mental vision fixed itself with an intensity which was almost like sight on the thought of the crucifix on the breast of her young guide. Through the long hours of that terrible night, the Christian heroine bore her lofty part, and during the next dreadful day, and when the shades of evening fell, and again through the night,