

THE TWO BRIDES.

CHAPTER XXIII.—Continued.

"What do you prophesy of my little Rose?" Mr. D'Arcy had asked him, on the eve of their departure for home. "That I shall be blessed with possessing my darling grandpapa for twenty years more," Rose hastened to reply, as she looked up beseechingly at Mr. Biham.

"That you shall be the joy of his life till his latest day, my dear child," answered that gentleman. "That is a magnificent prophecy," said Mr. D'Arcy, laughing; "but I do not believe it."

"Should I point out the day and month when he is to leave all things to follow?" "Her husband," said her grandfather, merrily. "The imperious and irresistible call of Love!" replied the priest. How many years is it now since you called me to Augusta to unite her father and mother?" he continued.

"I remember the day well," said Mr. D'Arcy. "And I remember, too, your prophesying so truly of the happiness our dear Mary was to shed around her—our parents, husband, children, servants, all within her own home and outside it. And so they set out, but without old Hunter."

"Our travellers met with Hiwassee and Jamie McDuffie at Lebanon. A most joyous meeting it was, amid the dangers that beset them, though it did not all except the Kentuckians, that had disasters that had of late darkened the home of the D'Arcys. Still, joy predominated in the minds of the girls. For they knew that, of all living men, the faithful Cherokee could best guide them through the labyrinth of mountain-paths between them and their home."

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sw-mill at a favorable spot on the creek, which he had his three gallant sons worked to their small profit, floating the heavy plank down to the broad river in the valley beneath, when the waters were at their highest. It was a wild spot for a human habitation. But the timber was fertile on the steep mountain-slopes, and the whole year round, and the D'Arcy's large and solidly-built dwelling was never without plenty of game and plenty of deer, and plenty of wood, and plenty of independence.

The proprietor was an old friend of the D'Arcy's. Indeed, he had worked for the founder of Fairy Dell before the latter destroyed mansion had acquired the property in which the incident occurred. And Francis D'Arcy had been with Thomas Coolidge, a true friend in more than one emergency. So far the Coolidges, who had the reputation of being thrifty and well-to-do in the world, had been unmolested by the marauding hands that disturbed the country. Probably these lawless men had a wholesome fear of the Coolidge rifles, which rarely, if ever, missed their aim. But once or twice since the beginning of the present mania for single warfare, of no prepossessing appearance, had dropped in under one pretext or another.

This circumstance had made the family suspicious, and the father and sons agreed among themselves that the house should not be left unprotected by day, and that they should never absent themselves by night. Old Thomas, however, had two or three days before the 25th returned from Augusta, where he had withdrawn a handsome deposit in one of the city banks, alarmed, as he well might be, at the commercial ruin which was already falling on the South. This journey and its motive had not been unobserved in the neighborhood of Asheville, little as Thomas Coolidge and his sons troubled the inhabitants with visits or business transactions.

He was a not unpleasing type of the North Carolina mountaineer, this Thomas Coolidge, whom his sixty years of unceasing toil had hardened into the roughness of the oak. He was tall, broad-shouldered, with abundant gray hair that shaded a face as brown as mahogany, but lit up by a pair of large blue eyes, and a smile as sunny as that of a girl of sixteen. His three sons were even more stalwart than their father, with frank, open countenance, abundant black hair, and an easy, cordial manner that bespoke a fearless spirit and a warm heart. Their two sisters were married and living at some distance. Their mother, an intelligent and mild-mannered dame of forty-five, showed signs of robust health and hard work, but bore no mark of decay. She was now aided in her household duties by a niece—a handsome girl of nineteen, named Nancy, not unknown to Rose D'Arcy and her sisters.

The whole family had come out to meet their visitors, and stood in front of their spacious and comfortable dwelling houses, every countenance beaming with pleasure and flashing a hearty welcome to their guests. "Well, Thomas, you see I had to go all the way to Spain in order to pay you and Mrs. Coolidge the visit I have often promised you," said Mr. D'Arcy, shaking warmly the former's hand. "And you, Mrs. Coolidge, I am so happy to see you with your good looks and your good health."

"Thank you, sir," the good dame replied. "I reckon it would improve my good looks any day to see yourself and Miss Rose, and her bonny sisters, and Mr. Charles, who is grown to such a fine gentleman."

"I don't think," said Mr. D'Arcy, "that the Kentuckians would do us any harm. They are now safe in the county jail, and I reckon they will get the water for all their ill deeds, or we'll give them a dose of lead, if they get free again."

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