

stopped with a harsh creak, my uncle and aunt stood still, with their toes pointed for the next step, and Cato pushed through the servants, almost sweeping the piceaninny from Chloe's arms, in his mad haste to reach the door. Every eye was bent in that direction.

A tall, handsome young man entered, muffled more than the season required, in a large travelling cloak, and leaning on his arm a young female,—slight and graceful she seemed, but her step was timid, and as she met the gaze of so many enquiring eyes, she drew the riding hood closely round her face, and clung trembling to her companion's arm. He whispered a word as if to reassure her, and then asked for President W., with whom he had urgent business.

Every one of us in an instant comprehended the scene. My uncle is often called upon to perform the marriage ceremony, for being a magistrate he has a legal right to do so; and there are many persons who still maintain the old puritan notion, that marriage is strictly but a civil contract, and who therefore prefer the services of a justice to those of a clergyman on such occasions. The laws of New Hampshire do not require either publication or certificate of banns to render the contract legal; but in Massachusetts, our custom of posting the names of the parties, puts a secret marriage out of the question. My uncle's mansion stands on the boundary line of the two provinces, and is mighty convenient for such fugitives as have a mind to give their friends the slip, and think they are discreet enough to manage their own love affairs in their own way; so my uncle is often obliged,—sometimes sorely against his better judgment,—to unite a runaway couple.

Now here was a little romance enacting, without doubt; the bearing of the fugitives betrayed their secret; they were not of a common class evidently, neither would any young people from the country round choose such an unseasonable hour for their nuptials. All of us were in a state of charming excitement; but unwilling to embarrass the strangers, we turned away, and suffered them to pass in unobserved.

The President, in the meanwhile, was placed in rather a false position, and felt his dignity somewhat compromised, at being thus surprised in the act of dancing before a crowd of young people, when his services were required in the capacity of a grave justice. But his dignified self-possession never deserts him, neither does his somewhat precise gallantry, and to no woman is he more gallant than to his wife; perhaps no one exacts it more. So he handed my aunt to her seat with grave formality, not omitting the usual ceremony

of a profound bow to her stately courtesy; and then returned to greet the young people who waited in the hall, the man evidently with much impatience. He spoke a few low words to my uncle, who directly led the way to his library.

I was standing a little apart with cousin Tom, puzzling my memory to recall some distinct impression of the gentleman, for his features seemed familiar to me. My uncle passed along, and with a smile bade us both follow him. I was right glad in my heart, for I had a longing desire to see the bride's face; and I knew he wished us to be present as witnesses to the marriage, the bridal pair having brought no friends with them. When we entered the room, they were already standing before my uncle; neither book, nor ring, nor formal ritual, were required; but in a silence almost chilling, they waited to hear those few words—so brief, but full of meaning!—which were about to link them in a bond which death alone could sever. The girl had thrown back her riding hood; she was pale with emotion, and trembled so violently that her lover was forced to throw his arm around her waist to support her. I now saw her face for the first time, and with what painful surprise. It was that of a most dearly loved friend, in whose happiness I had taken the warmest interest, and with whom I had often remonstrated against this very man, who now stood so proudly by her side.

With an eagerness which is always leading me to commit some folly, I sprang towards her, just as my uncle commenced his exordium, and exclaimed:

"Lucy Gray, what madness has brought you here?"

Her lover turned angrily, looking as if he could annihilate me, but I cared not for him—well did I now remember him. I thought only of Lucy, and she, poor girl, just lifted her sweet eyes to me, and sank back in a state of partial insensibility. I thought she was dying, for I never saw any one faint before, and in a great fright I began to pull off her hood, while Tom seized a tankard of cold water and dashed it over her face.

This was enough to bring back her senses, even had they left her more entirely; and directly her eyes opened, and a faint colour began to spread over her cheeks. She looked very lovely; one can scarcely fancy any being more delicately beautiful than she is, and she has such a gentle, sensitive nature, so affectionate and confiding. It is strange how she was ever wrought upon to leave a home where she was idolized, to follow the fortunes of that stern looking man! I begged