

There was no manse, and I boarded in the house of the chief member of my congregation, Mr. Michael Forrest, who owned a fine farm of four hundred acres close to the village.

The Red House Farm, as it was called from the colour of the paint Michael Forrest liberally bestowed on his buildings and fences, was in those days a pleasant place. There peace and plenty reigned, and everything within and without testified to good management, order and comfort.

My story opens in the parlour of the Red House, where, in the early afternoon of a splendid Indian summer day, a young man was writing at a desk placed under an open window that looked into a spacious verandah enclosed by cedar posts round which climbing plants were twined in picturesque profusion. This "best room" was never used by the family except on Sundays and festal occasions, and at other times was given up to the minister, the Rev. Gilbert Gray, who writes this narrative.

The hurry and bustle of dinner were over, the dinner things cleared away and the kitchen and dining-room made tidy. Mrs. Forrest was sitting in her rocking chair by the sunny kitchen window, and, her knitting in her lap, was taking her afternoon nap, her cat curled up at her feet. All was quiet in the house till light steps came tripping down stairs, and two pretty girls entered the verandah, sitting down on the high-backed bench of rustic work, each holding some bit of light needle-work in her hands. One was the only child of Farmer Forrest and his wife; the other a niece, brought up by Mrs. Forrest from infancy, and filling the place of a second daughter.

I have said they were two pretty girls, but Marjory Forrest was beautiful. She was a tall, graceful blonde, fair and pale, with rose-red lips, violet eyes, and hair the very colour of sun-light. She looked like the heroine of some happy love poem—happy, I say, for there was no hint of tragedy in her pure, serene face. Celia Morris had a Hebe-like face and form, with bright chestnut hair, merry brown eyes and a laughing mouth, showing two rows of pearly teeth. She was just eighteen; two years younger than Marjory.

They made a charming picture in their pretty print dresses, fresh and spotless, their bright heads bending over their work, and catching the changing lights and shades coming in through the autumn-tinted leaves. But the picture darkened and dissolved as a handsome young man stood in the open arch of the doorway. The girls smiled a welcome, and, taking of his hat, he stepped in and threw himself down on a pile of mats made of the husks of Indian corn. He was the son of the head of the great lumber firm of Mason and Company. His father was a hard-working, self-made man, but he prided himself on bringing up his son to be a gentleman. Not an idle gentleman, however, and he had lately sent the young man to the mills to gain some practical knowledge of business before admitting him to a junior partnership. As there had been many satisfactory dealings between Mr. Mason and Farmer Forrest, Leonard Mason was made welcome at the Red House, and speedily established himself on a friendly footing. His frank, unaffected manner, and freedom from what Mrs. Forrest called "city airs," pleased the farmer and his wife; his knowledge of music and light literature charmed Marjory and Celia. The young people were on the most familiar and friendly terms, but Leonard's attentions were so equally divided between them that if he had a preference only a very close observer could have discerned it.

To-day he did not respond as readily as usual to Celia's lively chatter, and he soon got up from his seat on the mats, and, placing himself against one of the posts, from which point of vantage he could better see Marjory's face, said, "I am going to Hamilton."

Marjory looked up with a startled glance. Celia laughed a quick little laugh as she asked, "not this very minute, are you?"

"I am going to-morrow; my father wants me."

"Well, I suppose you mean to come back again," said Celia, lightly.

"Yes, but not for a week. Shall you miss me very much while I am away?"

"Why, of course; there won't be any one to sing 'Come into the garden, Maud.' Will there Marjory?"

"No, indeed," said Marjory.

"I wonder which of you will miss me most. If I knew, I would ask her to give me a lock of her hair to wear round my wrist as a keepsake."

Celia's eyes were fixed on Leonard with an eager questioning expression, but he was looking at Marjory, who kept her eyes steadily on her work, though a faint blush was stealing over her face.

"I'll tell you what we must do," said Leonard. "I'll get two long and two short lots, and you must both draw. Whoever draws two long lots loses a lock of her hair to me. 'I know you won't refuse me,' he continued pleadingly, 'because there may be an accident to the train I am going on, and I may be killed, and then you'd be sorry for having been so unkind.'"

"What nonsense," cried Celia.

"Not at all," said Leonard, "wise men of old believed in the judgment of lots." And breaking off a slender vine-tendrill he divided it into two long and two short lots, arranging them with some mysterious manipulations between his fingers. Then, kneeling on one knee, he held them to Marjory.

Slowly, with tremulous fingers and blushing cheeks,

Marjory drew a long lot. Leonard seemed going to say something, but checking himself held out the lots to Celia. Celia did not blush; she grew deathly pale as she drew out her lot. It was a short one.

"I see you don't intend to lose, Miss Celia," said Leonard.

I think I hear now the wild, hysterical laugh with which she answered him. Then, I did not heed it.

"If you draw a short one this time," said Leonard, as he again held the lots to Marjory, "we shall have to try again," but as he spoke the second long lot was in her hand.

"Oh, kind fortune!" cried Leonard.

He tried to make Marjory look at him, but she would not meet his eyes. Still, those subtle signs that lovers learn to read—the flickering flame on her cheek, the quivering of her lips and eyelids, who can say what—gave him courage. Snatching up her scissors, he held them over her head. "May I?" he asked beseechingly. With shy, timid grace she bent her fair head still lower; he felt the mute consent, and the next moment one long braid was severed from the rest and lying in his hand.

"Fasten it round my wrist with a true lover's knot," he whispered, softly touching her fingers with the braid. She took it at once, and as he pushed up his sleeve she wound it round his wrist, Leonard helping her to tie the mystic knot. Holding her hand, which did not try to escape, he drew her gently towards him and kissed the virgin lips that confidently met his.

At that moment a shadow, as if from the wild flight of a bird, passed before the window at which I sat, and swift as an arrow from a bow Celia darted out of the verandah. Till then I had seen and heard all that passed in a sort of stupor, like that which sometimes takes possession of one who listens to his death sentence, though every word is indelibly written on the tablets of his memory. Unwittingly I had been playing the part of an eavesdropper. Now consciousness returned, and, like a man coming out of a trance, I got up and left the room and the house.

I had walked fast and far before I returned to the Red House, and the moon, a brilliant hunter's moon, was flooding earth and heaven with light as I came in sight of the verandah. The inmates seemed all standing outside, among them a tall, finely-made young man, whom I at once recognized as Archie Jonson, farmer Forrest's nephew, generally supposed to be the heir to the Red House Farm. A marriage between him and Celia had been planned by the farmer and his wife while the cousins were children. Archie had always been devoted to Celia, and she had been fond of him till he tried to win her for his wife. Then, either from coyness or coquetry, she became cold and unresponsive. His entreaties for an immediate marriage were indignantly refused, and the utmost concession she would make was that after she was one and twenty she might think about it. A quarrel ensued, and, deeply wounded, Archie left his home. He was passionately fond of the water, and being known as a brave and skilful sailor he found no difficulty in obtaining the place of mate on one of the best schooners on the lakes.

I was surprised at seeing him, as he was not expected home until after the close of navigation, but still more astonished when he came to meet me before I reached the house.

"Where's Celia?" he called out as he came near.

"Celia?" I exclaimed, with a sudden feeling of alarm,

"Isn't she at home?"

"No; Marjory thought she went with you to the village."

"She hasn't been with me. I haven't seen her."

"My God!" he burst out passionately; "where can she be?"

"Perhaps she's hiding from you, for fun," I said.

"No; they had missed her before I got here."

The farmer was calling us to come on, and, as soon as we were near enough, he told us that shortly after dinner he had seen Celia running down the road to the bush.

"But you see," he said, "I was so taken aback by Leonard coming to ask me for Marjory, that I forgot I had seen her till this minute."

"She must have gone to get maple leaves for her Christmas wreath," said Marjory.

"But what keeps her so late?" said Mrs. Forrest.

"Why, you needn't be scared about her," said the farmer; "there's nothing to harm her. There hasn't been a bear or a wolf, or even a rattlesnake, seen in these woods for forty years; nor no such vermin as tramps, neither."

"There's that swamp," rejoined his wife; "she's always hunting for some sort of weeds in it, and I often think she'll fall in and get drowned."

"She couldn't be drowned if she didn't walk into the middle of it on purpose," said the farmer. "But where's Archie going?"

"To bring home Celia," Archie called back, as he walked off at a pace that soon took him out of sight.

"I'm sure I'm glad he's gone after her," said Mrs. Forrest. "She might have hurt her foot on a stub or a stone, and not be able to walk."

I suggested that Leonard and I had better follow Archie, and Leonard said he was just going to make the same proposal.

"Archie won't want you," said the farmer. "If Celia has hurt herself, he can carry her home as easy as a baby; and like the job, too, I guess."

"Oh, let them go, father!" said Marjory. "You see how anxious mother is, and so am I."

"All right, let them go if they like," said the farmer; adding in an irritable tone, that showed he was himself getting uneasy, "women are always making a fuss about nothing."

The moon was at the full, and the sky without a cloud. Every cluster of golden rod and purple aster along the fence, every stick and stone on the road were as clearly seen as at noonday. Leonard and I hurried on filled with an unspoken dread. The road was at first in a straight line, but on coming to a piece of marshy land it turned away to the bush; a path from this turning led to the swamp, a few yards distant.

These swamps are often places of surpassing beauty. There every species of wild fowl make their nests and rear their young broods, and the brilliant flowers and luxuriant leaves of all kinds of water plants form lovely aquatic gardens, richly coloured with ever-varying tints from April to December, and always the delight of an artist's eye. Round the edges of the swamp the water is usually shallow enough for the hunters to wade through in pursuit of their game, but in the centre it is often dangerously deep, and only to be crossed in a skiff or canoe.

Where the road divided, Leonard would have kept a straight course to the bush, but a terrible fear dragged me in the other direction. "No; come this way!" I cried, and he turned and followed me in silence. Faster and faster we hurried on till we reached the swamp. There a heart-rending sight met our eyes. Archie Jonson was struggling through the beds of water-lilies, reeds, and rushes that obstructed his way, clasping Celia in his arms. Her long hair fell down dank and dripping, her arms hung stiff and lifeless, her face gleamed ghastly white under the strong moonlight. She was dead! "Drowned! drowned!"

As we ran towards him, Archie laid her on a grassy mound. Her limbs were not distorted and her face was composed, except that her eyes were wide open as if in startled surprise. "You are a doctor as well as a minister," Archie said to me, hoarsely; "see if there is any life left."

There was none. She had been dead for hours. As I said so, Archie sprung up from his kneeling attitude beside Celia, and turned to Leonard with a deadly rage and hatred in his eyes.

"This is your doing," he said.

"Mine!" exclaimed Leonard. "Are you mad?"

"I am not mad. There is Celia, the girl I loved better than my life, lying dead before my eyes, and you are her murderer!"

"Good Heavens!" cried Leonard, "What do you mean?"

"The shock has been too much for him," I said.

"Archie, my poor fellow, you don't know what you are saying."

"I know very well what I am saying. He—that man there—fooled Celia, poor little innocent child, with his fine flattering manners till she thought he was making love to her, and when she found out he had only been play-acting with her, she couldn't bear it. It made her crazy, and she came down to the swamp and drowned herself. Oh, my God, she drowned herself! But it was he made her do it."

"I never made love to Celia in my life," said Leonard.

"I loved Marjory from the first hour I saw her."

"Oh, I dare say. You were only playing with Celia, but she thought you were in earnest. Listen to me, minister," he continued, controlling his passion with wonderful self-command; "I had a warning, but I was a blind idiot and did not take it. Three nights ago, I dreamed that I saw Celia standing on a bank sloping down to a big piece of water, and a man was standing beside her, and while I was looking on in a stupid kind of wonder, I saw she was slipping down towards the water and not able to stop herself, and she held out her hand to the man and cried to him to help her, but he turned right round and went up the bank. Then I woke, and the dream seemed so real it made me feel queer; but I never had any belief in dreams, and when I got up and went out into the daylight, I laughed at myself for being frightened at a nightmare and thought no more about it. But the next night the dream came again; and this time I saw Celia throw herself into the water; and the man stood on the bank and looked on. Then I knew the dream was sent to warn me of some danger to Celia, though I couldn't tell what it meant, and I came home as quick as I could. And the first person I saw was the man I had seen in my dream—the man I am looking at now, and I heard he was going to marry Marjory; and Celia could not be found. Then when aunt Forrest mentioned the swamp, the meaning of the dream came to me like a flash, and I made for the swamp, but I had come too late—too late to save her, but not too late to revenge her wrongs."

I attempted to reason with him as well as I could, and tried to show him how wicked and absurd it was to let a dream—a nightmare, as he had himself called it—put such wild fancies into his head.

"And you cannot know that she drowned herself; it may have been an accident," I said.

"It was no accident; she drowned herself in her madness. When I got to the swamp I saw a bit of ribbon hanging on the reeds, and I went on till I came to the deep water; there I found her. She had not sunk very far down because her skirt had caught on a stake that stood