

SOMEBODY'S MOTHER.

The woman was old, and ragged and gray,
And bent with the child of a Winter's day;
The streets were white with a recent snow,
And the woman's feet with age were slow.

At the crowded crossing she waited long,
Jostled aside by the careless throng
Of human beings who passed her by,
Unheeding the glance of her anxious eye.

Down the street with laughter and shout,
Glad in the freedom of "school let out,"
Came happy boys, like a flock of sheep,
Hailing the snow piled white and deep:
Past the woman, so cold and gray,
Hastened the children on their way.

None offered a helping hand to her.
So weak and timid, afraid to stir,
Lest the carriage-wheels or the horses' feet
Should trample her down in the slippery street.

At last came out of the merry troop
The gayest boy of all the group;
He paused beside her and whispered low,
"I'll help you across, if you wish to go."

Her aged hand on his strong young arm
She placed, and so, without hurt or harm,
He guided the trembling feet along,
Proud that his own were young and strong:
Then back again to his friends he went,
His young heart happy and well content.

"For all she's aged, and poor, and slow,
And some one, some time, may lend a hand
To help my mother—you understand—
If ever she's poor and old and gray,
And her own dear boy so far away."

"Somebody's mother" bowed low her head
In her house that night, and the prayer she said
Was, "God be kind to that noble boy,
Who is somebody's son and pride and joy."

Faint was the voice, and worn and weak,
But Heaven lists when its chosen speak:
Angels caught the faltering word,
And "Somebody's Mother's" prayer was heard.

MACMILLAN.

UNDER MEETING BRANCHES.

"Square Price, up to our place, he sent his daughter inter the mountains to the sugar-camp when she was pakeader than this girl, an' she come back brown as a nut an' as fat as a whale."

The doctor looked thoughtfully down at the Daghestan ring his polished boots were pressing, and gently touched his upper lip with the tip of the tongue from which so much high-priced wisdom was wont to fall. Evidently the eminent city practitioner was giving some consideration to the words of the old aunt from the country, who, having sown the seed of a good suggestion, wisely held her peace, only glancing occasionally over her spectacles at her delicate niece.

That young lady did not even take the trouble to look disgusted at her grand-aunt's charming comparisons. She sat on the sofa, with her fair, pretty head resting on her anxious father's shoulder. Her blue eyes were turned toward the window, in a dreamy gaze at nothing more interesting than the tops of the neighboring houses.

A widowed father quite naturally makes an idol of his only daughter; but a man's idol should be like a jointed doll, moved to sit, stand, or pose only in accord with his will. It is an unpleasant surprise for a man to discover, as in this instance, that his pretty plaything has wishes and emotions which do not come within his control.

Outward obedience Florence Gay gave most dutifully to her father; but the roses faded from her charming face, and health and strength slowly waned, till the beautiful girl was only a shadow of herself. Aunt Cynthia, whose good sense and long experience made her a family oracle, was sent for, and so strong was her faith in the out-door cure she proposed that she overcame the hesitating objections Mr. Gay brought forward, and with the unexpected aid of the family physician, who found the case both obstinate and puzzling, carried her point and persuaded them to try her prescription.

Persons of seventy, even when as active as Aunt Cynthia, do not usually join camping-out parties, but as the old lady had proposed the scheme herself, she was determined to see it carried out; so the week after Dr. Delaplaine had given his approval, found her, with the invalid niece, the half-consenting father, and a young lady, who had been persuaded to join them, perched upon Summit Mountain.

Aunt Cynthia would have had them live in a very primitive picnic-fashion, but her nephew, being more sophisticated, had insisted on so many luxurious necessities that she gave up the control of the expedition, and the accommodation became quite palatial compared to her former experience of wood-life. There was a sleeping-tent spread under the trees for the ladies, furnished with beds made of hemlock boughs. In Mr. Gay's tent a comfortable cot awaited his hours of rest; but his aunt was firm about the hemlock boughs for the invalid, and to encourage by example, nightly laid her ancient bones on a similar couch.

"The smell of it's better than physic," she asserted, and no one being disposed to argument, she had her way; although Helen, Floy's friend, protested that her plump shoulders were decorated with a fine insaglio in evergreen pattern.

There was a smaller tent for Mark, Mr. Gay's servant, and some woodmen, who were engaged to help and protect the party from possible annoyances; and a commodious parlor tent, fitted up with rugs, folding-chair, a rough table, well concealed by a handsome cloth, books, papers, writing facilities, a mechanical lamp, and an oil-stove to make it a comfortable retreat when the mornings and evenings were cold.

Hammocks and large camp-chairs, that Floy and Helen would gladly have used for beds, had they possessed courage to repudiate the hemlock couches, were invitingly placed under the trees, with scrap baskets at hand to hold books and fancy-work. The soft, thick carpet of cool gray and enchanting emerald green, and the roof, an arabesque of lance-like points and foliated sprays against the clearest azure, were nature's own contribution to the sanitarium.

It is hardly necessary to tell the well-informed reader that the sky was blue with a heavenly blueness, the forests a gleaming glow of scarlet and gold, and the atmosphere a softly-tinted haze that might have been vapory smoke creeping through the earthy crust that covers subterranean fires where prisoned gnomes melt rubies and rare metals in the fervent heat.

Aunt Cynthia, surveying the landscape calmly through her second-best spectacles (she was well to do, and wore gold ones Sundays), said it was "always so in Injun summer," but Helen, who had only enjoyed nineteen opportunities of observing the varied seasons circling round, exhausted her adjectives in the vain attempt to express her rapture.

Floy, lying on the canvas chair, stretched to its utmost limit and covered with rugs to form a couch, watched the leaves' ceaseless dance, and said little; but Aunt Cynthia, giving her closer observation than the beauties of autumn, thought she saw, day after day, a brighter tinge of color come to her cheeks and the faint rose of her lips deepen to a scarlet line. But she was languid and silent still, and it was hard to awaken her to interest in anything.

"Why is it, Miss Steel, that poor Floy has changed so?" Helen asked, one day. "She was so bright and happy once."

"You may as well call me Aunt Cynthia. I ain't used to Miss Steel."

"Thanks. Well then, Aunt Cynthia, what is the matter with Floy?"

"She's kinder under the weather, dear, a little run down, you know."

"Oh, yes, a blind man can see that; but I want to know what ails her."

"Malaria," replied the spinster, drawing up her lips and carefully scraping the dirt from a root she had been digging up with her fingers.

"Nonsense," said Helen, impatiently, "Why can't you tell me the truth?"

"There, I do believe it really is yarrow!" said Aunt Cynthia, triumphantly, gnawing a bit of her exhausted treasure.

"Oh, please answer me," persevered Helen. "I don't believe you care a straw about your old roots and herbs. You don't want to talk about Floy, for you are afraid to trust me."

The old lady turned suddenly, prepared to give a searching look at the questioner, and discovered that the griefed brown eyes were full of tears. She melted at once. Her exterior was somewhat forbidding, but her heart was tender as a baby's. "Deary me, child," she exclaimed, throwing down her prize, "what have I done to hurt your feelin's?"

"Nothing, only you won't understand how worried I am about Floy, and you won't trust me. You would if you knew what friends we were at school. I don't believe we had a thought we did not tell each other."

"So her father says; but does she ever tell you anything now?"

"That is what seems so strange, Aunt Cynthia. She seems to like me to be with her; but she does not talk to me about anything. Oh, she is so changed!"

"Did she write to you when you was over in Europe?"

"Yes, at first; but after a while the letters stopped, and I heard nothing at all. I did not think it so very strange, for we were travelling fast then, and might easily have missed our letters. When we came home, in August, you know, I supposed, of course, that Floy was out of town, till her father told papa she was sick. I thought I never should get to see her. Every time I called I was met by the same remark from the butler, 'Miss Florence is too ill to see company, mum.' I grew to hate that pompous old Albert. I believe he enjoyed keeping me out."

"Well, I don't take much stock in him myself," assented Aunt Cynthia. "I missed my silver fruit-knife while I was to James's, and I mistrust he took it."

"But what was the matter with Floy?" persisted Helen.

"The doctor, he called it nervous prostration and malaria, sorter mixed," said the old lady, looking back at her niece to see if they were within her hearing, "and her father, he got scared about her, poor motherless thing. I wish he'd sent after me before. Come down the hill a ways, where she can't see us; I hate to have her think we're talking her over."

"I'll run back and get a basket, and tell her we are going for ferns," said Helen, taking herself at her word and running to the tents.

She was back in a moment with her basket, and a little fleecy "fascinator" for Aunt Cynthia.

"Bless your thoughtful little heart," said that lady, tying up her ears and climbing briskly up the rocky path, where Helen helped her whenever she would allow herself to be helped.

"My nephew sent for me," she began, when they had found comfortable mossy seats for themselves, in a sheltered spot where the wind reached them not, "and I left everything and come straight down to the city. Floy was sick; there was no disputin' it, and it was a long time before I could get at the real trouble. It was the doctor finally gave me a glimpse of it,

and I went straight to James. 'James,' says I, 'You've let Florence get a disappointment, and I ain't sure but it's killin' her.' He was very stubborn, he is yet, and pretends he don't believe that's what ails her. But he knows better."

"Oh, has Floy had a lover, and won't her father let her have him?" exclaimed Helen. "Oh, how lovely! I always told Floy she'd be engaged before me."

"I can't say about being engaged," said Aunt Cynthia, doubtfully.

"Won't Mr. Gay consent to an engagement?" "He'd consent fast enough, and be as pleased as pie if she'd only be engaged to the right man; but you see there's two of 'em."

"Two lovers?"

"Yes, beaux or lovers, whichever you want to call 'em."

"But Floy doesn't want them both," said Helen.

"Of course she don't," said Aunt Cynthia, disapprovingly. "Florence isn't a Mormon or a Shaker, or a bigamy, or any of those things. But as well as I can get hold of the story, there is, or was, two men wanting to marry her, and they've both been sent about their business."

"Who sent them off, did Floy?"

"She let them both go. There was a right one and a wrong one, and as she couldn't have Mr. Right, she wouldn't have Mr. Wrong."

"But what does it all mean? I wish Floy would tell me the whole story herself."

"I wish she would; but she hasn't talked enough all put together, to tell the story since I came into the house. No one can make her talk or take a mite of interest in anything, and till we fetched her up here she seemed to get poorer and poorer all the time. I can't say she's fatening yet, but she does have a shade more color."

"Poor Floy! She is only wreck of what she used to be."

"Yes, any one can see that, except her father."

"Oh, Aunt Cynthia, he does see it. I have seen him watch her till the tears came into his eyes."

"Have you, really?" said Miss Cynthia, scornfully. "Well, if a painful of tears came into each eye, and fell out in a stream, I wouldn't pity him. When my own niece that I brought up, Florence's own mother, died, I felt for James from the bottom of my heart, he grieved so. It used to comfort me in my own affliction to see how true he mourned, and as the time went on, and he never seemed inclined to take up with a second wife, but set his whole mind on the girl she left,—that's Florence—I got just about as fond of him as I used to be of Tiddy, that died. But I'm free to say he's disappointed me now, the way he's been crossing his own child, Tiddy's girl, too."

"There must have been some reason," said Helen, "for I know he's worried to death about Floy. He came himself to beg papa to let me come up here with her, and when papa said I must go to West Virginia with him to see grand-ma, he gave him no rest till he let me off and promised I should join your party. He said I could cheer up Floy if any one could; but I don't have much success. Still I think she likes me to be with her."

"She'd ought to, for you're a good girl," said Aunt Cynthia, giving her an expressive little nod, "but it ain't in your power, nor mine, to do much for her."

"Who is Mr. Right? Do you know?" asked Helen, suddenly.

"I know 'em both by name, but not by eyesight, but I don't know which is which. There's a Mr. Maxwell and a Mr. Martin. One of 'em is the son of a man that James had a business difficulty with years ago. The other is the son of a friend he used to think the world an' all of."

"I know a Mr. Maxwell. Is his name Arthur?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Then I think I know him. I would give anything to know if he is the one. Would it do to ask Floy?"

"I don't think it would be best to say anything to her about the affair, unless we had some good news to tell. The doctor said something like that to me fore we came away."

"Well, we can find out some other way, perhaps. I am certain I should have known it all from Floy if I had not been away at the time. But do you know if Mr. Gay had any personal objection to the man Floy liked?"

"I guess there was nothing against him except that he was his father's son, and turned up in time to spoil the other man's chances."

"Maxwell, Maxwell," said Helen to herself, musingly; "I wonder if Arthur Maxwell is the man Floy is breaking her heart for."

There was a lake not far below their camping-ground, skirted by a broad belt of beaches, beyond which, on the opposite side, was a scattered settlement too small to be called a hamlet, but still not too obscure to receive its quota of city boarders in the season. It had no post-office of its own, but every day in summer, for love of gain, a small boy traversed the tedious distance to the next village, laden with letters to mail, and returning with what mail matter the one post of the day had brought. The young carrier had resumed his occupation, for a consideration, and Helen, who was as expert at the oars as Ida Lewis, made a daily trip across the lake to meet him and receive his budget of letters and papers. Once she had persuaded Floy to join her, but she seemed so weary after climbing

back to camp that she resolved not to urge her again till the mountain air had had time to give her greater strength. Aunt Cynthia never trusted herself upon the water in anything smaller than a Sound steamer, and Mr. Gay, who had not left home for the good of his own health, could seldom be coaxed to leave the comfortable parlor-tent, so her trips were generally solitary ones. But one day, as she was about to push her light shallop from the shore, like Walter Scott's heroine, she was surprised to hear Mr. Gay calling for her to wait for him.

Helen would have been described by men of Mr. Gay's age, as a lively, bright little thing, with no particular depth of character, and not much faculty of observation; and if the young lady had heard that portraiture of herself she would have laughed a merry little laugh, and shown no disapproval of her picture. On this particular day she chatted to her passenger in her most fascinating manner, but her little head was busy wondering why he should have come without urging.

They saw the boy waiting for them on a rocky promontory at the usual place, as they neared the other shore, and Helen held out her small brown hand for the letter Mr. Gay had brought to mail. But he seemed quite determined to hand it to Johnny himself, although his awkward attempts to do so nearly toppled the little boat over. The water was deep, even at the brink, so the boy could render no assistance; and as Mr. Gay leaned over Helen, in his efforts to hand him the letter, he lost his balance and would have taken an unpremeditated plunge-bath if she had not thrown her arms round him and tumbled him unceremoniously into the bottom of the boat, which did its best to go over with the shock.

The letter, for which its writer had risked so much, flew out of his hand and calmly floated right side up, upon the placid water, ingeniously dodging Helen's oar when she essayed to push it toward the shore. At last she succeeded in giving it the right impetus, and Johnny with a forked branch secured it and laid it in the sun to dry. It had never been very near to Helen, but her far-sighted eyes read "Arthur Maxwell" on its white surface as it floated by.

"Now, Aunt Cyn," the girl said, later on, when the two were taking what the older lady called a "brambly ramble," "if Mr. Gay has broken faith, we have a right to do what we can for our side, which, of course, is Floy's. I believe he has been sending for Mr. Maxwell,—I suppose that is his man. If he has, I will surely get our man here, too. If all things are fair in love and war, they are just as fair for us as for him."

"I don't really think he will risk tormentin' Florence when she's jest gettin' a mite better."

"I do. He's in a dreadful state of satisfaction about something this afternoon, and I'm morally certain he's planning an attack, and you might call it."

"Surely he wouldn't bring any kind of a visitor without givin' me warnin'," said Aunt Cynthia. "How does he s'pose we're going to accommodate him, livin' in tents in the wilderness. He'd have to roost in a tree like a turkey."

"He'd do that with extreme pleasure. 'He'd sit on a stile and continue to smile,' a week at a time, I daresay, if he thought it would soften Floy's heart. But Mr. Gay is too sagacious to let him stop here. He'll have him stay over at Johnny's house, or some of those places, and drop in occasionally."

"You say you know Mr. Maxwell?" asked Aunt Cynthia.

"Yes; he was at Saratoga when I was there with papa, before he went abroad."

"Good lands!" exclaimed Aunt Cynthia. "Why couldn't he have fallen in love with you instead of Floy?"

"I suppose because Floy was so much better worth it," said Helen, with a little pang of annoyance, as she remembered how many of her thoughts were given to the unappreciative young man, whose devotion had certainly given her reason to feel that he gave no thought to any other than herself.

It was no surprise to Helen when Mr. Gay, two days later, again invited himself to cross the lake with her, and as she half-expected, they found the little mail-carrier enjoying a conversation with a tall stranger. It was Mr. Maxwell, and the friendly greeting between the two young people, who were so evidently well acquainted, seemed to greatly amaze and not entirely please Mr. Gay, who listened with surprise to the lively conversation they maintained upon the return trip.

If Floy's father hoped to arouse her from her apathy by bringing a stranger into camp, he must have regarded his experiment as a success; for she sprang from her chair with a quicker motion than any one had seen her make for months, and with flushed cheeks, glanced around as if she would escape if possible. But if Mr. Maxwell saw anything in her manner except gratified surprise at his appearance, he was too thoroughbred to let it appear, and his greeting was the perfection of cordial ease.

Then followed his introduction to Aunt Cyn, who acknowledged it with straightened neck and dilated nostrils, like an old war-horse, whose blood stirs at the sound of a trumpet. But after a few polite commonplaces, the conversation fell entirely into the care of Helen, who, seeing the position was a trial to Floy, soon proposed to escort their guest to some of the wonderful points of interest she and Aunt Cyn had discovered in the vicinity.

(To be continued.)