

he wants to be alone in the mountain where nobody must see his place?"

"True, true, David, shrewd they rightly call you; I too have suspected nearly all this, and still know something besides of the fellow.— And now will you keep a secret and engage for me? It is in this same villain that I want you to assist me in defeating. Will you promise?"

"Yes, Miss May, I promise now, and what I says I does."

"Well, David, I have discovered, as I think, that the letter you heard of was made up by Gow, to deceive and make me listen to his offers."

"Zounds! I'd fix him, And Mr. Ashley didn't write any letter?"

"Yes, I am satisfied he did, for Gow had no other means of countering Mr. Ashley's hand. Mr. Martin took the letter from the office and gave it to Gow, who, I feel sure, has still got it, and keeps it laid away in his plape in the mountain. Do you know, David, where this is?"

"I guesses putty close at it. I thinks it is the old cave that Mr. Ashley and I once finds in coming over the mountain. I sees every night just after dark, a little glim of light away up there, just peeping through the trees."

"Is there such a place? that is doubtless it, then. Now, David, can you go and get me the letter?"

"What! in the day time? he's always there, and won't let me have it."

"No, in the night, when he is always with the diggers."

"Maybe the old man's there; they do say, Miss May, he's the old one himself, helping them dig money with the black art. I'd go for you and take a bear out of a trap, if 'twas as dark as a nigger's pocket, for I always knows how to fight such like; but the old one—I fears to go alone cause of he."

"But if I would go with you?" said May, smiling at his superstitious fears, but thinking it would be useless to combat them.

"You! you Miss May?"

"Yes, David, I will go, and this very night, as soon as mother is asleep; they have not been digging for some nights past, but I overheard Mr. Martin say they were going to begin again to-night, and Gow of course will be absent from his cave. Will you go with me and guide me to the place?"

"I goes," said the little fellow, plucking up. "The old one never comes near if you be there, Miss May, and I fears nothing else."

"Well, then, we meet at this spot to-night as soon as you see the light put out in mother's room; and though it is out of my power to pay you now, David, I will some day or other see you handsomely rewarded."

"I works for pay sometimes, cause mother's poor; but I likes Mr. Ashley, and I likes you now, and I go just as well for likes as for money."

So saying, and gathering himself up proudly, the little fellow took his fishing implements and hastily made off as if his excited feelings were hurrying him away to prepare for the expedition.

"Don't forget to be here to-night in season," said May, calling after him.

"I never forgets anything," replied he, increasing his pace.

Our heroine now returned to her domestic avocations in a state of the highest excitement, created by her newly-raised hopes, and the thoughts of her projected adventure, and impatiently awaited the time set for undertaking it. It was her first object to obtain her letter; but although her great anxiety for its possession had prompted this bold, and, to a female situated as she was, somewhat hazardous enterprise, she had yet other inducements to visit the cavern. She highly suspected Gow of deep and complicated villainy, and thought it not improbable that something might there be discovered which would enable her to unmask him; for if any of his deeds had rendered him liable to be punished, she, in view of justice and public good, as well as her own wrongs and her own safety, was fully determined to expose him by every means in her power, believing that this was not only due from her, but the surest and perhaps the only way she could escape from the dreadful fate which seemed so menacingly impending over her unprotected head.

CHAPTER V.

At the appointed hour, May went to the spot agreed on in the garden, and found her sturdy little guide already there patiently awaiting her arrival.

"Ah, ha! Miss May," said David, cautiously peering about—"up to the chalk after all that's a brave one for a lady; I guesses all the afternoon as how you'd flummux when it come dark."

"Not so easily frightened, David. Are you ready? lead on then."

On this, they silently set forward across the fields and soon reached the woods. Before entering them, however, the boy proposed a halt, mounted several tall stumps successively for obtaining an observation, and at last succeeded,

he returned to the side of his companion and observed—

"I see a little twinkle up there once in a while—there, I see it from here now—here, look where I point; do you see it now?"

"Ay, yes, I did catch it then."

"Well, that's the place—about half a mile off—I knows a good cow path to the mountain; and when we gets there I knows one way to the cave—nation bad and steep too, Miss May, but I finds the way for all the dark—and here, feel the end of this cord—I brings it for you to hang on to, so you don't get lost in the bushes. And now, Miss May, if you ain't at-ared I leads you to the spot; I guesses that Mister has come among the diggers by this time, for I watches and sees them going afore I comes for you; so now, if the old man isn't there, we find a clear run and no snakes."

"David," said May, not knowing how far the boy's hobgoblin fears might carry him, in case they met any one, and being aware how much depended on him in the adventure, "you have very wrong notions about the old man, who has been seen about here; he is either some poor, crazy vagabond, or else a brother rogue of Gow; but at all events he is nothing more than a man."

"O, I fears nothing for him; cause if he be the old one he turns to a man when he sees you, Miss May, or else he clears out in a big hurry."

The boy now plunged into the woods, followed by his daring companion, and striking into the path, proceeded slowly and cautiously on to the foot of the mountain, at some little distance from where the money diggers were assembling for their night operations.

It was the same night we have already described as proving so exciting and fearful to the enthusiasts in searching for the buried mammon, we having found it most convenient, in describing their operations, to go forward of the events of the other part of our narrative.

The night was unusually dark, and the thick mass of the full grown foliage of the heavy overhanging forest completely shutting out the faint suffusions of the skylight, which was hardly perceptible even in the open field, and adding a still deeper shade to the ordinary darkness, no common or unaccustomed hand could have succeeded in advancing in the woods at all, much less in reaching any given point at a distance; but shrewd David, familiar with every peculiar tree, every turn of the path, and every inequality of the ground, and possessed of a vision uncommonly acute, carrying a long stick in his hand to apprise him of each interposing obstacle, while his bare feet informing him by the feel of the first step, deviation from the slightly trod path, threaded the difficult way with surprising accuracy, flading but little trouble for himself, and kindly endeavoring, by removing every limb or bush from the way, and timely notifying her of every log or other obstacle to be surmounted, to aid his less practiced companion in her more embarrassed progress.

Sometimes the resolution of May wavered for a moment, and her heart almost misgave her at the boldness of her own undertaking and the difficulties of its accomplishment; but a sense of her own wrongs, as often recurring to rouse her bosom to resistance, and the thought of what must soon be her fate without a perseverance in her plans, impelling her onward to action, bore up her courage through all, and tempered her usually mild spirit with an energy adequate to the trying emergency.

They at length arrived at the foot of the here steeply ascending mountain. David now again came to a halt for the purpose of ascertaining his bearings, and finding the most feasible place for climbing the ascent. After groping about a while, he returned, and, informing May that he had succeeded in finding the place where he intended to go up, he led her to the spot.

"Now, Miss May," he said in a low, cautious tone, "now for the tougher! Blistens and just heare the diggers at their work not a great ways-off from here they are now; that Mister, I guesses, has come down afore this; but if he ain't, and we meets him, I hears him comin' time-enough, and when I gives three jerks of the cord, you must sink under a bush or something, and be still as a mouse, and I does the same till he gets by. So now let's pull for it."

"Bless me!" said May, just being able to discern the dark outline of the steep, which rose like the side of a house before her, "bless me, David, we haven't to climb up here!"

"Yes, no other way for it; but never mind, we goes it, and I tells you what, Miss May, you tie the end of the cord round you, like I've done—there! I now let them bands work for a living—I seizes the roots; and you must be stronger than that pesky old bear that grappled hold of my browsers last summer, just as I springs and scrambles up a sapling to get out of her way."

With this they commenced their laborious and difficult task of climbing the mountain.—Slowly clambering from tree to tree and rock to rock, our sturdy and active little mountaineer, followed by his scarcely less agile and

resolute companion, continued to work his way several hundred feet up the almost perpendicular ascent, till they came to a narrow level, beyond which an upright and wall-like ledge interposed an almost insurmountable obstacle to their proceeding any farther in the direction they had been pursuing.

"Ah! I remember this cute place," whispered David, as they both dropped down on a mossy rock on reaching the summit, through sheer exhaustion from the severity of their struggles. "I remember this; we are most there now; only go along a piece on this level place till we comes to the end, and then when we mounts another rock and just gets round the point of a ledge, there's the cave—no trouble but what we finds it, cause see! there's more light now we have got up above the tops of the trees down there below."

Our adventurers again set forward along the scanty shelf towards the north, keeping as near to the ledgy barrier on the left as possible, as on the right and often within a yard of their feet yawned the black and fearful chasm of the precipice, here falling down perpendicularly some hundred feet beneath them. They soon, however, reached the termination of their walk in this direction. For at this place, while the shelf along which, for nearly a hundred yards, they had passed, considerably widened, a tall rock shot out boldly from the ledge on the left, forming a rectangular arena, of several square rods of level surface, in the corner of which stood a small tree, whose branches overtopped the ledge above, here not more than ten feet in height.

"There! Miss May," said the little guide, "when we gets up a top of this we are within a few rods of the place where the Mister stays, I now feels sure, cause I finds the twigs and bushes broke off along back there where he brushes by in going and coming here, and I knows well enough that nobody else comes to this ere mortal place."

"Yes, David, but how are we ever to get up there?"

"Why, I supposed all the time that he'd a fixed up some contrivance to get up and down, but I see none. When Mr. Ashley and I come we gets up into the top of that tree; but you can't climb, can you, Miss May?"

"I never trised, David, I believe, or at least not very lately, but is there no other way?"

"Stay a bit—let's see a little," replied the boy. So saying, and passing along the base of the ledge, he soon announced that he saw something projecting over the top of the rock which he thought to be some kind of a ladder. And now nimbly mounting the tree and jumping on to the rock, he proceeded to let down the contrivance he had discovered, which proved to be a light ladder, composed of two poles distended at the ends by split-sticks, with strong bark ropes confined at proper intervals to the sides to serve in lieu of rungs. Our heroine courageously mounted, and soon stood by the side of her companion on the top of the rock.—Here they found another level terminating at the distance of two or three rods in another and still loftier ledge of rocks. After pulling up and carefully adjusting the ladder in its original position, David proposed, as from finding the ladder at the top Gow might still be in the cave, to leave May under a projecting cliff, and go round the point of the ledge which only intervened between them and the cave, for the purpose of reconnoitering the spot. Accordingly he noiselessly sunk away, and after a considerable absence he returned, and creeping close up to May, he put his mouth close up to her ear and whispered—"As sure as guns, Miss May, they be there yet!"

"They!" repeated the other with some agitation; "they! who? are there two of them?"

"Yes, the Mister and an oldish man, who I almost thinks must be the old man himself; though for a certain he ain't got the same awful queer face on him that he had when I gets a peep at his one day in the edge of the woods. They've built out a sort of place with stakes and bark right afore the cave, so as to make it come all in one room; so I creeps up behind, and gets a look at them through the holes."

"Ah, ha!" mused May. "This old man, then, wears a disguise; he is beyond all doubt an associate of Gow. But what is to be done now, David?"

"Why, I thinks we better creep round where I did, so as to be on the back side, cause I expects the Mister, and maybe tother one, comes this way soon now, to go down to the diggers; and if they takes a light they sees us; but if we goes round there, they won't go that way for anything I guesses; and if they do, we sink off into the bushes, for there's a clear run that way. So we better go round there and wait till they goes, or we gives it up."

May at once falling in with this advice, our adventurers proceeded with the utmost silence and caution round the projecting point, and immediately found themselves directly in front of, and not twenty yards from the entrance of the cavern. Voices were now distinctly heard within, and a portion of light escaped through the narrow entrance, which was stopped by setting a broad piece of bark upright on the inner

side before it. With a slight shudder May obeyed the motions of her guide, and they passed on keeping at a great distance from the cave as the still continued precipice on the right would permit, and soon reached a spot where the effect of the ledge forming the cave seemed to terminate, leaving an opening of only a gentle rise up to the mountain. Here, safe from discovery, they sat down to watch the inmates of the cave, the new addition, or front of which, was still in sight.

"See that little streak of light through the side there, Miss May?" Well, there's where I gets my peep. Suppose now you creeps up and tries it, and I comes after you get still."

"Can I do it without any danger of being heard?"

"Yes, if you feels every place where you puts your foot down, to see that there's no dry bush or leaves to make a noise."

Another moment and our heroine was gliding silently to the spot—another and she was breathlessly seeing and hearing all that was passing within. The two worthies sat on a rude bench made of a cleft log, placed before a small fire built just without the entrance of the natural cave so as to afford the smoke a chance to escape through the opening left in the bark roof above.

"Let's see, to-day is Thursday," observed the elder—a man apparently about fifty—the first to break silence after May's arrival at the loophole. "To-day is Thursday—next Tuesday evening brings your concern to a focus, hey?"

"Next Tuesday, my old boy, is the day that gives me as smart a little jade of a wife as ever banded a broomstick—together with all the appurtenances thereunto belonging, as my old dad's parchment used to run."

"Ay, ay, the appurtenances after division, remember! As to the wife, she should have been named last; she is but the incumbrance."

"Why, as for that Colonel, she is really so smooth a piece, that I think I can stick to, and be quite husband-like for a year or so; and by that time I intend to have all said appurtenances in the shape of cash in my pocket, after which I shall probably be ready for a little high life by way of adventures again."

"Having duly and impartially divided —"

"What a suspicious devil you are, Colonel! Yes, yes, I am honest, and honor bright in this business, depend on't."

"Really, you well know how I can help myself, if you don't walk straight, my conscientious lad."

"Come, none of your threatening; I can do as much even at that as you can, I am thinking. But, as to this affair, I freely say you will be well entitled to share the plunder, let it be as much as it may, for you first started the project and gave me the chance. But how, Colonel, did you find out that the old man had made such a will? You never told me exactly, I think."

"Why, hearing that the old man was confined, and all others there, who formerly knew me, dead or removed, I ventured to spend a few months in town; and remaining there till the old fellow popped off, when the subject of his family and estate was a good deal talked of—I happened one day to overhear a lawyer, who drew the will, telling a friend all the particulars. He said Frank had written home a penitent letter informing his father of his private marriage in the days of his wild oats, long before he went abroad, and that though his wife died at the birth of her first child, yet that child was probably still living, having been left with some family in the north part of New Hampshire, and winding off by asking the old man's forgiveness, and hoping he would provide for his child, a daughter he was told. On which the old man forgot his temper—threw the old will, cutting Frank off into the fire—made a new one, giving him all the property, except these legacies in case the girl should be alive. I afterwards went to the register's office myself, and, under some pretence or other, got a peep at the will, and found it as I had heard. It was then, knowing Frank would come home from France as soon as he heard of his father's death, to take possession of his estate, I hunted you up, and put on this scheme so as to have all done before his return."

"And all shall be done by my precious old match-maker, but my very good friends, the money diggers, are by this time on the ground below, and doubtless impatient for my coming—I must be off. Let's see, how many of your salt and water rusted dollars did we bury there?"

"Just thirty, I believe."

"Five a-piece, hey? Zounds! how the fellows will jump at the sight of 'em, if they are of domestic manufacture! that is, if my worthy friend, the devil, don't frighten 'em out of their senses."

"Yes but you had better hear to me, Gow, and put them off till the night before or after you are married. The fools, I am afraid, will go and pass some of their dollars, and then we stand an even chance to get blown up before you bring your affairs to a point."

"Blown up! how? We got five hundred dollars of the real to-night, and as for what they