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THE PRAIRIE WAIF.

A youth was traveling on horseback one of our great western prairies. A leather saddle-bag slung over his horse, contained his wearing apparel, and in a knapsack, which was strapped in soldier fashion to his back, were a compass and a spy-glass, indispensable to the voyager on the prairie sea, as to him who navigates the deep.

The patient horse plodded his toilsome way through the tall grass, which, in its rank luxuriance, greatly impeded his progress.

From time to time the young rider glanced behind him at the sun, which was beginning to dip the western sky with gorgeous sunset hues, and then looked earnestly and anxiously forward.

Stopping his horse at last, he took his glass from the knapsack, and after a careful scrutiny, a quick smile broke over his grave young face, and he murmured, as he replaced the instrument, "Well, that's a sight to see!"

He looked at a spot about five or six miles off, and as beautiful as a veritable fairy, who stood in an expectant attitude gazing eagerly up into the trees.

As she heard the rider approaching she partly turned her head, and made a motion denoting silence; and then remained, with her little finger still held up, and with an earnest smile on her bright face, still gazing upward.

Hugh Westering, for that was the youth's name, thought he had never seen anything so beautiful—he had been an artist, in fact, as he was in feeling, he would have wished to model the lovely child just as she stood and looked, as the personification of "Hope." He paused a moment in admiration, and then slowly approached a little nearer.

"Do not make a noise!" said the little girl, coming to meet him.

"Why not?" asked Hugh, softly, respecting her commands.

"Oh, she answered, 'because I am expecting my owl to come out now. He is in the hollow tree—he has been there all day, and he would not come down, though I have tried to coax him. But I think he is coming now—he came out only a little later last night, and I saw him put out his head just now. And look there, she added, with a joyous laugh, 'what a nice feast I have got ready for him!'

Hugh looked where she pointed, and saw on the grass a number of small, oval stones set out in regular tea-table order. On these stones were piled up blackberries, whortleberries, ground-nuts, fresh hazel-nuts, and some pieces of dry bread. Little bouquets of the rich prairie flowers, bound together by blades of grass, were placed around—a more tasteful little tea-table could not have tempted Queen Titania herself. Hugh was becoming more and more interested in this lovely little one, who, though thus solitary, and apparently deserted in so dreary a spot, had, resting secure in her innocence, and knowing naught of evil, felt no thought of fear. He determined to unravel the mystery of her being where she was, and dismounting, he left his poor, tired horse to pick a supper much to his liking from the grass, while he approached the child. She clasped her hands gleefully as she saw his intention of joining her, and said, "Oh, you're coming to my supper! I'm so glad. You are better than the owl!"

Hugh smiled at the meagre compliment, and seated himself by invitation opposite to one of the stones which was playing the part of plate.

The little hostess helped him plentifully to her richest delicacies, berries and nuts, chatting in childish fashion all the time about the tawny party being begun, and how sorry the owl (which she every now and then declared she saw peeping at them from the tree) how sorry he must be that he had not come when she asked him—but it was not too late yet, if he was not too busy, and did not mind his country manners, and not being used to parties—this last with a little air of childish importunate.

Hugh at length interrupted her merry talk, to question her seriously as to who she was, and how she came to be all alone in such a strange place.

His interrogations seemed instantly to recall the child from the land of dreams, where she had been wandering, to this world of realities and sorrow. Her smiles and laughter changed to a look of sadness, and tears rolled rapidly down her cheeks as she told Hugh her story in a broken, broken way.

It appeared from what she said, that her mother had been left a widow in her solitary home, which lay in the wilderness just beyond the prairie. Unable to cope with the difficulties of her position, and far from either friends or neighbors, she had set out with her child to endeavor to cross the prairie in order to reach a more settled part of the country.

One day, however, the lonely woman, who had no idea of the dangers of the enterprise she had undertaken, became lost and bewildered in the pathless waste. Fortunately her stock of provisions was ample, and did not fail her; but the anxiety and fatigue she underwent was so great, that when she was able to discern from a distance the topmost branches of the beacon tree, for which her weary eyes had strained in vain for many long days, her strength, sustained till then by excitement and fears for her child, failed utterly. She sank down among the prairie grass, poor, weary, heart-broken, to die on the borders of the promised land, which her foot was never to tread.

To the child she gave her exact, dying charges to follow her when she should be no more, but to take her remaining provision and proceed straight onward till she should reach the hollow tree, where she said her mother, knowing probably that the child would be in comparative safety, and could scarcely fail to be soon discovered by travellers passing a spot so well known. Alas, for the dying mother, who could make no better provision for the orphan than the was leaving!

The weeping little one concluded her sad story, by saying she had only stopped just long enough to lay prairie flowers all round her mamma, and then had come straight on, just as she said, till she had come to the tree the night before.

"Mother told me to wait here and God would provide for me," she added, with a tone of doubt in her voice, as though she asked Hugh to settle the question which had arisen in her lonely little heart.

"And to wait?" he asked, Hugh, much moved, and without another word he lifted the child to his saddle, and springing after her, he folded her closely to his bosom beneath his warm cloak, and rode carefully homeward.

The Eastern Mail.

VOL. VIII.

WATERVILLE, MAINE. . . . THURSDAY, APRIL 26, 1855.

NO. 41.

"Hugh Westering, though still at youth in years, was a man whose youthful buoyancy was gone, owing to a great early disappointment. He had been deeply attached to a beautiful girl of his native place, Salem, Massachusetts. She had given him every assurance of affection, and notwithstanding their youthfulness, they were betrothed with the consent of friends. Happening, however, to attract the attention of a handsome and gay man, the little girl lightly broke her troth with the most levity and heartlessness, leaving Hugh at an altar, and unfortunately attached to this unworthy object. His feelings were naturally unconsciously deep and constant, and he felt the shock of this unexpected blow to his inner being. He could find no solace in the reflection that the girl he loved was unworthy, and had proved herself a false goddess; unworthy a true man's homage—that he found the hardest thought of all to bear.

"The noble nature can better endure sorrow than humiliation; and what humiliation so keen as the degradation of the being dearest far than itself.

"The sorrow and affliction this unhappy affair caused Hugh occasioned a severe illness, which for a time threatened his life. When he recovered, he gathered together his means, and leaving forever a place which had become hateful to him, sought a home such as suited the gloomy and misanthropic state of his mind in the forests of the West.

"His mother, a plain woman of the Quaker faith, whose whole affections were centered in her only child, accompanied him.

"For three long toilsome years they lived in their lonely home. Hugh found a stern pleasure in the fierce struggle by which the backwoodsman subdues nature; who does not willingly yield her freedom, and compels her to serve him and minister to his wants; but his heart had lain cold and dead in his bosom.

"Now, for the first time in all that period, he felt it stir, as though to new life, as he folded the lonely and deserted little orphan closely to him. While she remained awake he listened with a kind of rapture to the music of her innocent prattle, and when she fell asleep in his arms, he bowed his head over her, and silent tears, the first he had shed since his great sorrow, fell in the darkness, as he thanked God for giving him at last something for his lonely, aching heart to love.

"Though it was not many miles from the outskirts of the prairie to Hugh's forest home, it was quite dark ere he reached it. It was but a humble-looking place, the house, though large, being built of logs, as nearly all the dwellings in those remote regions are.

"The traveller seemed to have been expected, a boy was waiting outside the house, and came forward with a warm greeting to Mr. Hugh, and the door was at the same time opened by a middle-aged woman in Quaker dress and cap, who asked, 'What brings you here?'

"Is it then, Hugh?" replied the young man, as he carefully dismounted with the sleeping child in his arms. Entering the house, he deposited her on a lounge in an inner room, and turning toward the wondering old lady, simply ejaculated the word 'where,' in a tone of relief and satisfaction. The satisfaction, however, appeared to be by no means mutual. A frown of displeasure darkened friend Mary Westering's brow, and she exclaimed in a tone of impatience, 'Good Lord save thy wits, son, what has brought home now?'

"Only a poor, lost child, mother."

"Only a child? and what will it be next?—Last week it was a poor, lame horse, which had been turned out on the prairie to die, which you brought home to tend, and nurse, and feed—before that it was a wounded deer—I have been pestered all my life with thy lame dogs and stray cats, and now it is only a child, I am to play foster-mother to?"

"Mother!" said Hugh, in a tone of gentle reproach, "thy words belie thy kind and tender heart. If I am compassionate to the helpless and suffering, when I meet them, from whose early teachings I have learnt the lesson? God knows, mother," he continued, in a lower tone, and a voice he strove to make steady, "my heart has been hard and cold enough since the bitter time I saw that when Mary betrayed me—since then I have never felt so soft to any human being as now to this poor child. Mother, wilt thou not love her—at least bear with her for my sake?"

"It was the first time Hugh had ever alluded to the sorrow of his youth—the first time the name of the false maiden had been uttered between them, and the mother knew well how much it had cost her silent and reserved son to make this appeal; thoroughly melted, she answered with tears standing in her eyes, 'Yes, that I will, Hugh, and bless her from my inmost heart if she prove to thee a comfort and solace, for greatly thou needest both.'

"And so it was, that the little orphan girl was welcomed into friend Mary's heart. At first, for the sake of the beloved son, but once admitted, the little one maintained her ground, and even conquered it anew in her own right. She became the pet and darling of the old lady, and as for Hugh, from the time he took the poor, deserted little wanderer in his arms, he surrendered to her his whole heart. He rendered her—waited on her—amused her—sat by her when ill all through the long night—and was in all things her most obedient servant."

He spent several hours every day instructing her, and when he was working in the fields she was his constant companion. While he was busy with his farm work, she would nestle down in some shady corner, in sight, and make plays, and hold long conversations all by herself. A flower, a stone, a leaf, a bud, anything would serve for a foundation for her to build her fancies on; and Hugh, forlornly to guide and aid, often paused in his work, and stood listening and laughing at these imaginary discourses, when the child fancied herself abandoned.

Sometimes he would approach her, and with a heart overflowing with love and joy would ask, 'Art thou happy, my little prairie bird?' and she would turn to know that nothing in the world delighted her so much as to hear her reply, in the Quaker phraseology, which sounds so quaintly sweet on childish lips.

"Yes, dear Hugh, as happy as thou couldst wish."

"Nothing is so grateful and flattering to a man as the affection of children, since it bears so indisputably the stamp of genuine honesty that none can doubt its sincerity. Hugh could not but see that his little fondling preferred him

to all the world, and of course the fact increased his tenderness for her.

These pleasantly passed away the little girl's childhood—no one ever came to claim her, though her romantic story was often told to such travellers as not infrequently sought a temporary shelter beneath Hugh's hospitable roof. Hugh, therefore, in course of time, lost the dread of losing her, which had troubled him so much at first.

A few years rolled swiftly by, and as by some magic, the playful child had been transformed into a beautiful, bewitching young woman.

Hugh could only gaze and wonder—could it be that the vision of loveliness which he saw flitting about his humble dwelling, and seeming to irradiate each spot she visited by the more sunshine of her beauty—could it be the very same being, the same little Fanny, whom he had found under the old prairie-tree, and carried home, like a lost lamb, in his bosom?

Fanny was about eighteen years old, when it happened that a company of United States soldiers, on their overland way to California, a country, which was beginning to attract great attention, claimed Hugh's hospitality, for the night, and both house and barn were crowded by the travellers.

Among the guests at the house was, of course the commanding officer, young Lieutenant Howard, of Philadelphia. His manners were those of a gentleman of refinement; his conversation was lively and brilliant; he was, besides, extremely handsome, and as he appeared to be greatly struck by Fanny's loveliness, and devoted himself to her with a courtly gallantry, to which the country maiden was all unused, it will be conceded that a more dangerous visitor could scarcely have entered the forest home, if Fanny wished to continue to

"Walk in maiden meditation—fancy free."

But however willingly the young soldier would have lingered in this Eden which he had found in the wilderness, duty summoned him on the morrow to resume his journey. He accordingly marshalled his men, and having courteously thanked his host and hostess, and taken a somewhat tender leave of Fanny, he mounted his horse to depart. But ere he had secured his seat on the saddle, the animal swerved violently aside, owing to a sudden fright, and the rider was dashed forcibly to the ground.

His leg was broken by the fall, and as the accident of course unfitted him for travel, he remained in friend Mary's hands, while the troop proceeded on their journey without him.

Of necessity the young man was domiciled for many weeks in Hugh's cottage, and never was invalid more carefully nursed and cared for. Friend Mary was an excellent nurse, and unremitting in her attentions, and both Hugh and Fanny, but more frequently the latter, were constantly summoned to her aid.

Young Howard, on his part, seemed to have no idea of playing the uninteresting and querulous invalid. He exerted his really uncommon talents to render himself agreeable and entertaining, and his dark eyes told eloquent tales to Fanny. Will the simple country girl have wit to read them?

Friend Mary, simple-minded and unobservant, saw nothing of what was going on, but Hugh had perceived from the very first, what a powerful impression the young girl's beauty had produced on the young soldier.

It was therefore no surprise to him when, one evening, before the youth was to resume his journey westward, he laid before him satisfactory papers in proof of his respectability and character, and demanded permission to address his adopted daughter.

Hugh had not an objection to urge. The proposal seemed in every way honorable and desirable; yet his heart sickened within him as he listened to the stranger's voice. Even the words in which his petition was urged grated on his ear—for the first time he heard Fanny spoken of as his daughter, with pain. In vain he mentally chided himself, and bade himself consider the advantages of Lieutenant Howard's offer, so much more brilliant than he could have hoped for Fanny—so honorable both to himself and her. He could not persuade himself that the young soldier's proposal had caused him anything but the keenest anguish of spirit.

So greatly was he agitated and overcome by the conversation he have alluded to, that he was twice obliged to leave the apartment, ere he could recover composure to grant the young lover the privilege to tell her he had no right to withhold.

The next morning, Fanny rose early, as had been agreed upon between her and friend Mary to preside at the early breakfast prepared for the parting guest.

Hugh, who had passed a sleepless night, and had been long up, heard her lively call as she passed his door, but he made no response, remaining in his room till the sound of a horse galloping away assured him of the young soldier's departure. How could he doubt the answer he had received?

He descended slowly and sadly to the room below, but he assumed a cheerful air as he entered the apartment—at least he could spare Fanny the pain of knowing the suffering she innocently caused him—she should never blush for the folly of one who had revered and respected as a father. At least he could keep his secret—had he not guarded it well—almost from his own heart even—for two long years?

Fanny with somewhat heightened color and downcast eyes, was busy herself with the breakfast things as he entered.

Hugh, with the desire a despairing man had of hearing a dreaded certainty affirmed, said with an attempt at pleasantry, 'Well, Fanny, dear, how is it? Has he spoken?'

'Yes, Hugh.'

'And your reply?'

Fanny blushed deeply, and turned away her head.

'I want courage to tell you my reply,' she said.

'Take courage, Fanny,' replied Hugh, in a voice which told how sadly his own was failing him.

Fanny was silent a moment, and then looking up at Hugh with her candid blue eyes filled with tears, said in an agitated voice, 'Yes, I will tell you, dear Hugh, though it costs me a struggle for your sake as well as mine. I told him I did not and could not love him, because I already loved another.'

'Indeed, Fanny?' cried Hugh, completely taken by surprise, 'how can that be when you have known no other?'

'The person I love I have known all my life,' said Fanny, raising her eyes to Hugh's face, 'and he has loved me well these two years though he little guessed I knew him.'

She smiled through her blushes and tears, and Hugh changing color, stammered, 'Ah, Fanny, can I dare think—'

'Think anything,' said Fanny, giving way to a violent fit of weeping, which she sought in vain longer to restrain, 'except that I am bold and unmanly. Or forgive me, dear Hugh, if you do think so—but it was the only return I have ever had it in my power to make for all your goodness to me.'

'Forgive me, Fanny? Oh I bless you and thank you from my inmost heart—you have made me the happiest creature on God's earth.'

'Except one,' smiled Fanny, laying her girlish cheek affectionately on the rough-coated breast to which she clung, 'and if we may read aright the expression of that sweet young face, we must believe it no mistaken feeling which has made her reject youth and beauty for the sake of a man, plain-featured and no longer young. There is no mistaking that look of perfect love and trust, deep-seated and true.'

'Who shall judge of girl's fancies?' The wind-whistling whether it listeth, and even so windwardly does woman bestow her love. Yet seldom, indeed, does it happen that any man is so fortunate as to win the entire affections of the same individual thrice—as child, girl and woman.

THE FARMER'S FIRE-SIDE.

'The cold winter day and the prospect without, is certainly cheerless and cold. The farmer's wife bustles her children about, and with a strong inclination to scold, says to the boys, 'Be accustomed to feed a regular fire, and having her premises clear, she says to the girls, 'Now, my dear, a storm makes me feel that a wife can't keep a house fit to be seen.'

'Why, Johnny, my son, you are all over snow. Do go to the mill to get the flour.'

'How careless you are to be running in snow. All the time you are wasting the flour. I keep getting the boys to sweep after the boys. And then I must mend this jacket to-day.'

'Stop, Jimmy and George, don't you make such a noise. Is there nothing to do but to play?'

'Do you get some books and set down by the fire, and behave like a couple of men.'

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